

Pastoral Sabbatical Frequently Asked Questions

What is Sabbath rest, as described in Scripture?

The Biblical concept of Sabbath means “to rest” or “to cease.” It first appears when God rests on the seventh day of Creation. Throughout Scripture, Sabbath keeping is setting aside time that God consecrates and makes holy. Old Testament law instituted a weekly Sabbath, an expanded period of rest every seven years, and, every 50 years, a year of Jubilee. The New Testament frees us from legalism, but also reminds us we should make every effort to enter into God’s rest. The underlying principle of Sabbath rest throughout Scripture is trust in God’s provision rather than our own labor, trust that He provides for us and restores us as we rest in him.

What is a pastoral sabbatical?

A pastoral sabbatical includes elements of rest, disengagement, study, exploration, reflection and prayer. It is a time for the pastor to step away from the routines of regular ministry and experience a change in perspective, receive spiritual nourishment, and focus on a deepening relationship with God. It is an opportunity for a congregation to grow in its participation in ministry. It lays the foundation for envisioning and planning future ministry.

Is a sabbatical a vacation from the church?

Although some components of a sabbatical may sound a bit like vacation, it is not a vacation from the church. It is an opportunity for pastors to reconnect with parts of their life that are important but difficult to prioritize in the middle of routine ministry. These include their sense of calling and the roots of their spiritual journey. Times of sabbatical give pastors the opportunity to shape themselves as better shepherds and leaders for the church and give rise to a deeper reliance on the Holy Spirit in their life. The intent of the sabbatical is for the pastor to return to the congregation refreshed and renewed, ready to move forward into the next phase of our life together.

Why is Pastor Ryan taking a sabbatical now?

Pastor Ryan’s desire, and the desire of our entire staff and CEC Leadership, is to practice sustainable, biblical ministry. Church leadership--the pastor/parish committee and council at CEC, and our regional Conference superintendents--feel that June 1 to September 1 of 2021 is the right time for Ryan to take his sabbatical. Co-incidentally, the first day of Pastor Ryan’s sabbatical will be the 7 year mark of his role as the lead pastor of CEC.

I’ve never worked for a company that offered extended leave. Are sabbaticals normal for pastors?

Sabbatical leaves are most common in ministry or academic institutions. They are less common in the business sector, but some companies now offer this option because they see value for both employers and employees.

Our goal at CEC is sustainable ministry based on biblical principles, and we believe this includes planned seasons of pastoral rest and renewal. Many denominations, including our own, have established

policies of sabbatical leave. These leaves are most often granted after seven years of ministry. Advocates for pastoral sabbaticals recognize that the pastoral role as shepherd and leader of God's people requires them to seek God's voice. A sabbatical allows time for pastors to explore areas of ministry outside their usual responsibilities, and pursue spiritual disciplines that will allow them to grow in their ability to lead and serve faithfully.

On a human level, these sabbatical leaves also allow pastors to rest, recharge and reconnect with family members in ways that can be difficult when they are also serving their congregations.

Pastors who have taken sabbaticals say that they provided an invaluable foundation for fruitful ministry in the future.

This seems very sudden. Is everything okay?

Though this plan may be news, Pastor Ryan and the CEC Leadership have been discussing and planning this for several years. Pastor Ryan has served almost nine years in pastoral ministry at CEC. May 30, the day that his sabbatical begins will mark his seventh anniversary as our lead pastor. We join with our denomination in affirming that pastoral sabbaticals are part of healthy, vibrant and sustainable pastoral ministry, and that this timing is optimal.

Are there health problems? Is there a problem with the pastor's leadership? Was he forced to do this?

There are no negative circumstances or issues prompting the timing of this sabbatical. CEC leadership and Pastor Ryan see this time away as contributing to a healthy, good rhythm for Pastor Ryan and his family, and for the congregation as a whole. We anticipate that this sabbatical will strengthen and deepen Pastor Ryan's ministry effectiveness here at CEC in years to come.

