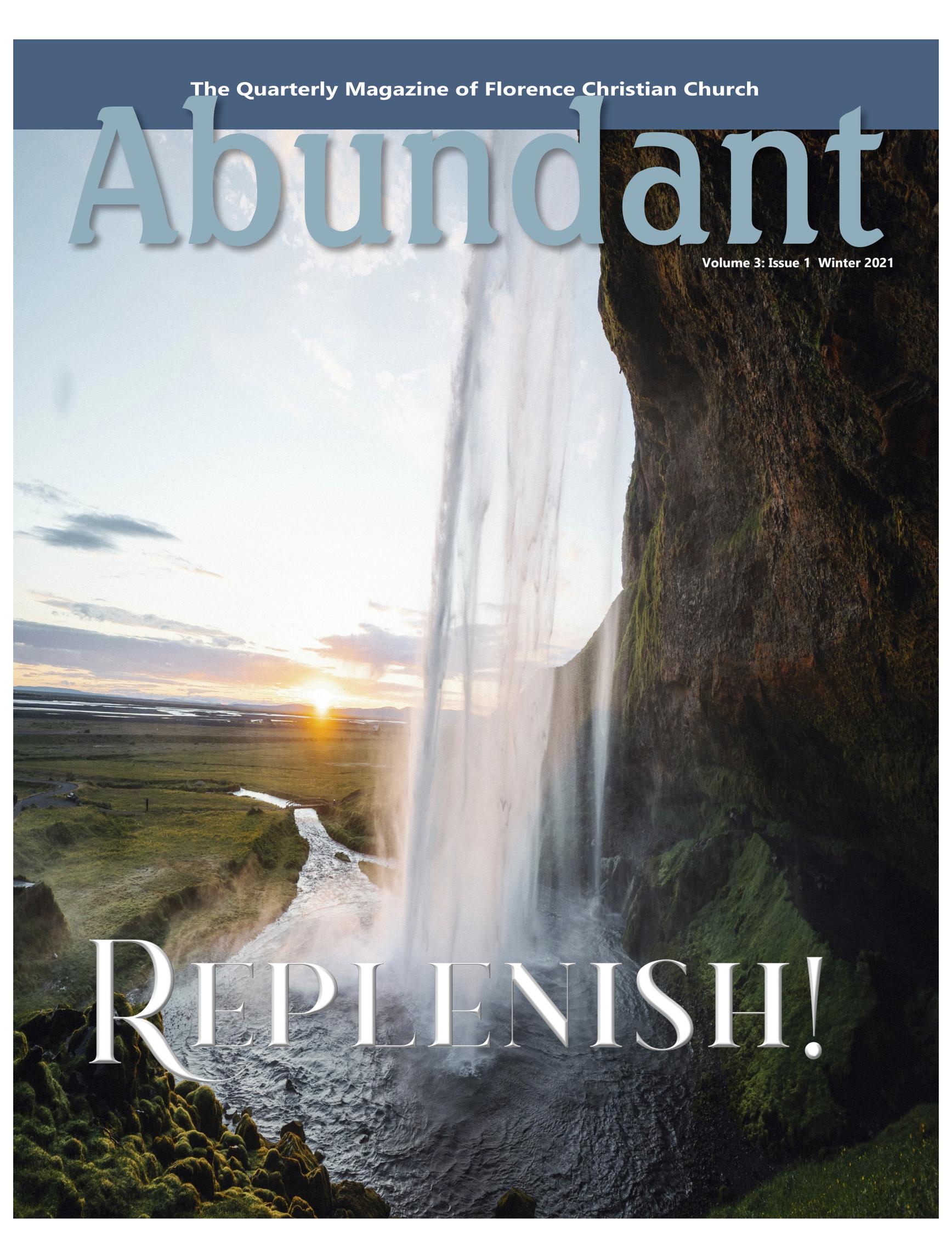


The Quarterly Magazine of Florence Christian Church

Abundant

Volume 3: Issue 1 Winter 2021



REPLENISH!

A SABBATICAL YEAR TO REPLENISH!

