

Sabbaticals are good for more than the person taking it, of course. Congregations, too, find it useful to hear different voices, stretch different muscles, learn new ways of being during this short time.

We should all be grateful that Rosemary stands ready to be at the helm during those months, but she too, will learn and grow from the experience. Above all, taking a sabbatical means that the church is strong, and ready to experience, from the Standing Committee on down, what we can all learn together. Ruth, Joan, Robin, Tim and all the staff will take up the slack and work as a team so that all goes not only smoothly, but in some important ways, *powerfully* forward.

This is all to the good. I frankly don't want to be gone too long, as I will miss you and pine to be preaching and being at events. But in every relationship, it is good to get perspective, gain appreciation, and truly experience what the feeling of absence can teach us.

So in the end, sabbaticals instill confidence and goodwill, and allow, most of all, the strong possibility of a long ministry. Burn-out and emotional exhaustion are not the reasons I am taking this time, but it is realistic and smart to make sure that the tensions and pressures of ministry do not catch up with me, and that I sharpen my skills as well as refresh the 'deep wells' out of which I preach and serve. And that too is good for everybody.

The time period is basically from Christmas Eve on until Palm Sunday, with two provisos--Rosemary and I will be doing our traditional 'Question Box' sermon on January 4th, and most importantly, **I will return for the death of any member of First Church.** Since I will be mostly working from home, this seems to be the wise thing to offer, and I would wish to be there at any service.

Other than that, however, I will not be around, deliberately. In fact, on Sundays, I will be visiting many area churches, including some 'alternative' and Mega-church varieties, just to see how the other half lives. You never know what tricks I may pick up along the way!

If you have any questions or concerns, Rosemary and I are happy to respond.

See you in church (mostly),  
Stephen