

Sabbatical Report and Reflections, Kathy Goodrich October 2022:

Sabbath, Shalom, Surrender, Surprises

Responding to, discovering and sharing God's Invitations and Opportunities

"More than Israel has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept Israel." Quote in Jewish literature

Thank you from the bottom of my/our hearts for this sabbatical opportunity and gift plus for all each of you gave and sacrificed as part of this presbytery body to make it possible. When it was clear in 2020-21 that the timing was not right, we realize this was not optimum either for some.

Sabbath

Sabbath and Sabbatical are rhythms created and intended FOR how we humans are created to live, encompassing MANY more reasons and benefits than I had previously understood well or modeled as faithfully and consistently as I pray I can the rest of my life. My reflecting and re-establishing has been greatly enriched by *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again*, as Ruth Haley Barton draws on a wide range of traditions & writing: a superb and essential for all disciples and Christian leaders in these times.

Therefore, I prioritized God's primary purposes of sabbatical, with some reflection, retooling and seeking to listen and discern God's voice and call. Not primarily study leave.

See our letter at the start of our Sabbatical; particularly Eugene Peterson's clear writings.

(2)*Taking A Sabbatical*, e-booklet with chapters written by several Presbyterian and other mainline pastors including Eugene Peterson, Lynne Baab, by Building Church Leaders 2015. Also,

<https://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ministers/rationale-sabbatical-leave/> among others.

Sabbath/sabbatical is for reclaiming BEING versus DOING and CONSUMING. I have relished discovering and living into these deeper realities, reasons and blessings of Sabbath as not only for rest but as ceasing, for freedom, for letting go & unplugging, for justice and *shalom* for all humans AND created beings and God's creation, for refocusing and re-centering in our Triune God, for delighting and savoring, for restoration and re-creation, for ongoing transformation and deepening trust in our loving, good and sovereign God.

I developed more discipline and intentionality about spiritual rhythms/practices, which *root* and *reorient* us, such as:

meditation, study, scripture, service (particularly with my 91 year old mother), sabbath, celebration – little ones and our 45th anniversary!, prayer, including spiritual warfare as weekly we experience and see testing or unleashing of discord, division, distrust, discouragement, evil and violence everywhere.

I am grateful for God's patient chastening, convicting, enlightening and re-shaping on this journey I pray is ongoing and more faithful the rest of my life.

"The fourth commandment is the most difficult and the most urgent of the commandments in our society...because it defies the most elemental requirements of a commodity-propelled society specializing in control and entertainment, bread and circuses...along with anxiety and violence." Walter Brueggeman's *Sabbath as Resistance*, xiv. This whole chapter is worth price of the book!

What may be God's Invitations and Opportunities? For you, for a congregation, for our presbytery? I dreamed and prayed how God might desire ALL of us in our wider body of disciples to experience and experiment with being Sabbath people, from studying and discussing it to a sabbatical policy for our pastors. How might we create the time and space to ask, dream, listen and discern more about this together? It takes a community.

Embracing more faith-full rhythms of Sabbath/sabbatical has involved Shalom, Surrender and Surprises.

Shalom – flourishing, undivided, God’s intended integrated wholeness...

Personal rest and nurturing physical health/shalom & surrender: I am grateful for this sabbatical season’s fruit and am recovering, stronger and hopefully wiser!

I worked with spiritual resources and doctors to explore more sustainable rhythms and pace. YES, I can and did slow down and surrender. I pray and intend to live and lead a bit differently from this rhythm, so essential after the crisis pace, shocks and shifts we all experienced in the last 3 disruptive years (*At Your Best: How to Get Time, Energy & Priorities Working in Your Favor*, Carey Nieuwhof). Nutritional resources for my body’s increased balances and health/shalom. Some sabbatical rhythms included listening better to and honoring my body’s messages and needs for rest, slowed pace, naps, no alarms at times, regular exercise again (walking, swimming, hiking local and in Glacier). While our Covid 2.0 was not intense or long for either of us, caring 24/7 for my mother for many weeks with Covid 1.0, and lingering, has been draining. She’s improving.

Equipping, empowering, supporting, exploring & experimenting with Shalom/God’s flourishing in today’s context and culture.

For our leaders and pastors/lay pastors. A significant insight from research amidst the great clergy burnout and resignations, was distilled by Rev. Dr. Tod Bolsinger in his online article:

“But the big difference is that those who faced those challenges *without considering stepping down* were not more resolved or committed than those who did, but they did have two other factors that worked in their favor:

1. ***They felt more equipped to face the challenges and***
2. ***The felt more supported as they did.***

As Barna reported, “Overall, most pastors are confronting the same pressures and stressors—but perhaps not the same levels of equipping and support. As Rev. Dr. Glenn Packiam writes in Barna’s *The State of Your Church*, “We need sages to advise us, leaders to direct us or hold us accountable, peers to remind us that we aren’t alone, healers to dress our wounds and companions who carry us when we can’t carry on.”