By Rev. Dr. Susan Ward Diamond, Senior Minister

After a year of great disruption in our lives and in our world, Florence Christian Church is being called into our 2021 Sabbath Year to Replenish. Replenish is a word that finds its roots in renewal and refilling. As we have all given so much of ourselves to hold our community of faith together, to adjust to the needs for being safe and healthy at church, at work, at home, and as we look to this year with hope and the possibility that COVID-19 will move from a daily threat to history, we believe it is time for us to replenish!

Upon the completion of the first six years of employment, Florence Christian Church grants our full-time ministerial staff a three-month sabbatical leave to provide prime opportunities for renewal of spirit, extended study, reflections, planning and creative growth that normal routines do not allow. Since both Pastor Diana and I began our ministry on January 1, 2015, we are both due for sabbaticals this year. For the past two years, we have been envisioning what this time will look like, not only for ourselves, but for the congregation.

This issue of *Abundant* will outline what you will want to know not only about our sabbaticals, but the exciting ways you will experience replenishment in your life and in our church! I know that God will be at work in all of our lives as we open ourselves to that renewal and refilling.

Abundant

The quarterly magazine of
Florence Christian Church

Contributors

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle
Rev. Dr. Susan Ward Diamond
Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka
Drew Murphy
Rev. Tracy Parker
Melissa Stephens

