



Sabbatical: Siesta, Study or Sayonara?

Mark Brewer Leaves Roger Dermody in Charge for Six Months

**Bel Air Presbyterian Church
Los Angeles, California**

By Dr. David R. Fletcher

“I talked about my sabbatical from the pulpit,” said Pastor Brewer. “I even brought up the Elders at each of the three services, and brought up all of the pastoral staff. But, the congregation still had questions.”

“Mark, there’s an undercurrent that you are half way out the door,” some said.

“Mark, are you coming back?” several people asked rather pointedly.

“Mark, are you being disciplined by the Elders?” queried one lady.

“I knew,” said Mark, “that in churchland, people cloak things in Christianese. The one lady came from a church where sabbatical was code for discipline. So I told everyone that I had negotiated hard for the sabbatical.”

Sabbaticals can be code in the church. It is a seemingly easy way to get rid of a staff person or for the staff person to go looking for a job. Is a sabbatical a siesta, a period to rest before returning to work? Or, is it for study, preparation for continuing ministry, enrichment of the mind and soul?

When the Rev. Dr. Mark Brewer, Pastor and Head of Staff at Bel Air Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles went on sabbatical in October of 2006, he faced all these questions.

About Mark

Mark's primary spiritual gifts lie in leadership and preaching, each enhanced by his warmth, humor, humility, intellectual rigor and vision.¹ Mark's passion is "weaving a fabric of friendship across the city." His desire is to equip his missions-minded church with bold and fresh ways of connecting with the city.

Mark is a third-generation Presbyterian minister's son. He received his early education in Denver, Colorado and did his doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena and in St. Andrews, Scotland. He served as Pastor in the Denver area for twenty years, not only building up his own congregation but reaching out to the larger Denver community in urban and suburban alliances as well. He was involved in starting two different churches in Denver, each growing to several thousand members. Colorado Community Church notes that: October 1993, Dr. Mark Brewer holds the first steering committee meeting to discuss his vision for a different type of church in the Denver metro area.²

Mark launched the nationally syndicated radio ministry "A New Day for America" which seeks to build relationships between the urban and suburban churches. He was also head of 'Denver LINK', an organization that builds relationships among the spiritual leadership of the City.

In 1992, Mark served as Senior Pastor of a large church in Detroit. "It was during his short time in Detroit that the passion of his life took hold. He found joy in building relationships between worlds that people said could not be bridged, discovering that it is possible to be in cross racial, cross denominational and extremely hostile situations while bringing true healing, by applying the truths of 'family systems.'"

In 2000, Mark's book *A Walk Into The City* was published. He writes about discovering the principles of the new relationships between urban and suburban churches, bringing to light the attitude of service and reconciliation.

He is on the Board of Directors for Committee to End Divestment: "a Committee coalesced in early 2006 around the belief that a mistake made in 2004 by the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) needs to be corrected. That mistake involves resolutions about the Middle East."³ In a web article for Christianity Today, Rabbi Yitzchok Alderstein writes, "When I called the Rev. Mark Brewer, pastor of Bel Air Presbyterian, former spiritual home to Ronald Reagan, he told me that no issue has produced as much irate reaction from his parishioners as this one."⁴ "James Rudin, in his

¹ The following material are from: *Pastors*, Bel Air Presbyterian, <http://www.belairpres.org/who/pastors.html> and *History*, Bel Air Presbyterian <http://www.belairpres.org/who/history.html>

² About CCC >>Our Story, Colorado Community Church, www.coloradocommunity.org/about/story.htm

³ End Divestment Now - NEW WEBSITE - put together by a Presbyterian group, standwithus.com http://www.standwithus.com/news_post.asp?NPI=722

⁴ *Speaking Out: The Resolution That Put the 'PC' in PCUSA, In its anti-Israel resolution, the Presbyterian General Assembly isn't speaking on behalf of members. A rabbi's opinion*, by Yitzchok Adlerstein, August

Religion News Service column of September 23, stressed the opposition of many prominent Presbyterians to the resolutions. The General Assembly “fell out of the stupid tree and hit every branch going down,” he quoted the Rev. Mark Brewer.”⁵

In June 2001, in a resounding vote, the membership of Bel Air voted to call Mark as Pastor and head of staff. He is no stranger to Bel Air. He served the church for three years as an intern, from 1978-1980, while attending Fuller Theological Seminary.

He has also been featured on the streaming video show, *America At Worship*. In a message entitled, *Running Away*, he “offers advice for those times when we feel almost as though our hearts are breaking.”⁶

About Roger Dermody

Roger likes to say, “I was bitten with the missionary bug very early.” At a young age, he lived in Cameroon, Africa with his parents, who were serving as short term missionaries with the North American Baptist Convention.

After receiving an undergraduate degree in architecture from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, he practiced architecture for five years in Los Angeles. Roger then joined Bel Air staff as the Director of Student Ministries, Director of College Ministries, and Interim Director of Missions. Roger received his Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1996 and was ordained in 1997. He has also led the contemporary worship service at Bel Air.

Roger is an “on-call” chaplain at UCLA Medical Center, the Dean of Forest Home’s Annual College Briefing Conference, a design Architect for the Christian Environmental Association, and a member of the Board of Directors of Living Hope in Los Angeles, and *Lasting Impressions* in Zimbabwe. He was National co-chair of a church-wide mission strategy for ministry in high education.

