

Sabbatical Program Rationale and Design

1. The purpose of our renewal program we're calling "***Creativity & Spirituality***" is to energize and enhance our congregation and Pastor's creativity in ministry as we seek to further our church's mission to ***know Jesus, live in the Spirit, and join in the Father's work***. While providing our Pastor, Beau Smith, an extended time away to engage his own creative passions for art, music, and travel it is our hope that our combined time of immersive learning will mutually enrich both pastor and parish. In what is a new and exciting season for both our Pastor and our church we hope that a time of Sabbatical will act as a catalyst for embracing all the new creative possibilities God has in store for us.
2. First Presbyterian Church Durango is a mid-sized church that worships in historic downtown Durango. Located near the heart of our community we have a re-energized desire to regularly engage our neighbors, which include local residents, schools, businesses, nearby college, and the many visitors to our beautiful part of the world. As a historic landmark in our community, we have in the past enjoyed being one of the epicenters of "Durangan" life. However, in more recent years, as with many other churches, we have felt the pressures of no longer being seen as vital to Durango and its larger community. Having also experienced our own seasons of inner turmoil we as a church have been for some time seeking healing and renewal. For these past seven years we have been on that path with our Pastor, Beau Smith. Now the question has become for both Pastor and Congregation, where is God calling us from this place of renewed health and energy?

Our Pastor is in his first call as Senior and solo pastor. In his two previous callings he worked with churches who were experiencing, or had recently experienced, significant difficulty and wounds. While grateful for honing skills of pastoral care, church mission study, and revitalization, Beau as Pastor is now in truly uncharted territory with First Presbyterian Church Durango.

As a result, these past three years Beau and our Elders have been engaged in consultation process generously sponsored by our Presbytery (The Presbytery of Western Colorado) with Dr. Stan Wood of Sower's Field. During that process we have had to ask difficult questions with respect to our church's mission and ministries. The church's leadership has studied hard the ideas of becoming a missional church and worked hard in asking how we currently are, and are not, engaged in God's mission here in Durango.

As a result of three years of consultation, much discussion, and a lot of prayer our church has re-committed itself financially and spiritually through new staffing and a renewed call to voluntarism to our Children and Youth ministries. We've now for two consecutive years partnered with a neighboring community, Bayfield, CO, in raising money and awareness for pediatric cancer through an annual community concert called OZ Fest. We're seeking to better align our calendar and worship schedule with Durango community events. For instance, our community celebrates our cowboy heritage each Fall, and we host a "Cowboy Sunday" worship service during the celebration. Durango's largest community event, called Snowdown, happens in the dead of each winter, and our church reached to out to be officially included in the week's events by hosting a *Family Movie Night* and Snowdown themed worship service that Sunday.

But likely our largest and newest commitment is something we're calling *Better Together*. One thing we discovered in consultation and in interviewing our congregation is that inviting our friends and neighbors to a worship service is incredibly difficult because of congregation's make up, and because of the many pre-conceived notions our community members have about the church. In response to this we decided that for every month that has five Sundays (there are usually four in a year) we would be off campus one of those Sundays serving our community. However, this is not simply an effort to better our community through service. This is a way for our congregation to invite friends and neighbors to join with our church in an activity that is less "threatening" than a formal worship service.

This past September 2018 was our first *Better Together* where we cleared trail that had been neglected over the summer due to the many fires in our area. While the group was primarily comprised of our congregation, we had several community members accept our invitations and join with us that Sunday. Our next better together was even better attended by people from outside our church community. In December we broke out into groups and caroled at several convalescing homes. It is our hope and prayer that the *Better Together* ministry continues to grow and provides pathways for connections to be made between our church membership and the larger Durango community. During *Better Together* in March we plan to clean and service handicap and mobility equipment and are already in conversation with possible partnering organizations that serve disabled in our community.