Design & Editing

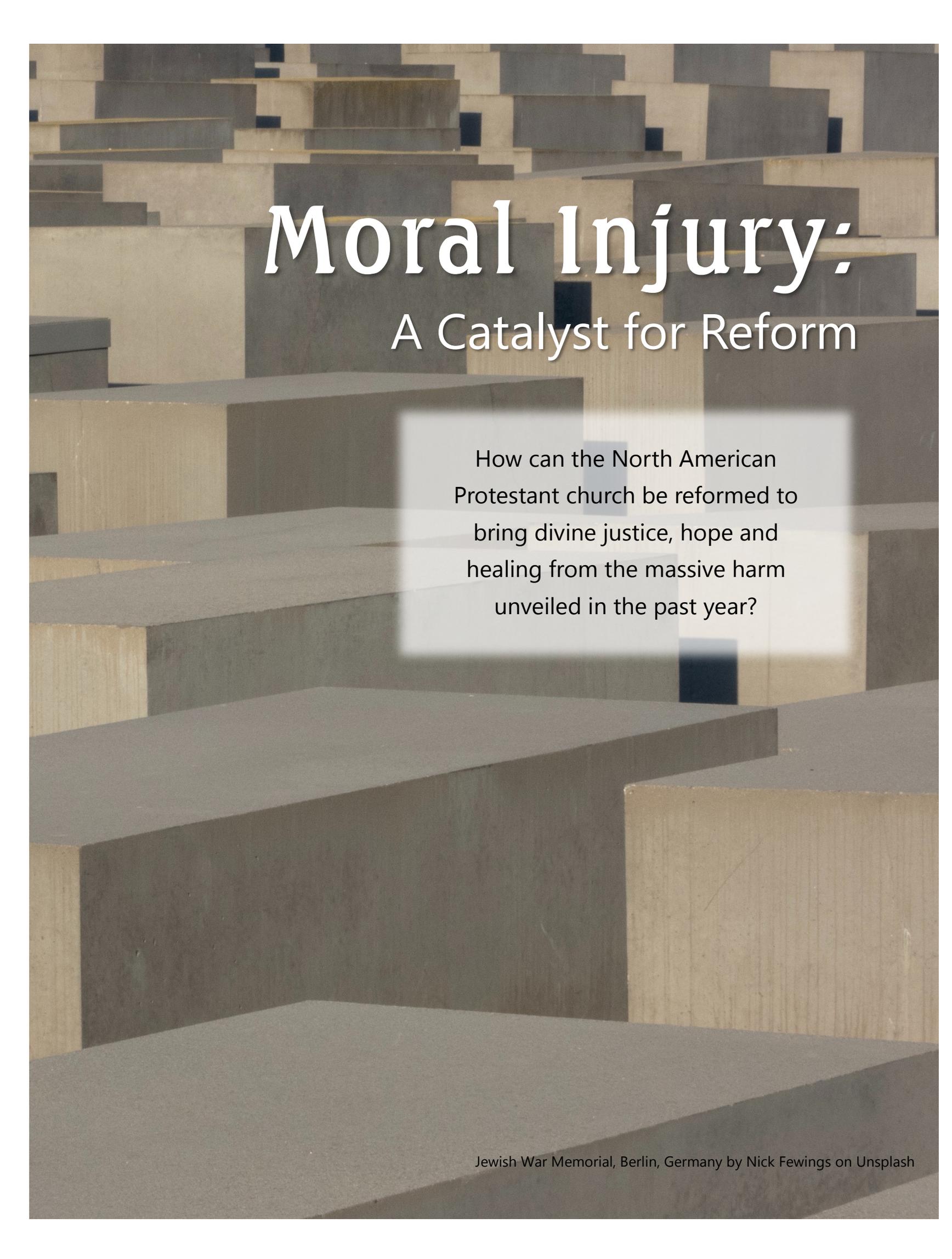
Melissa Stephens

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Cover image: Back view of
Seljalandsfoss waterfall in Iceland by
Jack Anstey on RawPixel





Moral Injury:

A Catalyst for Reform

How can the North American Protestant church be reformed to bring divine justice, hope and healing from the massive harm unveiled in the past year?

MORAL INJURY: A CATALYST FOR REFORM

By Rev. Dr. Susan Ward Diamond

As I began to envision God's calling for my upcoming sabbatical, I reflected on what was going on in my life, ministry and the world. And part of what I saw was disturbing. The best way I can describe it is an almost apocalyptic convergence: a global pandemic, unprecedented climate change, socio-economic disaster, intense political polarization, a reckoning with white supremacy and rising distrust in institutions. As I was preparing a grant proposal for the Louisville Institute, the question I pondered was this: How can the North American Protestant church be reformed to bring divine justice, hope and healing from the massive harm unveiled in the past year?

That harm has resulted in uprisings of something called moral injury—the deep and pervasive psychological, biological, behavioral, spiritual and social impact that results from witnessing, participating in or being betrayed by those in power over acts that defy one's moral compass.

Over the past several decades, moral injury has mostly been recognized in veterans, who have come back from war with invisible wounds that deeply impact their lives and their families. And with the alarming rate of suicide in recent years, those in the medical and psychiatric communities have been considering with religious leaders the spiritual dimension of addressing moral injury.

The moral injury we are seeing today is not only happening in the lives of veterans, but nurses and doctors, teachers and fire fighters, children of elderly parents, millions who have lost their livelihoods and sense of confidence and security, and those on the margins with no economic safety nets whatsoever. There have been uprisings of guilt and betrayal by leadership evidenced in the



handling of the pandemic and the shocking brutality revealed on TV exposing racism and white supremacy in a way that finally got the nation's attention.

Through all of this, I believe that the church has the opportunity to answer God's call to address moral injury as a spiritual issue. And as I consider the last few years of service to Florence Christian Church before retirement, I am hearing God's call to this time of sabbatical to consider how we and other congregations around the



country can be led to a new vision of ministry and mission for the years to come.

Utilizing the findings from experts in the field, along with the insights provided from surveys and interviews that will be conducted, and in conversation with our own Beth Silvers (author of *I Think You're Wrong, But I'm Listening*), I will offer strategies for how to conduct "grace-filled conversations" within the church and with those beyond the church whom we serve. I will also be considering strategies for congregations on how

to move forward with self-awareness, repentance and change within the institution to bring further witness and healing to itself and to the world.

In addition to developing a sermon series on the topic of moral injury and the church, I hope to launch a podcast on this subject in 2022. This podcast will feature conversations with experts as well as those willing to share their experiences with moral injury in the kind of "grace filled conversation" that I am advocating. Part of the grant will be used to purchase equipment for this purpose. Podcasts are powerful ways of educating and have the potential to reach large audiences, which can facilitate the kind of reform for this important time in the church's life and ministry.

As we engage in "grace filled conversations" on the subject of moral injury, it is my hope that our congregation and others will find a pathway forward to face the difficult realities confronting us with regard to all of those uncomfortable conversations we avoid because of the fear of conflict. I hope that we can face our inherent and often unacknowledged institutional and personal sins (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, etc...), so that we can move more fully toward repentance and healing. As a result, I believe that Florence Christian Church, who for almost two hundred years has been a servant church to our community, will experience greater vitality, generosity of spirit and be a transformational resource to our community as we prepare to move into our tri-centennial era of ministry.