What are the benefits to the congregation of a pastoral sabbatical?

A sabbatical is an investment in the future of the congregation. As pastors cultivate a deeper relationship with God, self and family, they return reporting renewed energy and enthusiasm for ministry. Healthy pastors, in turn, provide healthy leadership for God's people and enhance the life and ministry of the congregations they serve.

Congregations often experience growth during the pastor's sabbatical as well. People gain confidence in their leadership abilities. Lay leadership may develop in creative ways. New people may try new things or experiment with different ways of approaching traditional ministries. The congregation hears from a range of voices in preaching and teaching. The pastor's absence is an invitation to the entire congregation to see ministry from a wider perspective.

How will expenses of the sabbatical be covered?

Consistent with our denomination's policy, full compensation and benefits for Pastor Ryan will continue through the sabbatical. His pastoral responsibilities, including worship leadership and pastoral care, will be covered by existing staff and the congregation.

Grant money provided by our denomination will partially supplement additional expenses incurred by Pastor Ryan during his sabbatical, and also provide honorariums to those who are invited to preach at CEC.

What are the dates of Pastor Ryan’s sabbatical?

Sunday, May 30, 2020, Pastor Ryan will preach and we will have a sabbatical celebration for our church and his family. He will return to regular ministry responsibilities Wednesday, September 1, 2020 and resume preaching responsibilities on September 26th.

What are Pastor Ryan’s plans for his sabbatical?

Pastor Ryan plans a focused rhythm of rest and renewal. This includes including keeping a daily journal, reading, and spending extended times with God in prayer and reflection. Some weeks will center on his own time with God, and others will be structured to include more time with his wife and family.

He and his family also plan to include time spent outside a majority-white culture, either within the US or outside the country. His goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how God is at work outside our congregation and community and use that understanding as CEC continues to creatively engage people from other cultures and cultivates a multi-ethnic church community.

Ryan and his wife, Kealy, have worked and traveled abroad, and their insights have already deeply impacted our church and its ministry. Their children will share the family’s cross-cultural experience, and they, too, will contribute to the life of our congregation.

CEC leaders believe that this sabbatical rest and exploration will shape and sustain many years of fruitful ministry to come.

From Pastor Ryan:

“After more than eight years of ministry in an incredible church as the primary vision caster and primary preacher/teacher, through transition and reaching an intergenerational, multi-cultural community, my soul and my spirit are in need of extended time with the Lord to be recharged and rejuvenated for continuing fruitful and sustainable ministry. This sabbatical will provide the opportunity for me to reflect on the ways that God has worked, rest again in His sovereignty and grace and reflect on who I am and what God has called me to. Furthermore, this season to explore life and worship together as a family, away from vocational ministry and, at times, outside of our normal culture and context, will reinvigorate our calling and provide valuable insights to future healthy and fruitful ministry.

In addition to the time of renewal, the focus on minority people groups and cultures other than the predominantly white culture of our church and community will provide me and my family with fresh perspectives on how to do life and ministry in a way that reaches, creates space for and empowers people of color in our community that we are trying to engage with the Gospel.

The congregation will benefit from my absence by noticing the incredible gifts and resources of existing staff, retired ministers and most important, our laity. As we continue to build a culture that equips and empowers our congregation for everyday life and ministry, my absence will provide unique

opportunities for people to step into ministry roles and realize that God has equipped and called them to be ministers in His Church and His Kingdom.”

Who will oversee the ministry during Pastor Ryan’s sabbatical absence?

Staff and leaders were asked about the ‘gaps’ or ‘holes’ that Ryan would leave while on Sabbatical. Our goal is not to simply rely on the existing pastoral staff team but to invite retired pastors and our congregation into ways of serving that will utilize their passions and experiences and further community and cultivate our desire for team-based, lay empowered ministry. CEC is blessed with some retired pastors and ministers who have the gift of preaching, as well as lay leaders and regional church leaders who will all take a turn at sharing the pulpit during Ryan’s sabbatical. Furthermore, there are individuals currently within our congregation who are willing to check in every other week with individual staff team members for prayer, encouragement and accountability.