Just as Mark has written directly on current cultural “hot topics,” so has Roger. He posted on the web an article on “What about sex before marriage?”⁷

Roger’s passion remains firmly grounded in Missions. He has led short-term mission trips to such diverse places as Romania, Bulgaria, Zimbabwe, Germany, Egypt, Belize, Mexico City, and South Central Los Angeles. “I love to walk alongside of people who discover how incredible God is, by getting out of the pew, rolling up their sleeves, and sharing the good news of His Son in word and deed, in neighborhoods very different than their own.” Roger’s life goal is to know Christ and to make Him known.⁸

2004, Christianity Today (web only) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/augustweb-only/8-2-33.0.html>

⁵ *Presbyterians Divest the Jews*, by Andrew Walsh, in Religion in the News, Fall 2005, Vol. 8, No. 2 <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINV08No2/Presbyterians%20Divest%20Jews.htm>

⁶ *Running Away*, by Mark Brewer, America at Worship, February 2, 2005. <http://www.americaatworship.tv>

⁷ *Sex Before Marriage*, by Roger Dermody, god-answers.com, http://godanswers.typepad.com/godanswerscom/sex_before_marriage/index.html

⁸ *Who We Are, Pastors*, Bel Air Presbyterian Church, www.belairpres.org/who/pastors.html

About Bel Air

The church has seven ordained pastors and over 60 program staff. It has an annual budget of \$6.8 million.

“It has become one of the most influential churches in Los Angeles. Many members of Bel Air Presbyterian Church are involved in the entertainment industry, and tend to be affluent and prominent within the Los Angeles and Hollywood communities. Bel Air Presbyterian Church is the church that former President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan, attended on Sundays after leaving office, and Mrs. Reagan still attends. Jessica Simpson, Nick Lachey, and Leonardo DiCaprio are among celebrities that attend services. The church had over 2,000 members as of 2005, making it one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the United States. It is affiliated with Presbyterian Church (USA).⁹

The Spiritual DNA

Mark writes about Bel Air:

“Ever since it was established in 1956, Bel Air has been known as a church deeply committed to Christ, committed to caring for the hurting, with a heart for missions. Building upon our past, we’re growing into a church for our present times: a church that seeks to be a blessing to other churches and ministries in our part of Los Angeles ... a church that is intentional in loving people and growing disciples ... a church that is alive with authentic relationships—real relationships with Christ and each other ... a church that seeks to return the ministry back into the hands of the people ... a church that is characterized by the joy of serving the Lord together.”

“Our mission field is not only our ‘Base Camp’ on Mulholland Drive, but connecting with churches in the Valley and the Westside, downtown, and literally the world. If you’re just checking out this ‘Christian thing,’ or are serious about making a difference for Christ, we’d love to have you be a part of our spiritual family.”

“We believe that salvation is merely the first step in a continuing lifelong process of discipleship. Our community practices a variety of disciplines to nurture the likeness of Christ—including worship, character development, evangelism, service, stewardship, and fellowship. Corporate worship is at the center of the Christian community’s life and, as such, should be the best possible in the Reformed tradition. Our worship services include elements of the old and new, the contemporary and the traditional.”¹⁰

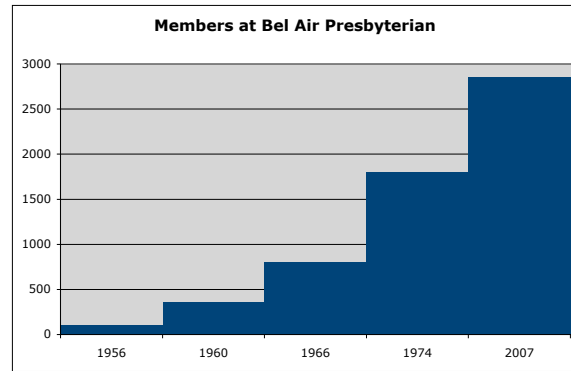
⁹ *Bel Air Presbyterian Church*, Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bel_Air_Presbyterian_Church

¹⁰ *Who We Are*, Bel Air Presbyterian www.belairpres.org/who/welcome.html

Two Earthquakes

The Los Angeles Presbytery approved in 1946 a tentative location for a new church in Bel Air. It wasn't until ten years later that 51 people were able to meet. "Work on the church building began in October 1956, and the rock blasting and grading work took seven and a half months."¹¹ For a church built on solid rock, it would soon have two earthquakes.

In 1964, the congregation called the Rev. Donn D. Moomaw as pastor and head of staff. The church rapidly grew and soon required three services each Sunday morning. Bel Air decided in 1983 that a new 1,600 seat sanctuary was needed and in 1988 ground was broken. It was dedicated in 1991.



The church suffered a spiritual earthquake in 1993 as the Rev. Dr.

Donn D. Moomaw resigned as head of staff. He was a UCLA's first two-time, first-team All-American football player, ultimately elected to the College Football Hall of Fame. "His most famous parishioners were President Ronald Reagan and wife Nancy; Moomaw gave the invocation at both of Reagan's inaugurations. His tenure at Bel Air Church came to an end when he pleaded no contest to ecclesiastical charges of sexual harassment."¹²

The second earthquake was physical. In 1994, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake shook the Los Angeles area and widely damaged the church. "A pipe connected to the sprinkler system in the new sanctuary burst and caused major damage to the Casavant organ; and cracks and broken windows were widespread. The sanctuary was classified to be unsafe, and worship services resumed in Evans Chapel. Repair work extended over a two-year period."

The two earthquakes were a challenge for the church to overcome. The church was without a head of staff for more than two years. In 1995, a new pastor was called "and under Dr. Wenning's leadership, the attendance, ministry, and finances continued to rise; and the church was able to add to its ministerial staff by extending a call to the Rev. Roger Dermody, Jr. in 1997."