**PROJECT SPONSORED BY:
PASTORAL STUDY GRANT FROM THE
LOUISVILLE INSTITUTE**

MINISTRY TRAINING THROUGH CYCLING

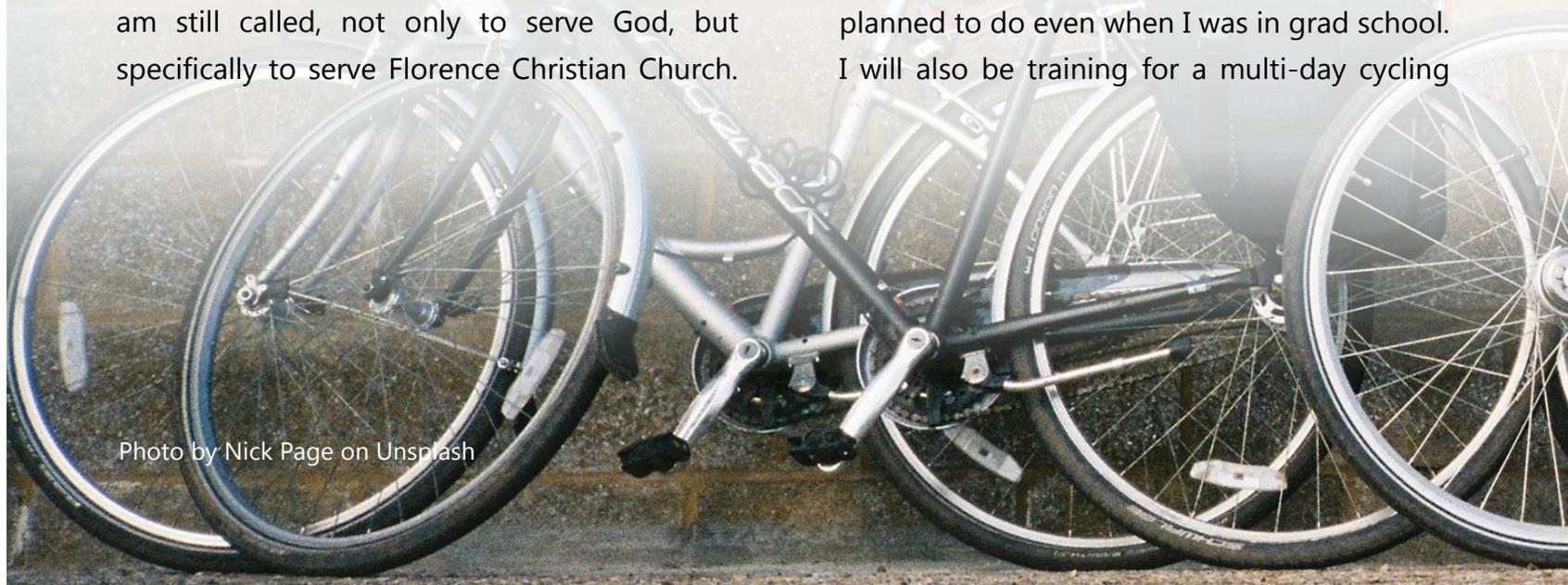


By Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka

Over the past 18 years, I have served in seven ministry settings across five states. For the past six years, I have been honored to serve with Florence Christian Church. While my call is no longer new, I know, deep in my bones, that I am still called, not only to serve God, but specifically to serve Florence Christian Church.

Yet, this is the first time that I have served one community for more than a few years. It is a new experience to be growing such deep roots. As such, I am learning new ways and behaviors to nourish and replenish my call, myself, and my ministry. As I approach my first sabbatical ever, starting on my 39th birthday, I am both excited and nervous about what this experience may reveal and how it will prepare me for the next stage of my ministry.

