



Frequently Asked Questions: **Pastor Chad's Clergy Sabbatical (Renewal Leave)**

What is a clergy Renewal Leave?

The *Book of Discipline* gives guidelines and support for clergy study leaves, continuing education, and sabbaticals. Leaves of up to six months may be taken by clergy who have held full-time appointments for at least six years. Periods of leave are scheduled in consultation with the personnel team, church council, and district superintendent. Pastor Chad has been our pastor for 13+ years at New Song, and a total of 22 years in the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. After thorough review, our Executive Ministry Team and District Superintendent have approved a Renewal Leave for Pastor Chad at this time.

Why do Clergy take Renewal Leave or sabbaticals?

The word *sabbatical* is rooted in the biblical concept of Sabbath (to “rest” or “cease”). A sabbatical is essentially like stringing together a number of Sabbath days. A Sabbath is “set aside” time that God consecrates and makes holy.

Research continues to show pastoral work is acutely stressful for clergy and their families. Consider the statistics:

- 94% share the processing of extremes (deaths, births, pettiness, tragedies, etc.) as emotionally taxing
- 91% have experienced some form of burnout or fatigue, often working 60-80 hours per week
- 80% feel pressured to serve in ways that cause undue burdens on their families
- 78% report having vacation and personal time interrupted with ministry tasks and expectations
- 52% feel they cannot possibly meet their church's expectations
- 44% do not regularly take a day off

A sabbatical is a time to shift gears, disengage, study, reflect, rest, and travel. Sabbaticals are more than *vacation* from meetings, budgets, sermons, shepherding, etc. Clergy need to be “taken out of circulation” to re-vision and re-structure their lives to best align with Jesus. For Chad, his sabbatical is designed to receive spiritual nourishment and deepen his relationship with God, himself, and his family, a true season of spiritual growth. This time will also help advance the congregation: we trust God will do incredible work within our leaders and ministries, across the board, as a result.

Do other clergy go on sabbatical?

Yes. Former District Superintendents, Rev. Dr. Steve Jones and Rev. Dr. Pete Moon, took sabbaticals during their tenures, along with many other clergy in our Conference. As pressures and demands increase, more and more clergy in many denominations are finding sabbaticals allow clergy to return revitalized. They often find the church moves into new phases of ministry even while a pastor is away. We have begun to explore: what happens when we give ourselves s-p-a-c-e to dream? What happens when we pair creativity + boldness + energy? Simply put: **rested leaders lead better.**

How long will Chad be gone?

Chad's Renewal Leave will begin just after Easter on Monday, April 5. He will return to the office the week of June 20, and join us for worship on Sunday, June 27! Chad is eligible for a sabbatical of up to 6 months. Together, he and our leaders have landed on the 11-12 week timeframe for his Renewal Leave in order to accomplish a very full itinerary.

What will Chad be doing on his sabbatical?

Chad plans to do *many* things while on Renewal Leave, though it is highly recommended that sabbaticals *not* be so structured as to prevent rest and renewal from taking place. Chad has plans for multiple trips with Sara, Sophie, Cammie, Silas, & Coco, along with an opportunity for a clergy retreat, and a time for Sara to get away, as well. Chad and Sara are also working to explore an opportunity to get away in a Covid-safe way as they plan to see everything from the beach to Williamsburg and even the mountains.

Chad also plans to read (he has quite a list, particularly in light of his final months of doctoral studies). He plans to write a significant portion of his final thesis, participate in coaching/counseling sessions, visit other churches, and connect with colleagues from across the connection.

Who will cover Chad's responsibilities while he is gone?

In addition to talented staff and leaders, New Song is very fortunate to have gifts and expertise from multiple clergy who have graciously stepped up to help during this time. Our District Superintendent and Bishop have also been kept apprised that we are enthusiastically looking forward to granting this time away. (We have conveyed that we are growing, going, and expanding for Christ and that we appreciate their continued support.) Our chairpersons are well-equipped to handle their various ministry teams, and our staff members are ready to take help our ministries succeed to the fullest. We are not planning on *letting up* while Chad is away, and we look forward to having your help throughout!

Who do I call if I have a family or personal crisis?

The first step for anyone who has a question or who needs care is to contact the church office at: **804-559-6064** or info@newsongumc.org. We will put you in touch with our on-call clergy (or church leaders). We have a list of 8 clergy on our coverage team and are prepared for most anything that comes up, including hospital/sick visits, consultations and referrals, births, funerals, etc. For emergencies, please contact our Executive Director, Katie Payne: katie.t.payne@gmail.com or **804-382-1301**, or our Christian Counselor, Heather Shaheen: hshaheen96@gmail.com or **804-909-1334**. Katie and Heather share a commitment to helping find needed assistance as quickly as possible.

Who will pay for the sabbatical?

This year's church budget includes stipend funds to assist in covering expenses and for our team of clergy covering the tasks of visitation and preaching. Our Conference has made a limited amount of funding available, as well. Chad will use personal funds, in addition to partnerships with several organizations that have prioritized clergy health and well-being as a top goal.

Will Chad be in contact with New Song during his sabbatical?

An important part of a Renewal Leave is to take a "break" from things at the church as much as possible. Our aim is to limit persons who will be in contact with Chad while he is away in order for him to focus on the *renewal* part of his leave. Chad will be staying informed via our Prayer Chain and a monthly check-in with Mary Eaton (Chair, Executive Ministry Team) and Katie Payne (Executive Director). If Chad connects with church members during his time away, please know this is as a friend, not as pastor. We aim for him to connect with God in a deeper way and focus on his renewal and rest.

What about Holy Communion, baptisms, weddings and funerals?

We have a full team of capable, qualified clergy who have the authority to preside over the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism and to conduct weddings and funerals. If you are interested in baptism, weddings, or have questions regarding a funeral, please feel free to contact the Church Office and they will be happy to be put you in touch with a clergy team member.

How will we say "goodbye" in April and "hello" in June?

We will have a brief time in worship where we officially hand over responsibilities to our clergy team and staff on Easter Sunday. On June 27, we are planning a big "kick-off" to our new facility expansion at an official **Groundbreaking!** We join with Chad's excitement in being back just in time to hit the ground running as we continue to open more fully from Covid-19 and begin raising funds and raising walls for our new expansion! Lots of projects are in full swing: we are recruiting for new opportunities, re-engaging ministries that have been on-hold, and preparing for a future in which we can't wait to have you become more fully involved!

What will our role be during this sabbatical?

New Song has a huge set of objectives we hope to achieve while Chad is gone, including progress on the Phase II facility expansion, enhancing our Children's and Youth Ministries, Small Groups, revamping the Prayer Team, launching a brand new Events Process, expanding our Worship and Tech ministries, creating more Missions engagement, cultivating new opportunities to become a leader, and help others dive deeper into their faith... and so much more!

We hope to work on providing multiple surveys to assess where our church is gaining in traction, along with discerning new ways and next steps to reach more and lead more to a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ. This Renewal Leave ends up being a huge opportunity for each of us to dig down deep, step right up, and draw closer and closer to all God has in store!