In 1998, a contemporary worship service began on Saturday evening in the chapel. It was moved to Sunday morning the following spring. "In 2000, the worship schedule changed to a traditional service at 9:00 and a contemporary service at 11:00, both in the Sanctuary. A second contemporary service was added on Sunday evenings in 2002."¹³

The pastors of Bel Air actively speak on vital current issues. A congregant, Matt Singley, writes about Bel Air: "I love how our church lives out authenticity. Authenticity involves

¹¹ History, Bel Air Presbyterian, www.belairpres.org/who/history.html

¹² Don Moomaw, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donn_Moomaw

¹³ Welcome to Bel Air.pdf, Bel Air Presbyterian, 2007.

many aspects including transparency, honesty, humility and forthrightness. It's that forthrightness that led our pastor, Mark Brewer, to write a quick article about homosexuality on the god-answers.com website. Issues like this are so challenging, most churches avoid this and the other "big" issues like the plague; or they give a very vague answer like, "love the sinner, hate the sin" (which I think is actually acceptable, albeit confusing to those you are trying to have a conversation with that don't believe in God). I think that Pastor Mark has written a biblically centered, loving piece.¹⁴ Mark wrote in that article: "We have many gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ who attend Bel Air. I'm often asked "how do you want them to feel when they attend your church?" The resounding answer is I want them to feel welcomed, loved, embraced, supported, and challenged. I also want them, as I do for myself, to live the life of holiness."¹⁵

The church is also involved in the media and arts. In addition to having a pastor focusing on this area, Mark speaks out on it. In an article on video games, Ian Hardy, the North America technology correspondent for BBC News, cites Mark: "When you say it's a Christian movie, novel or video game you expect it to be really schlocky and cheesy," said Pastor Mark Brewer of the Bel Air Presbyterian Church. "It'd be great one day for people to say 'this is Christian' and know that there's going to be quality to it. "But that takes discipline, it takes money, and it takes a craft and the dedication to do it."¹⁶

The church is influential in the denomination of the Presbyterian Church USA. On the future of the PCUSA, "Pastor Mark Brewer says Bel Air doesn't want to make a move out of PCUSA alone: 'Right now there's this awkward pause. Everybody's got their hand by their holster, but nobody's drawing yet. And the denomination's waiting now, looking around the room, going 'Who's going to make the first move?' Pastor Brewer says that in ten years he'd like to see either the PCUSA reformed to be driven by the pure gospel, or he'd like to belong to a new gospel-driven denomination in its place. Bel Air session considers redirecting \$75K in denominational giving to evangelical groups. Bel Air plans to sponsor gathering of West Coast evangelical PCUSA pastors. Online recordings of Bel Air Town Hall Part 1 & Part 2"¹⁷

Mark can be critical of those who try to redefine the core of the gospel: "When referring to the Trinity, most Christians are likely to say, "Father, Son and the Holy Spirit." But leaders of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are suggesting some additional designations: "Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child and Life-giving Womb," or perhaps "Overflowing Font, Living Water, Flowing River." The Rev. Mark Brewer, senior pastor of Bel Air Presbyterian Church, is among those in the 2.3-million-member denomination unhappy with the additions. "You might as well put in Huey, Dewey and Louie," he said."¹⁸

¹⁴ *What About Homosexuality?* Blog by Matt Singley, October 3, 2007, http://mattsingley.typepad.com/matt_singleyquips_and_mus/2007/10/what-about-homo.html

¹⁵ *What About Homosexuality?* By Mark Brewer, October 3, 2007, www.god-answers.com

¹⁶ *Spiritual challenge for gamers*, by Ian Hardy, BBC News, June, 4 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/click_online/5040340.stm

¹⁷ <http://www.savehollywoodpres.com/index3.html>

¹⁸ NewMexiken, a blog, June 30, 2006, citing a report from the Los Angeles Times of June 30, 2006, <http://newmexiken.com/archives/date/2006/06>.

The Sabbatical

When Mark was negotiating the terms of call to come to Bel Air, he included a sabbatical in his fifth or sixth year. “This was my second sabbatical, the first was twenty years ago. It was a totally different story as I mostly studied at St. Andrews in Scotland.”

“Most don’t take sabbaticals because they fear it may roll on them.” By this he means that adverse effects will happen in the pastor’s absence. “The congregation suffers if you don’t take it because a good sabbatical models health to the congregation about life’s fears and work.”

Mark left in October 2006, made a mid-sabbatical visit in January for three weeks and then returned to the church in March.

Mid-Sabbatical Break

There was tragedy in the middle of the Sabbatical. Mark’s wife sister-in-law died very suddenly of cancer. “So, because of this, we came back in the middle.” This became a three week mid-sabbatical break.

“The break definitely did interrupt the sabbatical, but we were on the way back to Australia. I did some counseling and dinners every night—which I wouldn’t recommend.” Roger commented, “I could argue the mid-sabbatical break both ways, as I was concerned for Mark and Carolyn.” In the mid-sabbatical visit, Mark preached once and met with the new Elders.

Study and Results of the Sabbatical

During his sabbatical he studied at Oxford and then at other various cities. “Study was my main focus. I over commit anyway and my wife is an amazing sightseer. I would study all day long. I had a problem at Oxford as I couldn’t get into some libraries—since I was not a Ph.D. candidate. I worked on a book too—on spiritual intelligence, a quadrilateral based on Scripture, reason, wise counsel (from the living and dead) and prayer. There was great material at Oxford that will never go online or be published.”

“I studied Augustine, Aquinas and Luther on church-state issues. I studied some in Australia. Here’s the \$40,000 conclusion to my sabbatical—ruin a church by having the government help and ruin a city by having the church run it. Calvin had some success, but Constantine is another matter.”

“We want to transform Los Angeles, to bring the political, moral and spiritual institutions together.” For Los Angeles, the conclusion from Mark’s sabbatical was that “I am such an evangelical in the Presbyterian Church USA and we fight the wrong hills in social transformation. We need to just work together. We need more small groups with others, such as the dominant Korean and African-American churches. We need worship field trips—shut down worship and go somewhere else for a Sunday!”

Another passion of Mark's is the arts, and this was rejuvenated in the sabbatical. "We need to reclaim the arts for Christ. Here at Bel Air we have a 'Designated Pastor to the Entertainment Industry. We need to take it to the next level."

"I am more excited to be here now because of the mission—and that was a surprise from the sabbatical. Pastors need to go away to get away and being away I could contextualize the mission of Bel Air. That's why I studied in Australia and Europe. Australia has some of the lowest church attendance of 3-4% of the population and Europe is 4-5%." Mark gained perspective on Los Angeles and culture in the United States by being able to reflect on it from a distance.