During my sabbatical, I will be fulfilling two goals. First, I will be completing my Doctor of Ministry Degree at Candler School of Theology. I will be completing my project tentatively entitled "Butts in the Pews to Views: Exploring Average Worship Attendance in Light of COVID-19 Changes." In this project, I am exploring the history, purpose and function of the metric of Average Worship Attendance in a congregational setting and how the changes in worship experiences due to COVID-19 crisis call for reimagining this metric. When I receive this degree, I will have completed one of the goals in my life to further my professional education which I planned to do even when I was in grad school. I will also be training for a multi-day cycling



tour. A few years ago, my father-in-law gave my husband and me hand-me-down bikes. After our first ride on the Little Miami Scenic Trail in Ohio, we were hooked. We now ride at least two times a week for about 25 miles each time. My sabbatical will provide me the time to do the daily training needed to take me to the next level, not only in cycling, but in my ministry.

My sabbatical will begin, hopefully, with a weeklong trip with my mother to somewhere warm! Plans are still a little vague due to COVID travel restrictions, but I know that a week to decompress, relax, and be will help me begin to adjust to a new normal. My next weeks will be spent in daily bike training and working on my DMin project. I will present my project, hopefully on-campus, at the end of the April. In mid-May, John and I will be off to California (unless COVID changes things of course) for a 6-day, 5-night bike tour from Santa Barbara to Ojai where we will enjoy beautiful weather and see some of Southern California.

Over my sabbatical, I know that completing my DMin degree and training for cycling will help replenish and prepare emotionally, physically, and spiritually for my future years of

ministry. I will get to spend time with John, doing something we both love and something that we should be able to continue to do during our "golden years." I will get to train for a physical activity, which will be a BRAND NEW process since I never played sports. I will feed my mind by thinking deeply about an aspect of my ministry through my DMin project. Most of all, this sabbatical will help me spiritually prepare for my next stage of ministry. Cycling fills my soul with joy, peace, health, and wholeness. Spending this time on my bike will replenish my mind, body, and spirit.



John and Pastor Diana

SABBATH KEEPING AS A FAITH PILLAR



By Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle

When I was first approached by your pastors about coming and kicking off your innovative year of SABBATICAL for clergy and parishioners, I was so intrigued. When I was among you a year or so ago, your hospitality was infectious and your enthusiasm for being the hands and feet of God was inspiring.

Maybe you weren't a part of Florence Christian when I was preaching about Pixar and *The Incredibles*. During that sermon, I shared about living a heroic-sized faith with great love. My name is Suzanne, and I am thrilled to be coming alongside you to create a unique space of leadership training, fellowship and worship during this next year as Pastor Diana and Pastor Susan embark on their sabbaticals.

I said "yes" to this innovative partnership because of my experience with you during the GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PIXAR series way way back in 2019 (*hasn't COVID made everything seem exceedingly long?!*) Your spirit of leaning into imaginative forms of ministry is a marker for

so many other congregations, and I cannot wait for our work to begin. Together, we will explore what it means for a congregation to not only give space for pastors to have a sabbatical, but how the leadership and ministry also need to have space for sabbaticals, too. Sabbath-keeping is one of the most important pillars of faith we can practice.

And you might be wondering why me. My official title is something like: The Reverend Doctor, and my work has been focused primarily in the realm of creating worship that is responsive to culture. My work comes out of my professional entertainment background, and much of my work today is in consulting with churches and organizations in developing creative and strategic leadership.

My hope is that together we will discover spiritual practices that enliven our leadership, settle our weary souls and make space for the Spirit's breath to fill us once again. As we embark, listen to Isaiah's encouraging words (opposite page) for something new is happening, even now!

**Feel free to reach out
to me with your
thoughts and ideas!**

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle
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A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink and white checkered cap, a white t-shirt, and black overalls, is watering a field of green plants. She is holding a hose that sprays water in a wide arc behind her. The background is a dense line of green trees.

"Don't revel only in the past, or spend all your time recounting *the victories of days* gone by. Watch *closely*. I am preparing something new; it's happening now, *even as I speak*, and you're about to see it."

Isaiah 43:18-19a

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Photo by Tony Pham on Unsplash

Together We Say “Here Am I!”



By Rev. Tracy Parker

Why God decided to combine a spirit of creative energy, unorthodox humor, and a love for the color purple into one human being, I will never know. Then to place a call upon my heart to not only love and follow Jesus, but to serve Him and His church through ordained ministry will forever remain a mystery to me, but here I am. I am often referred to as ‘the purple-haired pastor,’ but obviously I am much more than that. I am a wife, a mother, and my favorite adjective—a Grommy! I love to read, knit, hike, golf, and go fishing. My favorite pastime is listening to live music. I even married someone who is quite adept at serenading me with bits and pieces to a million different songs on the guitar.