With much work behind us and so many possibilities ahead both Pastor and Congregation are excited and anxious as we engage this new chapter for the life of our church. Having served seven years with our Sabbatical policy calling for pastor to take a sabbatical between their 6th and 9th year of service, and every 6-9 years following, we feel the upcoming summer of 2020 is the perfect time for this Sabbatical to take place.

Pastor Beau has long been passionate about the world of art, music, and creativity in terms of its relationship to problem solving and engagement with spirituality. As a child and teen, he often thought of himself as pursuing Art School and becoming a painter. While God's call on his life to vocational ministry is undeniable at this juncture in ministry it seems the perfect opportunity to break away and re-engage long-dormant passions of his, especially as our congregation is seeking out and praying for its own creativity in ministry to our community. To re-energize our pastor by engaging in his passions, and to have God's Spirit working in him for renewed energy and creativity is what his heart is longing for and what we believe will "make his heart sing." For our congregation to serve our pastor in this way and to engage with the concepts, ideas, and even some of the practices that energize him while he is away at this time felt to be a privilege and honor in serving our pastor and growing our congregation.

3. Activities and Timeline

This Sabbatical is just as much for Pastor Beau's family as it is for him. He's excited to have an opportunity to spend uninterrupted time with his wife Kristin and their two children, Asher and Eden, to move at the unique pace of their family, and to engage in activities that all of them find meaningful. Pastor Beau's fourteen-year-old son, Asher, has significant Special Needs and uses a wheelchair to commute long distances and a walker for shorter distances. This makes their travel times and the pace of their travel unique to their family.

For the first week (May 18-Aug 30) of the Sabbatical Pastor Beau and Family plan to spend time at their home in Durango. This time will be spent decompressing, packing, and prepping for their several trips ahead. Prepping their house and training their house sitter will be important as the Smith family will be leaving behind two wonderful dogs, a cat, their daughter's parakeet, and five egg-laying chickens!

From there, the Smith's will be driving their ADA accessible van to Nashville, TN for three weeks (May 25-June 14) immersing themselves in the listening to and creating music in a leg of the journey we're calling, *The Spirit of Creating Music*. All of the Smith family members love music and play a musical instrument. Kristin plays the Ukulele, Eden plays the Cello, Asher plays the drums, while Beau mostly plays guitar and sings, but dabbles a little in mandolin.

What better place then, to engage in the world of music and its creation than in *Music City*. While their the family plans to take in live music, visit the many music focused museums there, and spend time with friends involved in the music industry, Beau will take some of this time to focus on some of his songwriting—something that often falls to the wayside as a busy husband, father, and pastor.

From Nashville the Smiths plan to drive to New York City for three weeks (June 15-July 5) immersed in the world of art and its creation in a leg of the journey we're dubbing, *The Spirit of Creating Art*. Both Beau and his daughter Eden are passionate sketch artists, and Beau also enjoys oil painting. New York City has so much to offer when it comes to art both traditional and modern. The family plans to visit art museums, spend time engaging the art community, and to take in some of the many galleries in the area. Beau and Eden plan to have sketch pad in hand wherever they go, giving this father and daughter a unique experience of the city together. Beau will also be attending a few workshops at the Art Students League of New York which has seen the likes of Jackson Pollock, Norman Rockwell, and Georgia O'Keeffe pass through its programs.

Following these two three week trips the Smith's intend to fly from New York to Paris, France where they will spend six weeks (July 6-Aug 16) in the final leg of their travels we're calling *The Spirit of Appreciating Creativity in History and Others*. During this six-week extended time in Paris the Smith's plan to visit world famous museums as well as enjoy local artisans and the many flea markets of Paris and the surrounding areas of France. This leg of the journey is meant to be more a time of rest, relaxation, and appreciation than anything else. It is our hope that in this leg all that happens during, but also all that came before in their Sabbatical can coalesce for both Beau and his family.

The final two weeks of Pastor Beau's sabbatical will be spent back in Durango unpacking, decompressing, and getting the kids ready to start the school year. During this time of transitioning back to home Pastor Beau will be compiling, photos, sketches, and the music he hopes is born of the trip to share with the congregation.