"In coming back, I also re-contextualized the staff. I saw the people to retain. And, I became more resolved in the others who need to transition. I had 'away eyes' when I came back. It was luxury of being objective when I came back. I could say, 'now I see.' In coming back, you look at your team very differently. The good and the bad was intensified."¹⁹

Communication

Mark stayed in touch with the church in a variety of ways. "I did an e-mail epistle to the staff every third week to let them know what I was doing. I talked on the phone probably only three times to Roger."

While some in sabbaticals don't look at any e-mail, Mark found a different style worked for him. "I looked at e-mails once a week at most. More than that and I couldn't disengage."

Mark and Roger questioned how much contact to have during the sabbatical and the form of contact. Should they have a regular teleconference? Should Mark send video messages back to the congregation, like a "man on the street" report about the sabbatical? The decision was to not employ ultra high-tech solutions, but to send an e-mail every third week.

A mistake for Mark was keeping the same cell phone number. "Some people called me every third or fourth day. It was the needy who called or sometimes the very neurotic. They called me while I was overseas. The people that I had in pastoral counseling called me and I should have gotten a different cell number. Some elders contacted me. But, no one was tattling Mike Hooper or Roger. There were no end runs while I was gone."

Timing

The timing for the sabbatical was deliberate. The church's Executive Administrator, Mike Hooper was going to retire in the summer of 2007. Mike was over facilities and finance, while Roger as Executive Pastor was over Ministries.

¹⁹ Perhaps this comment alone is enough for governing board members to immediately adopt a sabbatical policy. It is also enough for some staff to block it as diligently as possible (humor—trace, drf).

The challenge of the timing was that the discipleship building was in mid-construction. While Mark was on sabbatical, the church staff moved into new offices in March 2007. Construction on the Discipleship Center and Christian Education buildings was completed in June and the site was dedicated in September 2007.

Mark went into the sabbatical, “scratching my head. Why am I going on sabbatical in the vital seasons from October to early March?” These were important times for Bel Air with stewardship, advent and pre-Easter.

Empowerment & Delegating

As a symbol of empowerment, Mark told several people “I hope that you are here when I get back.” The clear implication was that it was possible for staff to be terminated while he was away. Mark empowered Roger and Mike with enormous power in his absence.

“This was a great opportunity to test leadership, to not steer the plane into the hill. It helped clarify the roles too, differentiate from Mike’s and Roger’s roles.” Mike was in charge of building, grounds and finances—and slated to retire in the summer of 2007. Roger’s role was ministry. A key to Mark’s sabbatical was his empowerment of Roger. “I trust Roger and had a great Executive Administrator in Mike.” When asked what he delegated, Mark replied “Everything! Jim Collins in *Built to Last* said that one of the big deterrents of an ongoing organization is a strong voice at the top that doesn’t delegate. I felt loved by the church and it has doubled since I have been here, but this is Christ’s church. This is a huge relief to a Senior Pastor. It is the Lord’s church. So go!”

Bel Air was in the middle of a building project when Mark went on sabbatical and it was delegated to Roger to work with the architects. For most Executive Pastors this would be a chore, but Roger was an architect before entering the ministry. Mike Hooper helped as well, “and we had an architect on staff, so it worked well—most decisions were done before Mark left, so it was good.” There were challenges with the building project. “We rushed to move into our new offices before Easter. Mark had just come back but his office wasn’t done. For three months his office was being worked on.”

Roger and Mark commented on staff morale during the sabbatical. Roger said, “there wasn’t a strangeness to it; we did well.” Roger had concerns about two staff members and how they would work during Mark’s absence.” Mark set the boundaries for the staff and empowered Roger by saying to several staff members, again with the phrase “I hope you are here when I get back.” Some staff wanted to preach more and other staff wanted more ministry responsibility. “But in the end,” Roger said, “it all righted itself.”

During the sabbatical, the church was looking for a replacement for Mike Hooper, the long-time administrator. Mark commented, “We should have talked to someone to do the search during the sabbatical, but didn’t.” Roger picked up the thought, “So when Mark got back we didn’t have anyone. It was our first time to use a search firm and the process was okay.”

The pulpit of a large church is both vital and influential. Mark filled it with a mix of “outsides guns” and Bel Air staff. “We needed continuity in preaching. I didn’t want to see ‘the pastor of the week,’ so not all staff preached, while others we booked for 3 weeks.” Roger said that “we had strong feelings about having a consistent thread, no pastor de jour, someone has to be the visible up-front face to the congregation, stitching the services together. But being in this role felt presumptuous to my colleagues. It was Mark’s call, and the right one, my motivation wasn’t for power, but I wrestled with the role. I don’t want to be egocentric.”

Simply put, Mark put Roger in charge of the pulpit. Further, Mark told the staff of his decision, so that he was the “bad guy.” Roger spoke on five Sundays. They had twelve Sundays from outside speakers. Two other pastors spoke for a total of four Sundays. “The only feedback that we got was that there wasn’t enough color or women speaking,” Mark noted.

While in the role of the lead pastor, Roger and his wife, Megan, attended many church and social functions. “We were surprised at the parties at Christmas. Since Mark was gone, we went to them. This church is out of control in its ability to party. It is so LA. Mark will have many a night of two parties.” As Mark is an extrovert and loves the social events, Roger found it tiring.

Re-entry

“At first there was a bizarre rumor that Roger and I were at odds with each other,” Mark said. “The rumor was that we both were leaving after a huge fight. Yet, I wouldn’t have done it without Roger and Mike—I trusted the team back home.” With laughter, Mark shared that “the budget went up and attendance went up while I was gone. If I went away for another six months, we would make a fortune. Attendance surged just a little when I came back.”