My wonderful, musical husband Bob and I have been together since we were teenagers. We’ve been married for 34 years and raised three incredible daughters in our DIY home in Georgetown, KY. Our girls are grown and live on their own now. Two are married with children, making us the proud grandparents of SIX amazing

grandkids ranging in age from 1 to 6 years old. I like to let people know that I have always loved my children unconditionally, but I love my grandchildren DESPERATELY!

I am a graduate of the University of Kentucky, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications and of Lexington Theological Seminary with a Masters in Divinity. I have served as Associate and Senior Minister in central and eastern Kentucky for fifteen years. I look forward to exploring faith formation in every age and stage of life with you as we embark on this time together!

Yes, I do tend to speak with a lot of exclamation points because I am thrilled to be joining you for a portion of your sabbatical year while we endeavor, together, to replenish our spirits in love and service to God, providing witness to the abundant GRACE that God has made known to us in Jesus the Christ. I hope to have a chance to meet each of you and to work with you in the many amazing ministries Florence Christian Church provides for your community and to the world at large. The most important thing to know about me, though, is that I am all about relationships. I love people and I live to form meaningful relationships of a depth and quality that brings out the best in me and in those around me. My understanding of sharing the LIGHT of Christ with the world, means drawing as close to one another as we can (safely, of course), and together getting as close to God as we possibly can. Combining our LIGHT magnifies the lumens of God’s LIGHT, so all may see us as shining beacons of God’s incredible love and grace through all that we do and say in this crazy world in which we now find ourselves living. I look forward to all the wonderful ways we can grow in our faith journeys in the months ahead.



By Melissa Stephens

Who would have thought that five years ago when the pastors and the personnel committee hired me to serve as the church administrative assistant that this year I would be on the Sabbatical Team and preaching once a month? Maybe I did. Maybe I had my hopes that my position here at Florence Christian could become an opportunity to live into the calling that has always been on my life.

I have lived my life in the church and have the cradle roll certificate to prove it. In ten protestant congregations of 4 different denominations I have had leadership roles. Teacher, youth and children's activities coordinator, choir member, mission director, and secretary are the titles that populate my volunteer and paid staff resume. In all of these experiences it seemed that God had prepared an opportunity and I was in the right place at the right time to fill the gap.

Now, this great opportunity to serve on the team with Pastor Susan, Pastor Diana, Suzanne Castle and Pastor Tracy is yet another incident of right place and right time. And I say "Here I am, send me." My hope this year is that I will find clarity for a path of ministry into ordained church leadership. In the year ahead I anticipate there will be celebrations and challenges, too much to do with not enough time to do it all, and creative responses to many first time experiences. All of us will be guided by the members of this sabbatical team through the "we've never done it this way before" processes to reach a place of rest and replenishment, energized for a new year of vision-casting in 2022.

My position on the team, in some ways, will be an expected fulfillment of my current job as Communication Coordinator. This publication of **Abundant** is an example of the groundwork we have laid in Communication Ministries to provide a platform for in-depth storytelling to expand beyond the short snippets of weekly announcements. We will plan and implement communication strategies in the next year so you can feel well informed. The centralized tool that the sabbatical team will use to provide consistent and clear communication to the congregation is the website – florencechristian.org. Bookmark it on your favorite web browser and visit often. The current website is updated and streamlined. We will be launching a new site soon.

There will be added tasks to my life outside of my expected job responsibilities. Preaching once a month is what I look forward to the most. I will also assist Pastor Susan with data collection and analysis for her research on moral injury.

This year will see growth for all of us. How is God calling you to engage in the process? Will you say "Here Am I!"

