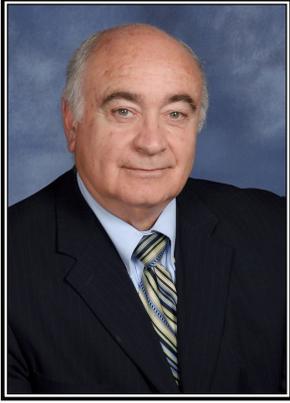




FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
San Luis Obispo

Special Edition

Kirk 2019



As most of you are well aware, Session has been meeting over these past few months regarding all the unrest within the congregation that developed regarding my unused vacation day compensation, the need for greater transparency, the congregational meeting in which I was the moderator and did not leave the meeting, as requested, to allow a more open discussion of this matter.

Session and I have received libelous letters attacking my character, as well as receiving very supportive, positive letters regarding my ministry over the past five years. Some of the members who were on my Pastor Nominating Committee wrote a letter of support to the congregation, extolling the leadership and qualities I have brought to the church. This letter and the knowledge of the attack on me and my character and ministry have caused members of our

congregation to attend Session meetings in support of me, to stand up for my ministry here.

On October 20, a Town Hall meeting was held after worship, a congregational meeting without the formality of voting, where the Chair of Finance provided a quarterly financial report, which indicated that we are doing financially better than we have ever done and that our reserves are up from \$20,000 to \$130,000, which is a positive sign of congregational support.

At the Town Hall meeting where there were over a hundred people in attendance, one after another stood up to speak, saying very supportive things about my ministry. I almost felt like it was my eulogy. This ended after about an hour with a standing ovation. I cannot explain or express to you how wonderfully supported Becky and I felt.

Again, in support of me remaining here as your minister, two Elders requested a special meeting of Session to discuss my Spiritual Leave and the option to remain here and continue my ministry instead of retiring. The plan approved by Session is for me to take Spiritual Leave starting December 25th through April 6th. My plan is to return to celebrate Easter with you. My Spiritual Leave time will be a period of time for Session and the congregation to work through a process of reconciliation to heal the division that has existed in the congregation for many years.

At the end of the leave, I will return and evaluate my spiritual renewal and the congregation's progress in becoming a whole and healthy Church, what a joy that will be!

When I return if progress is not evident, either I or Session can terminate my call with a 30 day notice.

All of this is to say that though we have not fully experienced the support and guidance of Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, we do feel God's hand is working among us, His timing to help FPC "to Seek Him First." I am very heartened to see light at the end of the tunnel regarding continued involvement with FPC with a renewed sense of commitment by the leadership, the membership and my sense of calling to be here.

Respectfully,
Dennis

Here is my Spiritual Renewal Leave Request which comes out of FPC's Personnel Manual. From Personnel Manual Guidelines under –

VI. LEAVE CATEGORIES

F. Other Leaves of Absence

6. Spiritual Renewal Leave Policy for Ordained Staff (pg. 20)

--Eligibility – 5 years of successful and continuous employment.

--Length of SR Leave – 4 consecutive months

--Allocated Funds – Full Terms of Call + \$5,000 for expense receipts

Leave Date: December 25 – April 6, 2020

Leave Proposal:

My SRL Vision statement: *“To rest and be refreshed in body, mind and spirit; more passionate for Jesus, my wife and family, and the mission to which the Lord has called us for the next decade.”*

Goals for my SRL (Spiritual Renewal):

Some personal goals for my SRL.

- Self-Spiritual Care
- Family
- Solitude and Silence
- Reading
- Bible Reading

Use of time:

Renewal, reflection, and recommitment defined:

My hope for this earned SRL time is that it will lead me into a refreshing experience in which I rejoice with the Psalmist who said: *“The Lord has brought me into a delightful wide open space!”* (Psalm 18:19, paraphrase). I call this spacious place the Kingdom of the Heavens where Jesus teaches us how to bring our whole lives into this overarching and undergirding eternal spiritual reality.

For these few months my plan is to attend a variety of churches and pray for my congregation. I hope to report back to Session periodically through the Chair of Personnel. I am seeking for the Lord to lead me to spend a lot of time simply enjoying my wife and boys without my normal responsibilities. This church has recently taught me that I've never really been at rest. Even when I thought things were going well people wanted me to take time off and be away from pastoral demands. So I'm seeking to experience God's shalom.

At the beginning of my spiritual leave I will spend some time in solitude and silence at a cabin somewhere on a lake in “Tennessee”. I'll fast, pray, meditate on Scripture, take walks, water ski, fish, journal, and meet with a Spiritual Director. Hopefully experiencing a tremendous catharsis with new insights and resolution to future directions for my sense of calling because of my time away.

The second month I will focus on deeply engaging with my personal mission statement that has been: *“For me to live is Christ!”* I want to be all and only for Jesus: to know Him, love Him and obey Him, and to help others live the same.” (Phil 1:21, John 14:21, 17:3, Matt 28:19-20)

For the final few weeks I plan to *disconnect totally* from church life, phone calls, and email. I plan to be out of town to avoid the temptations of house responsibilities and normal routines. I plan on visiting family around the country, maybe using a ministry retreat cabin for pastors in Yosemite or Zephyr Point as a launch point to do

some hiking, and then traveling to Hawaii where I hope to stay in an inexpensive “Bungalo” and enjoy visiting inspiring churches and museums on the Island.

Where ever I go I want to make sure to enjoy getting outside and drinking in the beauty of God’s creation by taking “prayer hikes” and spiritually meditating without sermon preparation in mind. My refrain through my SRL will seek to be that I walk in cadence with the Spirit of Jesus and not “Don’t do too much except slow down and learn why it’s important to vacation!”

Also I hope to read a variety of things and foremost two classics of Christian devotion that have been recommended: *Letters By a Modern Mystic* by Frank Laubach and *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* by Jeanne Guyon.

I also have an evangelistic goal on my SRL to do list. But it isn’t “work”; it is as easy as “*a branch abiding in the vine and bearing fruit*” (John 15:5). In other words I want to meet people and share the joy of Christianity through developing friendships. Resting in and enjoying Jesus with my wife will be to naturally spread the sweet fragrance of Christ everywhere we go (2 Corinthians 2:14).



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Important information regarding “Next Steps”

Here is what will happen during my leave:

First: Installed Pastoral Parameters for Covering Spiritual Renewal Leave

There are both Session and Pastoral Responsibilities.

The interim Pastor will assure the Session continuance of services to the church during my leave. I will do this by making sure these responsibilities are assumed by the Finance, Worship, and Personnel Committees.

1. Responsibilities:
 - a. Moderate Session
 - b. Pastoral Care
 - c. Pulpit
 - d. Weddings and Funerals
 - e. Weekly Administration

Regarding Responsibilities:

Personnel and Worship will fill the pulpit, insure Session has a moderator, and assist in all aspects of the healing process.

Dennis