“I felt very affirmed, loved and missed, but the church is less fearful of me being gone now. We can do it. I have only been here six and a half years. I brought a different kind of personality to it. It is good for me because I feel less of the weight of the church.” Roger agreed with this and felt that the church was healthier because of the sabbatical. They reported the staff felt the same.”

Policy & Sabbaticals for Staff

Bel Air offers a six-month sabbatical at full pay or a twelve-month sabbatical at half pay (see the Appendix for the policy). To date, one Associate Pastor has taken the 12 month sabbatical. A year is a long time to be away from the church and ministry. In the case of that Pastor, there were elements of the position that changed in the year that she was on sabbatical. At the beginning of the sabbatical she and Roger were peers and at the end, Roger was her supervisor.

Roger plans to take a sabbatical soon and work on his dissertation. Yet, in response after Mark’s sabbatical, “there’s no waiting list yet from the staff.” Since none of the other

pastors have been at the church for seven years, Mark and the Associate Pastor are the only pastors to have taken a sabbatical in the existing policy.

The sabbatical policy at Bel Air applies only to ordained pastors.

Examples from Other Churches

Senior Pastor's Second Sabbatical Grace Covenant of Austin

At Grace Covenant of Austin Texas, the Senior Pastor is Dr. Matt Cassidy. While at Grace, he completed his second three-month sabbatical in 2007. His first three-month sabbatical was in 1996. Two other pastors have taken sabbaticals in 2005 and 2007. Prior to going on the second sabbatical, Dr. Cassidy and this author had an "interview sermon," to talk about the biblical Sabbath and sabbaticals. Similar to what Mark Brewer did in having the Elders and staff come to the pulpit before his sabbatical, this sermon was to help the congregation cognitively and emotionally understand the purpose of the sabbatical. The following material is excerpted from that sermon.²⁰

Matt Cassidy on his Current & Past Sabbatical

"Our family will be going to Colorado for a number of weeks. Then just Melinda and I will take a trip to Canada where I will be taking classes from Dr. Bruce Waltke. Dr. Waltke is an unparalleled academic scholar who is the authority on Hebrew and especially the Old Testament covenants. I look forward to studying under him since we will be studying the Joseph epic in the fall. I previously had a class with him via tape. He is notoriously famous for being one of the most difficult faculty members at whatever seminary he taught at."

"And then I will be taking some courses on my own in philosophy, psychology and literature. I didn't have much exposure to these subjects in my undergraduate years."

"Eleven years ago, the church gifted me with a sabbatical. There are different ways of looking at it. Certainly from the church's standpoint, it was a very good investment on their part in my coming back and doing a better job. It was very good for me because at that point in my life I was pretty much done. I was dried out and desperate. That sabbatical gave me a chance to restore my spiritual life, physical life, marital life, family life, and in so many different ways. During the sabbatical itself, I was working as a teaching assistant for Haddon Robinson, who is the foremost teacher on how to preach more effectively. I was helping with two classes, the 101 and the 201 courses that he taught, reviewing the sermons of the graduate students there and how to make it better. In that experience, unbeknown to me, I learned how to become a far more effective teacher in that I was able to evaluate my own work and predict whether next week's sermon was going to be any better or worse than the previous week. Dr. Robinson insisted that we,

²⁰ Dr. Matt Cassidy & Dr. David Fletcher, *The Rest of God*, May 27, 2007, www.grace360.org/sermons/archive.php.

the two interns working for him, should take our lessons back to our churches and teach those classes. I taught that course about 10 times.”

Matt Cassidy on “Why the Sabbath?”

“It is hard to answer with any degree of confidence. I think in the nature of God He is showing Himself to be a leader and a role model. Also it demonstrates that rest is part of worship. The first two chapters in Genesis are about worship. We talked about salvation being defined as bringing things back to the way they were meant to be. Even in the creation story, the creation story is incomplete if you cover just Days 1-6. The creation story is complete when we say there is a seventh day and rest is part of that. You will see that in nature itself. The heart must rest between beats. In music there is a rest. There is Selah in a book of poetry called Psalms. David and the other authors of Psalms say rest. They don’t mean stop worshipping. They mean that is part of the worship itself. I think God here is saying—*rest is part of who I am.*”

“There are two times in the Ten Commandments where Sabbath is mentioned. The Ten Commandments as a structure of a covenant is found in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5. Deuteronomy is supposed to be a second book, Second Law. But when we look at these two passages that are supposed to be identical, we find they are not. Their nuances bring out the various reasons why we ought to be celebrating a Sabbath. Let me introduce the comparison and contrast from a quote by Mark Buchanan in *The Rest of God*: ‘Exodus grounds the Sabbath in creation. Deuteronomy grounds it in liberation. Exodus remembers Eden and Deuteronomy remember Egypt. In Exodus, Sabbath-keeping is about imitating divine example and receiving divine blessing. In Deuteronomy, it is about taking hold of divine deliverance and observing divine command.’”

“In Exodus 20:8 the longest of the Ten Commandments, mind you, and it is the part of the Ten Commandments involved in worship. Exodus 20:8-11 says: ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.’ In that passage, we see that God has blessed that day and made it holy because that is the creation account. It is like Him. This is playful on God’s part. When we imitate God on the Sabbath, He says, ‘*why don’t you just do what I did. I worked six days and I took a day off. You act like Me and you’ll find out on that day that you are nothing like Me.*’”

“We are in His image but He is not in ours. We are like Him but He is not like us. On that Sabbath day, that is the day when we stop everything because most of us are consumed with the idea that we would rather be God. We could control things better. Things would go better for us. On that Sabbath day, it is like the quote, we have to unwind and start to realize that we are very little people. We are very small in the grand scheme of things. That humbling thing helps us enjoy God in His greatness and helps us understand our

limitations. And God uses Himself as an example like a parent would do at three o'clock on an afternoon with a raging three-year-old. He says—Look, reason will not work here. *‘Why don’t you just come and lay down with me. I will tell you a soft, slow story as I tickle your forearm and we will see where things end.’*”

Matt’s Conclusion

“First of all, I am very excited about the fall 2007 (*ed. this spoken in May 2007*). I have been working on Joseph for a number of months now. We will be looking at the life of Joseph and the epic of the patriarchs. So if you will get ready for that, I won’t be able to spend much time on how whacked out Joseph’s family is. To fully appreciate what Joseph went through and the transitions that took place in that epic, you can start now in the summer studying the series we did in 1999 on Jacob. That would be a big help. It will be posted on our web site. The Recording Ministry will have the Jacob series in CD albums for sale. If you study the life of Jacob so that when we hit Joseph in August, we will have a fuller understanding of the context of that.”