What may be God’s Invitations and Opportunities here? It is a priority for our Leadership Cabinet, Pastoral Ministry Team and pastoral leaders to pray, dialogue, and explore this, soon. How can we cultivate what Walter Brueggeman refers to as “shalomic imagination”?

Shalom, Healing, Hope for our churches and communities – Our context today has many similarities with those of Jeremiah’s time. God’s instructions and promises for his exiled people in Jer. 29 are equally important and pertinent for us. Jesus commissioned and gave his disciples the power and authority “as they went out” to make disciples, being specific about proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom/God’s realm, healing, and driving out evil (Luke 9:1,2; MT 10:1; 28:18-20).

There is an evident and crying need for healing – physical, relational, social, racial... - in our communities. The ministry of healing has been a hallmark of Christians and the church throughout history, from the Roman Empire when it was the Christians who took in abandoned infants, the sick and elderly dumped into the streets and cared for them, to the building of hospitals and clinics around the globe, deaconesses, parish nurses, healing services. *A Time to Heal: Offering Hope to a Wounded World in the Name of Jesus*, by J. R Briggs, is a practical, timely empowering and hope-giving book for congregations. *How might we as God’s people and congregations seek to embody, experiment, and participate in this work of the Spirit?*

What does it look like for God's people to seek the shalom, NOT of ourselves or our tribe or church, but of the world God loves and made, of where God has sent us, to be *Agents of Flourishing: Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society*, as Amy Sherman, PhD, portrays in her most recent book from a Reformed perspective? Contrary to the relentless consumer, materialistic, individualistic, selfish... values abroad in our society/media... What can it be like as disciples and congregations live out this calling and work of restoring shalom in 6 major spheres, the good (ethics), the true (knowledge), the beautiful (creativity), the just and well ordered (political), the prosperous (economic), and the sustainable (natural environment)?

What may be God's Invitations and Opportunities here?

Funding for Christ's mission of seeking shalom in this time of significant shifts and economic challenges.

My reading has included the importance of innovation and entrepreneurial ways of using gifts and doing mission. Fascinating: *We Aren't Broke: Uncovering HIDDEN RESOURCES for MISSION and MINISTRY*, by Mark Elsdon (PCUSA pastor), Forward by Craig Dykstra.

Surprises -

Future Discernment – Desert Father, Abba Moses, said, “no virtue can come to full term or can endure without the *grace of discernment*”.

While sabbatical has been somewhat restful, empowering and transformative, God's call and the ministry and creative invitations and opportunities before the church and Yellowstone, have intensified on my mind and heart and in my prayers for this calling. I wondered, waited, wrestled with God, and talked with George and Personnel subgroup, among others. The polity provisions and process in our Book of Order (G-2.0504a), are that the “Co” continues on in the position. The Personnel subgroup and Leadership Cabinet have affirmed this call as well. While I have deeply appreciated teaming with George in ministry since our early days in seminary and ministry, I support his following God's leading, and I seek to as well and have always found our God who calls provides. And yes, we have discussed boundaries.

Therefore, I sense I am called to continue in this call, in prayerful partnership and community with you all in this time of transition as a bridge-builder and fellow pilgrim and pioneer as we cultivate deeper roots and practices as a community and as we discover, dialogue and adapt to God's present and future, including *with* younger generations. As we discussed with the Leadership Cabinet, and have been admonished by the Personnel subgroup, the present and future leadership is to be with a more sustainable pace and true half-time time commitment.

Family

Another surprising part of the Sabbatical has been with both of our mothers. George's mother, 94 and longtime PCUSA elder, gifted leader and beloved Nana, died after yet another stroke, joining the church triumphant, her prayer for years. Such tender blessed final Facetime conversations with her and with family amidst many decisions. Her Oct. 1 memorial service had to be cancelled due to the impact of the hurricane, complicating grieving, closure and needed family time. We may be looking at the second half of June. Then, starting in April we have needed to attend to the very complex affairs of Kathy's 91 year old mother, living with us since the end of May, including declining health and capacities, a challenge and gift some of you have had in your own lives. Prayers, wisdom and understanding appreciated!

Again, thank you for this restorative time of sabbatical you and God knew we needed. We are deeply grateful for and love you and look forward to what the Spirit has in store. Shalom!

Kathy