SABBATICAL FOR THE CONGREGATION

By Brad Lyons,
President and Publisher, Chalice Press

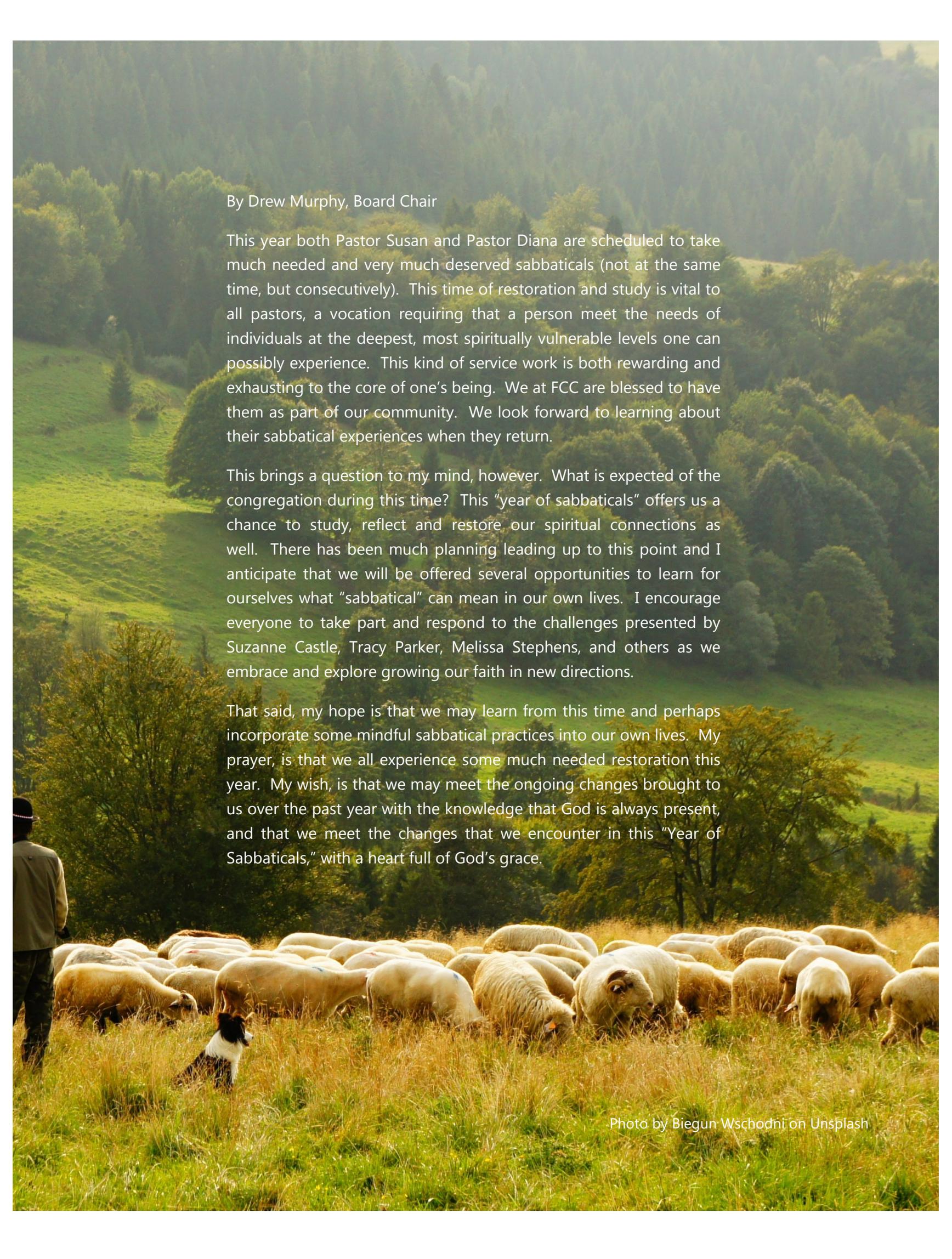
Your pastor probably needs a sabbatical. The fact is, your congregation probably needs a sabbatical, too.

Community events, performances and games of the church's children, preparing weekly worship services, heart-to-hearts about difficult subjects – there's no way on earth that fits neatly into a 9-to-5 job just five days a week. Even when they're not on the clock, the weight of their ministry follows them home. In a job defined by stress, a sabbatical is crucial to keeping pastors healthy and energized for a career in ministry. Wise congregations make sure sabbaticals are built into pastoral calls and that pastors answer that call on time.

But a pastor's sabbatical doesn't mean congregational life and evolution screeches to a halt. On the contrary, a sabbatical provides an opportunity for a congregation to refocus, to evaluate what really matters in congregational life and what can be discarded, and to consider how the pastor's work can be even better with lessons learned from the timeout in week-to-week pastoral duties.