Pastor Beau's first week back at work will be intentionally spent in further reflection with ample time free of meetings carved into the week. In welcoming our pastor back in the context of worship on Sunday, September 6th we'll have a *Celebration of Spirituality & Creativity*

to follow our worship service in the fellowship hall with time allotted for sharing both pastoral, family, and congregational experiences of the Sabbatical time.

4. Intended Benefits for the Congregation and the Pastor

As a church and as a Pastor we sit at a crossroads in terms of ministry for the present and the future. And while we've done extensive introspection and even taken concrete steps in the direction of becoming a more missional congregation, we recognize that we may have to continue to re-imagine how we do and are the church in the years to come. With a lot of great work behind us it seems appropriate now to take a step back, to rest, to be still and listen for God's voice of inspiration for the future.

The great benefits I as pastor see for the congregation in this sabbatical season are the opportunity to hear from a diverse set of voices other than myself, a time of reflecting on our current "creative avenues" for ministry and dreaming of new ones, and a time of intentionally seeking those who can help us all engage the creative process in terms of liturgy, worship, service, and more.

As Pastor it's been a long-time dream of mine to be fully immersed in the worlds of art and music. As a child from a young age I excelled in drawing and writing. While my talents and aptitudes were clear enough I unfortunately didn't explore or cultivate my God given talents in childhood and adolescence as much as I would have liked. It wasn't until college that I really picked up a guitar or a paint brush. The connection between myself and these two mediums of creativity was immediate and deeply heartfelt. And my God given talents for singing, instrumentation, and drawing-turned-oil painting grew quickly.

While I've always felt a strong connection between this side of myself and my call to ministry, I must confess that my ability to engage my creative side has been limited by the day-to-day demands of ministry, the needs of being dedicated to my wife and children, and the extra added demands of having a son with significant special needs.

It is my hope that by taking this full sabbatical season to engage these oft-neglected passions I might be able to envision and articulate better an even larger cross-section between my natural gifts and talents and my life as a husband to my wife, a father to my children, and a Pastor in God's church.

In addition to building more confluence between my vocation as a minister and my creative tendencies as an artist I hope to also bring back with me through this exploration new tools for creative expression that will enhance my self-care for the long haul in ministry. Finally, I too share the church's excitement and trepidation over the days and years that lie ahead of us. Durango is a "hard egg to crack" in terms of reaching people with gospel. We as a church and pastor together have realized now that our old solutions, remedies, and approaches to ministry are not going to work for the present or the future. In a way I am hopeful that this whole experience will "prime the pump" for conversations about renewed, re-envisioned, and re-imagined approaches to ministry in our community for years to come.

5. (Written by a team member) As a church we are blessed to have several former and retired pastors in our congregation, one of whom (a retired former pastor of our congregation) was instrumental in our adopting our Presbytery's sabbatical policy three years ago, and another two of whom sit on the Sabbatical committee. We are committed to seeing that our pastors, present and future, take significant time for rest and renewal. In so far as filling the pulpit during Beau's absence we have four retired and/or former pastors ready to fill in and who are already, or will be, familiarized with the sabbatical theme and hoped for outcomes. Each of these we are confident can bring their own voice and their own insight into the value of creativity and its relationship to spirituality. Preaching topics and texts will include God's own creative nature and invitation to us as co-creators in terms of biology, community formation, religious life, and problem solving. We hope to explore through preaching the function art, music, and poetry in the life of God's people from the Exodus to the Psalms, to Hymn singing in the New Testament.

These four pastors will also be invited to help provide pastoral care in Beau's absence. But we also have an excellent Deacons ministry that is already fully engaged in offering pastoral care to our congregation. One hoped for outcome of this sabbatical would be that our Deaconate ministry would be even more empowered and more creative in their approaches to providing care for our congregants. Additionally, our Session already has in place a policy of rotating through Elders for pastoral emergencies when the Pastor is away.