“I would say just keep coming to Grace Covenant Church. I have heard rumors that I am leaving. I am not leaving the church but coming back. I have heard rumors that everybody else is leaving. I don’t want to hear that either.”

An XP’s Sabbatical Westminster Church of the Nazarene

For many years, Rob Bollinger was in the for-profit business world.²¹ After receiving a degree, he began as an electrical engineer. Twenty years later he was a regional sales and service manager for twenty-three western states and had forty people working for him. He left the for-profit sector and joined the staff of Westminster Nazarene Church of Westminster, Colorado.

When he lived in California, he got involved at Calvary Church, a new start from David Hocking’s Calvary Church in Santa Anna. Rob came as an attendee to Westminster Church of the Nazarene in 1997 and entered full-time ministry at the church in 2001. After completing ministerial studies, he was ordained into the Nazarene Church in 2006. He serves as Westminster’s Executive Pastor. The church is rapidly growing and is getting ready for the future—they recently purchased eighty acres of land and will soon relocate to the new property.

Westminster Nazarene led the way in conceptualizing the sabbatical policy in their Nazarene district. The policy was adopted by the district of Nazarene churches, then by Westminster in 2006. The district policy was not made mandatory for all churches because “some churches can’t follow it due to financial reasons.”

Westminster determined that pastors need time in the seventh year to rejuvenate and renew, so that they don’t burn out. This did not come from an immediate crisis in the church, but the observation that pastors across the board need renewal. Rob said, “The

²¹ Based on a conversation with Rob Bollinger on September 26, 2007.

church talked it over for a while, about how to keep pastors long-term, to avoid turn-over and burnout.” Further he noted, “Our Senior Pastor, Dr. Stan Reader, has a friend who is a medical doctor. The doctor wrote a book *Time Bomb in the Church: Diffusing Pastoral Burnout* (Dr. Daniel Spaite and Debbie Salter Goodwin, ed.). Dr. Reader and Dr. Spaite worked together on the sabbatical idea—in biblical and physiological terms.”

In communicating the policy to the congregation, Westminster took pains to share that for pastors, ministry is “24/7.” Leaders informed the church that weekend time is work time for pastors and that they do not want to lose great staff. Westminster realized that though much of industry doesn’t have sabbaticals, that the church needs it—and that other professions have it. There was some apprehension in the congregation, “and for some the jury is still out, the proof is in the longer term of whether pastors stay at the church.”

The first pastor to take a sabbatical was the Worship Pastor in the summer of 2006. Both the worship pastor and his wife were on staff, desiring simultaneous sabbaticals. The church did the math of combining the total number of years on staff, factored in the total number of weeks, divided by two and came up with ten weeks of time away.

In 2007, Rob became the second staff person to take a sabbatical. The policy requires that the sabbatical be taken “roughly” in the seventh year, for a minimum of seven and a maximum of twelve weeks. The policy applies only toward ordained pastors. Time leading up to ordination can count toward a sabbatical, including time with a local and district license.

What did the XP do on his sabbatical? In terms of rest, Rob said, “Never having done this before, I sat down and thought through what I wanted to do. I over-planned stuff, but became busier than when I was at the church, so I slowed down. I took a vacation to visit my Mom in Minnesota and we took a family vacation—my wife works and she had 3 weeks of accrued vacation.”

In terms of renewal, Rob became involved in a film project in New Orleans. He said that the film “will help launch the non-profit. It is designed to help people who have been through a catastrophic event and show that there are ongoing needs with the people.” He found the film project was too ambitious. “I tried to write a book and got a long ways on it, but didn’t finish.”

During the sabbatical, he was not allowed to attend church at Westminster Nazarene. He went to other churches and “saw some great and not-so-great churches, where I felt an outcast. This gave me a heart for embracing visitors to our church.”

Also during the sabbatical, he was not allowed to see church friends, even socially. Since he has been at the church for ten years, this was a challenge to have no contact with them. He saw people at the supermarket and they didn’t know what to do. Some said to him, “I know that I’m not supposed to be talking to you.”

In terms of his church workload during the sabbatical, there were dedicated laymen involved to carry through on projects. He off-loaded some projects to other staff. Some major projects would wait for his return. Rob noted, “I was quite surprised that people carried through with things!” Rob would encourage others to “three months in advance, think through what needs to be done while you are gone.”

At the time of the interview, Rob had been back at the church for three weeks. In his first week back, he had one-on-one meetings with staff to come up to speed. He said, “I came back refreshed and renewed. I came back with new approaches to things. I recognized how busy people are and how important a Sabbath day of rest is. Don’t work on your day off! The church is program driven but I want it to be ministry driven.

Since the policy is new he said, “We don’t know all of the long term effects of it!” When asked when the Senior Pastor will take a sabbatical, he replied, “Next summer!”

Conclusion & Principles

Case studies are designed to let the reader draw the conclusions. There are several questions that will help in this process. In the material presented:

- What were the concerns of the congregation with the sabbatical? What elements from the church’s history played into the fears, concerns or thinking about the sabbatical? Did the churches adequately address the issues? What is your church’s unique history and how would that affect a sabbatical policy?
- What were the responses from the staff with the sabbatical? What steps were taken to allay fears or position new authority? Were adequate steps taken to work with staff? If you or your pastor were to go on sabbatical, what staff issues would need to be considered?
- Each church had stated reasons for the sabbatical—were these realized? What are the unique factors in Mark Brewer’s gifting and make-up that influenced his sabbatical? Did the churches know and address the pastor’s unique make-up of gifts and abilities in creating the sabbatical? If you were to take a sabbatical, what would you need to consider?
- What unexpected results came from the sabbaticals?

