

Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church

REV. KATHRYN Z. JOHNSTON SABBATICAL 2024

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This brochure has been prepared for the MPC community to share information about the Reverend Kathryn Johnston's planned sabbatical leave experiences this summer, and also the ways in which we as a community will experience this sabbatical time.

What is a sabbatical?

The word "sabbatical" is rooted in the biblical concept of Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is setting aside time that God consecrates and makes holy. A sabbatical leave is a period of time – the duration varies – during which a church leader steps away from the daily life of the congregation to rest, reflect, travel and study in order to then return to the congregation renewed in body, mind, and spirit. It is not a time for routine work, mid-career assessment, job search, or retirement planning. It is undertaken **with a full commitment** to the congregation.

A sabbatical is not simply a stepping away *from* the routine of committee meetings, budgets, and sermons; it is a stepping *toward* an intentional focus upon spiritual nourishment and a shift in perspective. It can also be a season of growth for the congregation – a time for all of us to think more consciously about church leadership and develop new perspectives on our individual roles within the life of our faith family.

Do leaders in other churches go on sabbatical?

A growing number of church leaders are taking sabbaticals. Carlisle Presbytery has a presbytery-wide sabbatical policy. Sabbatical leaves have been required in the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ for decades.

How long will Kathryn be gone?

Kathryn's sabbatical begins on Sunday, June 2 at 7pm. At that time, she will be unavailable. Her leave is for three months. She will return to the office on Tuesday, September 3. She will be in worship on September 8 and back in the pulpit on September 15. She intentionally chose a time when most MPC ministries are less active, and many members of our family of faith are away on vacation.

What will Kathryn be doing on her sabbatical?

The theme for Kathryn's sabbatical is: sabbath. Her focus will be on personal, spiritual, and congregational rest and renewal. For personal renewal, Kathryn and Martha will be traveling to Puerto Vallarta for a few days, taking in some baseball games, and spending an extended time in Maine both on their own and joined by their family and friends. She is looking forward to spending time with their young adult children and grandchildren without also having it be the busiest church season of the year (Christmas). For spiritual renewal, Kathryn will be attending a week-long silent retreat. She is looking forward to this opportunity to quiet her mind and learn rituals for returning to that spiritual space once back in her usual routine. Kathryn will be working with a spiritual director and will continue this relationship into the future. For congregational renewal, Kathryn and Martha will be attending a worship service at a colleague's church in Boise, Idaho. Once a month, this church has a worship service on a Saturday night, and then the entire church practices sabbath on Sunday. There are no worship services or meetings, and a commitment is made by the congregation to treat the day as a true sabbath. Kathryn is also planning to rest and read and hike and hang out with the dogs and do nothing.

Who will cover Kathryn's responsibilities while she is gone?

Rev. Emily Sutphin will be covering most of the preaching and acute pastoral care needs. There will be other pulpit supply through the summer, including Rick Boyer and Rebecca Langer. Emily will also serve as moderator of Session for their June and August meetings. She has our excellent Clerk of Session, Katie Chase, to help put together the docket. MPC's staff team will cover other things, as they always do. There will be one or two designated people who will be able to get through to Kathryn if there is a crisis.

Who will I call to plan a special service if needed?

The church office will be open during its usual hours (9-4:30, Monday-Thursday) with office staff at work as usual. Pastor Emily will handle requests for special services.

Who should I contact for special prayer requests or if I have a family or personal crisis?

Pastor Emily will be available for special prayer requests by call or email.

Who will pay for the sabbatical?

Sabbatical leaves are paid leaves. Kathryn will continue to receive her salary and benefits, including her full vacation and continuing education time for the year.

MPC and Kathryn applied for and received a grant from the Lilly Congregational Renewal program for \$47,975. This grant will cover pulpit supply, congregational programming that is part of the study of sabbath, and catered events held on June 2 and September 8. This grant also covers all the activities that are listed above (Mexico trip, silent retreat, vacation home with family, etc...). MPC has already received the grant money, and all expenses are carefully invoiced and reimbursed.

How will the sabbatical and the need for coverage affect MPC's budget?

Kathryn's salary and benefits are part of the budget as always. The extra sabbatical costs are being covered by the grant.

Will we simply be in a holding pattern while Kathryn is away?

Our ministries will continue in their normal summer pattern. But it is important to remember that the sabbatical is a two-way process: while Kathryn is away on her journey of renewal, we as a family of faith will be on a journey as well. We may see things in a new way by taking on different roles in her absence, or become aware, through a change in routine, of habits and patterns that have developed over time that we want to change. We also encourage you to take advantage of some of the programming around sabbath that will be happening at MPC through the summer, courtesy of the grant.

We encourage you to be a part of the celebration as we send Pastor Kathryn on her well-deserved sabbatical on June 2 with worship (9:30am) followed by a catered meal. Then join us again as we welcome her home on September 8 (9:30am) also followed by a catered meal.