

Sabbatical/Sabbath for Pastor Sharon

We often associate the term “sabbatical” with academia, with professors taking leave from teaching to do research and to deepen their knowledge of and connection to their field. But Merriam Webster reminds us that:

The word “sabbatical” is related to Sabbath, which refers to the Biblical day of rest, or the seventh day. The Old Testament refers to God’s day of rest most famously in Genesis, but Sabbath referring to an entire year of rest is mentioned in Leviticus (25:3-5):

“Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.” ([Source](#))

2022 will mark Pastor Sharon’s seventh year with First Congregational Church and it is time for her Sabbath! Her sabbatical will last three months, starting after Easter 2022.

This past spring, Pastor Sharon and a team of First Congregational Church members prepared a grant application in support of her upcoming sabbatical period. We are pleased to share that First Congregational Church of Bellingham will be the recipient of a \$46,691 Lilly Grant for Clergy Renewal! The grant’s purpose is described as allowing “Christian congregations to support their pastors with the gift of extended time away from their ministerial duties and responsibilities. Ministers whose congregations are awarded the grants use their time away from the demands of daily ministry to engage in reflection and renewal. The approach respects the ‘Sabbath’ time concept, offering ministers a carefully considered respite that may include travel, study, rest, prayer, and immersive arts and cultural experiences.” ([Source](#))

The grant includes funding to support Sharon’s travel and expenses (\$34,680), funding to hire interim staffing in Sharon’s absence (\$11,013) and funding for congregational renewal activities and events around Sharon’s leave-taking and return (\$990). These renewal activities are meant to guide us on a parallel journey to Sharon’s. This is some of what the members of Sharon’s grant writing team imagined:



- Sharon will focus on developing a deepened awareness of how place shapes her; we will ponder important questions: How do the topographies, geography, and communities of our histories inform our development? What spiritual strengths stem from our environments? How do our sacred spaces make us who we are?
- Sharon will celebrate ways that her roots, family, and friends shape her spiritual journeys; we all will discover: What strengths come from our shared relational experiences? For which folks are we an extension of legacy? Whose work do we continue? Are there generational cycles we are gifted to continue; emboldened to break?
- Sharon will discover and discuss ways faith/cultural traditions have enriched her journey; we all will explore: How have our sacred learnings and worship methods informed our identities, priorities, and passions? What traditions would we continue with more fervor? How has our faith/cultural tradition changed over time? What might come next?

Over the next months we will be looking for people who wish to join a team to make some of the ideas for the congregational activities a reality. If you are interested or even just curious, please contact Beth Tyne, B.Tyne@hotmail.com.

Sharon's vision for her sabbatical is so powerful. When she shared it with council there was a hush in the room (or zoom!). We asked her to create this video link so you can also hear her share that vision. Get some tissues ready and let's prepare for the journey on which we are about to embark.

With gratitude and anticipation,
Beth Tyne, Vice Moderator