Appendix

Bel Air Presbyterian Los Angeles, California

Sabbatical Policy

A. Purpose

Bel Air Presbyterian Church approves the policy outlined below in order to: Provide its pastors with opportunities for study and reflection, so that they might fortify their relationship with Christ and strengthen their ministries. Show appreciation for our pastors' dedication and hard work on behalf of Bel Air Presbyterian Church.

B. Eligibility and Length of Sabbatical

Pastors will be eligible to apply for Sabbatical Leave after each seven years of full-time pastoral service at Bel Air Presbyterian Church. Pastors can choose either a six-month Sabbatical at full salary or a one-year Sabbatical at half salary.

C. Conditions and Requirements of Sabbatical

The specific conditions and requirements of a pastor's sabbatical—including any proposed curricular or work projects—will be negotiated with the Personnel Committee and approved by Session. Interested pastors should submit a short memorandum describing their proposed sabbatical to the Personnel Committee at least one year prior to when they would like their sabbatical to begin. The memo should include recommendations on how to minimize the impact of the pastor's absence on the church and its ministry.

D. Commitment of Continued Service

Pastors will accept sabbatical on the explicit condition that they will continue to service Bel Air Presbyterian Church full-time for a period of 2 years following the conclusion of their leave. Pastors who take up to six months sabbatical at full salary (or 12 months at half salary) will commit to at least three more years at Bel Air Presbyterian Church.

E. Vacation

Vacation will not accrue during the time the pastor is on sabbatical.

Grace Covenant Church Austin, Texas

Dr. Matt. Cassidy on the Sabbath as seen in Deuteronomy²²

Turn to Deuteronomy 5 and I will read a second part of Mark Buchanan's quote as we look at the distinctions between these two covenants. -- "Exodus looks up. Deuteronomy looks back. Exodus gives theological rationale for rest, and Deuteronomy historical justification for it. One evokes God's character; the other His redemption. One calls us to holy mimicry--be like God; the other to holy defiance--never be slaves again. One reminds us that we are God's children, the works of His hands; the other that we are no one's chattel, not Pharaoh's, not Nebuchadnezzar's, not Xerxes', not Beelzebub's. One is invitation. The other is warning." That is what the Deuteronomy passage is all about. Watch as we read it now in Deuteronomy 5:12. Listen how He is using the Sabbath to remind people what it cost to free them and how free they are. Deuteronomy 5:12, 13, 15 Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days

²² This material is from an "interview sermon" with Dr. Cassidy and the author, entitled *The Rest of God* on May 27, 2007. See www.grace360.org/sermons/archive.php.

you shall labor and do all your work, ... v. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

In Deuteronomy's declaration that you are to observe the Sabbath, it is a time for Israel and for us [because the Exodus is metaphorical to us because we are saved from the slavery of sin] to go back and think-- *The way I used to be was enslaved by pettiness, by vanity, by greed, by pride. That is the sin that consumed me.* Then it goes on to say, *Remember where you were enslaved? Remember what it cost to get you out.* His mighty hand and outstretched arm (the strength of God) in Israel showed Himself to be stronger than the blood bath of the ten plagues. This is no ordinary God you serve. In our case, it would be the cross and the power that took place there.

Here is how I think we can make sense of it. If I am left on my own for more than a few days, I start off as a spiritual-desiring being to glorify God and serve God and love other people. I think as time goes on, I become less and less who I was meant to be and more and more who I was. If you work six days and on that seventh day you take a breath and say – *I started acting like the slave-Matt that used to live. I have started to become more petty, selfish and angry. I am taking this day off to remind myself that I am not in bondage any more. God has set me free through His Son.* The Sabbath is a faith-based commandment where God is calling our bluff. The Sabbath is tithing time like we are supposed to tithe money. Tithing is saying *oh yeah, I call your bluff* because if you go from spending more than you make (which is pretty common) to what you actually make (that's great) and then when you get to the point where God is asking you to save a certain amount of money and start by giving 10%, the first thing that comes to mind is – *I won't be able to pay my bills. It can't work.* Then God says – *Exactly. You will have to trust Me to live within your means and to live within the commands of what you should be giving generously.* There is a huge faith step in a very delicate part of our souls, our finances, where God says – *Try me.* In Malachi it says – *I double dog dare you to step up to this command and just do it and see how you can live by faith.* The Sabbath is saying – *Put your checkbook down. Let me see your palm pilot, your day timer, and your calendar.*

With the whole Sabbath story, you can take this authoritatively and look at the Bible and say, *this is the way God set it up.* You can say – *I am just going to submit to the wisdom that comes from understanding the Creator who made me and gave me His owner's manual.* Or, you can back into it through a 1,000 different studies and tests and see that a successful diet comes from diligence for six days and then a day off. Successful athletes will tell you that you work hard six days and you take one day off. In history when the Russians were using slave labor to build their railroads across their eleven time zones, they had worked through every possible rotation of labor versus rest. They came up with one day in seven. You can work it any way you want, it will come down to this. If you want to be who God made you to be and glorify Him, it is not just about being fatigued. The thing that bugs me is I know I can't be the giver, the caretaker, the encourager, and the person who brings wisdom when I am just tired.

