

Part 3: SABBATICALS, OUR HUMANITY, AND PRESBYTERIES

By Stephen McCutchan

PRESBYTERY WITNESS

Since we live in a secular society that has lost its appreciation for the Sabbath, and churches are only beginning to appreciate the importance of sabbaticals for their clergy, let me suggest some ways that Presbyteries can nurture the church's understanding and appreciation of sabbaticals for clergy and staff.

RHYTHM

First, presbyteries can lift up the whole concept of the rhythm of seven that our faith suggests is built into the framework of creation. If a major aspect of the Sabbath is the ceasing of productive work to focus on our relationships with God and neighbor, could that rhythmic interruption be consciously built into the design of presbytery meetings. For example, after seven agenda items of productive work, could we consciously take a sabbatical moment to sing praises, exchange the peace with neighbor, or offer prayers for the health of the larger church. If we specifically identified this as part of the rhythm of seven, we would emphasize the importance of Sabbath in our life.

CELEBRATION

Each year the presbytery can have a time of celebration for those who have had a sabbatical during the past twelve months. Develop a liturgical way of receiving from them something they have gained from their sabbaticals.

SABBATICAL LOTTERY

Invite the presbytery, through special offerings and other means, to build up a Sabbatical fund. Then, once a year, take the names of all those who are planning a sabbatical in the year ahead and hold a drawing in which some would receive a small financial gift to augment their sabbatical experience.

CELEBRATING CREATION

Finally, since Scripture applies the Sabbath to the land, animals, and the stranger within the gate, the presbytery can focus some Sabbath energy on one or more of these three aspects of creation. Perhaps they can plant a tree, offer gifts to prisoners, or lift up the work of those who care for animals.

IT'S OUR FAITH

By integrating such acts into the life of the presbytery, you are building a sabbatical consciousness into the life of being Presbyterian. You can also invite congregations to be creative in developing Sabbath acts in their congregations and sharing them with others. You might be surprised at the energy that such actions might generate throughout the church.