In addition to preaching that is sync with our Pastor's travels and experiences we are planning Adult Sunday School themes focused on art, art history, and worship music. Within our congregation and through several congregational relationships we already have people well-versed in these areas we will be inviting to lead us in study and discussion during Pastor Beau's absence. Our Children's Church and Youth Group will also be in a season of emphasizing crafting, art, music, and skits by incorporating these into their lesson plans and utilizing curriculum that emphasize our God given creativity.

We plan to take this time to highlight the ways in which our church is already participating *creativity and spirituality*. We have a longstanding knitting group who regularly create prayer shawls and distribute them to the hurting in our community. We have multiple musicians within our congregation who will be invited to share their stories in small groups, fellowship hour, our "moments for mission" during worship, and more. We also have published authors within our congregation who we will invite to share their creative process and the ways they feel God at work in their craft. Additionally, we intend to use grant funding to bring in a few guest artists and musicians that we will incorporate into our worship services while Pastor Beau is away. It is our hope that in emphasizing all the creativity already present within our congregational context we will be inspired to think of new and more imaginative ways to fulfill our mission to *know Jesus, live in the Spirit, and join in the Father's Work*.

Our church is also blessed with an excellent administrator—also a former Presbyterian pastor—who will be taking care of organizational and administrative tasks during Pastor Beau's absence. Additionally, as a part of the Sabbatical Team, our administrator will be helping to organize Worship, Sunday School, Children's Church, and special events around the sabbatical theme.

As a part of the grant monies awarded for congregational use, we would love to invite guest musicians and artists to be a part of this journey. We have connections with several local and national musicians and artists and will be building into our budget worksheet a plan to cover cost of travel and payment for these potential guests. We would also love to purchase art supplies and media appropriate to the theme.

6. For Pastor Beau's send-off we'll be holding a special Sunday service celebrating the current creativity in our congregation and the adaptive change we've already engaged in because of embracing God's creative Spirit at work in us. Upon Pastor Beau's return we'll have another celebration service followed by a time of sharing, reflection, and Q and A regarding both Pastor and family, and the congregation's experiences during the sabbatical in our fellowship hall.

7.

Upon Pastor Beau's return and in addition to the celebration Sunday we plan to have an Adult Sunday School series led by Pastor Beau reflecting on the shared insights of he, his family, and our congregation. It is our hope that in recording this series and collecting ideas that may be birthed as a result our Elder Board would consider and pray about where God may be leading us as a church from here. We really do desire that this sabbatical time of renewal would be a means of further renewal for our church as a whole. While it's impossible to predict what conversations may come as a result, we're hopeful that this sabbatical would bear more and unexpected fruit for future years.

8. Our church has been in process about a sabbatical policy for some time now. One of our former pastors, Rev. Bill Postler, who went on from serving our church to serve as the Stated Clerk of our Presbytery was passionate that future pastors of FPC Durango receive a sabbatical time. Our Presbytery drafted a Sabbatical policy during Bill's tenure as Stated Clerk in hopes that local churches would adopt it. But it wasn't until Pastor Beau's arrival, and the return of Bill Postler to our worshipping community a couple of years later, that we began to seriously discuss adopting a sabbatical policy.

Starting with our Staff Support Team there was a review of our Presbytery's policy suggestion. While the Team was enthusiastic it took some time to communicate with the congregation both what "sabbatical" meant, and why it was so important. Support for sabbatical was there all along, but clarity as to what that meant and what it would look like took time to communicate. At our annual congregational meeting in February of 2016 the congregation voted unanimously to adopt our sabbatical policy.

At that time Pastor Beau had served four years with our policy indicating between six and nine years of service being the timeline for taking Sabbatical. These last two plus years Pastor Beau has been in small conversations with staff and Elders about taking a Sabbatical the summer of 2020. With the full support of the congregation and our Elders a small Sabbatical Team was formed this past year to discern, pray over, and apply for the Pastor Renewal program through the Lily Endowment. We are excited not just as a team but as representatives of First Presbyterian Church Durango's heart for our Pastor, his renewal, and our own through this unique opportunity.