First thing you have to do is say, “I have decided to understand that God’s standard here transcends culture because it applies to creation. I have heard about this and there is always next year but now I am finally going to quit putting this off. I am going to start expressing a six-to-one Sabbath of some sort.” I want you to know that does require faith. For me a synonym for faith is fear. Whenever I deal with something requiring faith, I am generally racing about whether I should take over again. When you resolve—I will start resting like God wants me to—it is appropriate to say, “God, I am stepping out here because you want me to. I am going to trust You to get me through six days that will get everything done. You can live with that; I will do seven days of work in six days. Or, the things I don’t get done are okay with You and they are okay with me. I will not work past the deadline of the sixth day. If it doesn’t get done, I will trust You, God, to get it done or let it go.” The first few times you do that, you are really walking out and you will have to trust God for success and failure—if you define failure as not getting things done.

Sabbatical Policy of Grace Covenant Church

Definition

A sabbatical is a time of enrichment and personal growth, to include rest, renewal, stimulation and development across spiritual, physical, and intellectual dimensions. The goal of the sabbatical is to ensure continued ministry excellence and faithfulness for the individual and the local church. Without this synergy, the purpose of the sabbatical is undermined.

Focus

A pastor initiates the sabbatical process by reaching the eligibility requirements and then submitting a plan for review by the Executive Team. Sabbaticals require a plan that is pre-approved and then a report after the sabbatical is completed.

Eligibility

Sabbaticals are limited to full time pastors. There is a distinction based upon the role of the pastor (e.g., senior, executive, & staff pastor). The pastor must have a minimum of seven years of service to be initially eligible; the frequency of eligibility is a minimum of seven years after the last sabbatical; the request for sabbatical must provide a minimum six months notice.

Timing

The timing for a sabbatical must be agreed to by the Executive Team. Such factors as time of year, the condition and stability of the pastor’s ministry and the impact on key church events are essential components of timing decisions. The transition of the ministry leadership before and after the sabbatical is an important consideration.

Cost

The costs to the church and the individual for the sabbatical will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Normal sabbaticals will be handled via compensation and benefits, as if the time were vacation. The Executive Team may approve education, travel or other expenses.

Length

The Senior Pastor receives up to 12 weeks. The Executive Pastors receive up to 8 weeks for the initial sabbatical; up to 10 weeks for second and following sabbaticals. The Pastors receive up to 4 weeks for the initial sabbatical; duration will increase an additional 2 weeks with every successive sabbatical up to a total of 8 weeks.

Commitment

Upon completion of a sabbatical, the pastor must make a commitment to the church to remain in good standing in that role for one year of service for every four weeks of sabbatical. Should the pastor be promoted or transferred to another position in the church, the time commitment will remain.

Concurrency

Where more than one sabbatical is requested for a period of time, the Executive Team will consider how multiple sabbaticals will impact the health of the church and decide on a case-by-case basis. As a rule, concurrent sabbaticals will be discouraged.

Sabbatical Policy Westminster Church of the Nazarene Westminster, Colorado

Purpose/Overview

WCON along with the General Church of the Nazarene (Manual for 2001-2005 section 129.10) recognizes the special need of its full-time pastors to seek and obtain spiritual renewal. We also recognize the special benefit and wisdom of a Sabbath renewal. God's Sabbath principle, applied to their ministries, provides an opportunity to rededicate (sanctify) one's life and work to the Lord, reacquire God's perspective, and freshen one's spiritual health. In this way, the entire Body of Christ benefits and is blessed by the pastoral Sabbath.

Policy

1. A pastor in full-time, paid ministry at WCON, with Church Board approval, shall be entitled to take a minimum of seven weeks to a maximum of twelve weeks of sabbatical leave during the seventh year of full-time service.
2. It is each pastor's responsibility to plan and schedule their own Sabbatical leave in coordination with the demands of the ministry at the Church. However, the demands of the ministry at the church do not constitute an adequate reason to prevent the Sabbatical leave.
3. Full salary and benefits will be provided during the Sabbatical leave.
4. Sabbaticals may not be accrued and must be taken roughly in the year in which they are due (the seventh year in the ministry cycle). See #11 for exception.
5. The Sabbatical leave may not be taken as terminal leave (i.e. as leave at the end of employment).

6. The Sabbatical leave cannot be combined with vacation time and cannot occur any less than four weeks before or after the vacation leave.
7. Cash, or other forms of compensation, may not be offered or accepted in lieu of Sabbatical leave.
8. Sabbatical is provided for spiritual renewal and freshening. The Sabbatical leave cannot be used for ministry at any other church or other Christian ministry.
9. The activities of the Sabbatical represent a stewardship to be exercised by the Sabbatical pastor and will not otherwise be stipulated by the church. On the other hand, the Sabbatical pastor will consult with his/her supervising pastor to discuss the various Sabbatical options to be planned and approved. The overarching concept for sabbatical is spiritual, emotional, and physical rejuvenation.
10. The timing of the sabbatical leave for pastoral staff will be coordinated with the supervising or senior pastor with approval of the Church Board. The timing of the sabbatical leave for the senior pastor will be coordinated with the Church Board. The District Superintendent will be notified of the senior pastor's scheduling of sabbatical leave.
11. Care should be given to avoid scheduling overlapping Sabbatical leave between various pastoral staff. An exception to this may be where two spouses are serving in full-time ministry at WCON. Spouses are strongly encouraged to take this sabbatical leave concurrently and all efforts should be made to synchronize their respective sabbatical schedules as follows.
 - a. When spousal length of employment is unequal, eligibility for a sabbatical shall be granted when the first hired spouse begins his/her seventh year of full time employment. Since the second spouse would not otherwise be eligible for full leave at this time, the following formula shall apply for the purpose of determining a combined sabbatical leave.
 - b. Sabbatical leave will be accrued at the rate of 2 weeks per completed year of full time employment for the spouse with the shortest length of employment and combined with that of the eligible spouse. For example: Spouse 1 has served 6 full years since start of employment or last sabbatical year and Spouse 2 has completed 4 full years. The length of combined leave would be calculated as below...

10 years combined employment

Times 2 weeks leave per completed years of employment

Divided by 2 employees

Equals 10 weeks of combined allowable Sabbatical leave