Our pastoral care team, made up of staff pastors and others within our congregation, will continue to provide pastoral care for our church family during Ryan’s sabbatical.

Finally, CEC leadership will meet in July to assess the health of the ministries and reflect on how Ryan’s sabbatical is impacting ministries and the church, followed by a reflection retreat with Ryan in the fall of 2021 to process and chart a path forward as a church community.

Who will be preaching while he’s away?

CEC is blessed with many people who have the gift of preaching, from other active pastors, retired ministers as well as gifted laypeople. We will have an opportunity this summer to hear from multiple voices in our weekly gatherings. Furthermore, we will have the privilege to hear from other leaders and pastors within our broader regional network of churches that will enrich and bring new perspectives to us as a congregation.

What if I need Pastor Ryan for something?

Pastor Ryan will be unavailable throughout the period of sabbatical and it’s requested that you don’t try and contact him through email, Facebook, or by phone. If there is a care need, or you need pastoral guidance, you can contact Pastor Karen or Pastor Garrett and they will be able to find the best way to help.

We will receive a few updates from Pastor Ryan and his family via video or written correspondence that will give us a window into how his sabbatical is going and what he is experiencing and learning.

In case of emergency, Pastor Karen and Pastor Garrett are the designated contacts to reach out to Pastor Ryan at their discretion. Pastor Karen and Pastor Garrett will also be joined by a pastoral support team made up of retired ministers within CEC and other pastoral care members.

What about our other pastors? Will they take sabbaticals too?

While each sabbatical scenario is unique and developed with the pastor, their family and CEC leadership teams, it is the hope that sabbaticals become a regular part of healthy, sustainable pastoral ministry at CEC.

How can I best support our pastor and our church throughout this sabbatical time?

- First, recognize that the church is not the pastor. This church does not belong to Pastor Ryan, it belongs to Jesus. In fact, the Bible calls the church His “Bride,” which means He loves it more than any pastor ever could. So recognize that what you are a part of in this church goes far deeper than the leadership of a single pastor.
- Second, lean in, not out. It’s very normal for some of you to think this would be a great time for you to take a break from ministry in either attendance, giving, or volunteering. Our hope is that this won’t be the case for you. The church is a body that needs all of its parts doing what they do best. Our church needs you and we hope that you take this opportunity to engage even deeper in our church and find new ways to call this place your home.
- Finally, pray for your pastor and his family. Though there are many great things about spending an extended period in this way, it can also be a struggle. Disconnecting from relationships for a period can be painful and changing the day-to-day rhythms can leave one wondering about their purpose. Pray for Pastor Ryan and his family’s journey through sabbatical and for his leadership to be renewed so that the church may benefit from what God is doing in him upon his return.

Will Pastor Ryan be in contact with the congregation when he’s on sabbatical?

No. Sabbaticals are meant to be a time away from the congregation and the routines of pastoral ministry. The congregational leadership has made arrangements for pastoral needs to be covered in his absence so he will be able to take full advantage of his time away.

I still have questions and concerns. Who do I contact?

On this webpage there is a place to send questions to our sabbatical steward team. Feel free to share your questions and someone on our team will respond to you soon.

Want some outside resources on the benefit of sabbatical? Here are some great articles that talk about its benefits

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/why-sabbaticals-are-critical-to-avoiding-burnout.html>

<https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-your-pastor-should-take-a-sabbatical/>

<https://www.soulshpherd.org/sabbatical-guide-pastors/>

Want to hear more? On this website you'll find videos from Pastor Ryan, CEC Leadership and our Conference Regional Leadership talking about the process of preparing for this sabbatical and the reasons why it is important.