"My hope is that...the talk of clergy sabbaticals [shifts] away from being focused on the pastor," says Robert C. Saler, author of *Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and Their Pastors*, "looking at the bigger picture and seeing the holistic congregational framework and how the framework and how the entire community can benefit from the pastor's renewal time."



A pastoral scene with a shepherd, sheep, and a dog in a field, with a forested hillside in the background. The shepherd is on the left, wearing a hat and a light-colored jacket. A black and white dog is in the foreground, looking towards the sheep. The sheep are gathered in a field of tall grass. The background is a lush green hillside covered in trees.

By Drew Murphy, Board Chair

This year both Pastor Susan and Pastor Diana are scheduled to take much needed and very much deserved sabbaticals (not at the same time, but consecutively). This time of restoration and study is vital to all pastors, a vocation requiring that a person meet the needs of individuals at the deepest, most spiritually vulnerable levels one can possibly experience. This kind of service work is both rewarding and exhausting to the core of one's being. We at FCC are blessed to have them as part of our community. We look forward to learning about their sabbatical experiences when they return.

This brings a question to my mind, however. What is expected of the congregation during this time? This "year of sabbaticals" offers us a chance to study, reflect and restore our spiritual connections as well. There has been much planning leading up to this point and I anticipate that we will be offered several opportunities to learn for ourselves what "sabbatical" can mean in our own lives. I encourage everyone to take part and respond to the challenges presented by Suzanne Castle, Tracy Parker, Melissa Stephens, and others as we embrace and explore growing our faith in new directions.

That said, my hope is that we may learn from this time and perhaps incorporate some mindful sabbatical practices into our own lives. My prayer, is that we all experience some much needed restoration this year. My wish, is that we may meet the ongoing changes brought to us over the past year with the knowledge that God is always present, and that we meet the changes that we encounter in this "Year of Sabbaticals," with a heart full of God's grace.

Photo by Biegun Wschodni on Unsplash

WAYS TO ENGAGE

REPLENISH!

Leadership Retreat
Feb. 20, 10 AM - 1 PM

So, here we are, church. Together. Learning to rest. To renew. To resurrect that which has felt 'off' and to reclaim that which holds us fast to our God.

I hope you can be with us at our kickoff event February 20-21. To begin sabbatical, we will start our Sabbath-Keeping and follow Jesus in a 24-7 world of zoom-nation with practices to rest and renew that are actionable and impactful.

Led by Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle

DAILY DEVOTIONS

**Pastor Tracy and Suzanne fill in
for the Pastor on sabbatical**

Daily Devotion from the Pastor is an important part of the faith formation program and it will continue through the sabbatical year. In order for the sabbatical pastor to completely disengage Pastor Tracy and Suzanne will assist the presiding pastor in producing daily devotions. It will be a great way for you to get to know these women.

Daily devotions are delivered to the email mailing list weekday mornings at 6 AM. Contact the church office if you are not receiving the devotions. (859)647-5000 Ext. 1

STAY AT HOME SABBATH SUNDAYS

A Sabbatical Practice for All

One of the things that has been a consequence of COVID-19 has been quite an extra amount of stress and even some burn-out for our weekly worship staff who have been so faithful. Changing quickly to an on-line format has required double duty for not only our pastors, but musicians and especially our church sound and media ministry.

Therefore, in honor of their hard work and need for renewal, we are scheduling Stay at Home Sabbath Sundays on the second Sunday of each month through October. A service will be recorded and made available online on those Sundays. During six of the Sabbatical months, our Sabbatical Coach, Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle, will produce the entire worship service. The rest of the time, our worship team will pre-record the service.

We are thankful for your faithfulness during the Pandemic season to be flexible with the idea of worshipping from home. We trust that you will take your "Stay at Home Sabbath Sundays" as a time for renewal and prayer for the church and be replenished along with those who work so hard to provide an experience of God's presence in weekly worship!

E

What is a sabbatical?

The word *sabbatical* has its roots in the biblical concept of Sabbath (“to rest” or “to cease”). Sabbath keeping is setting aside time that God consecrates and makes holy.

Sabbatical leave is a time for our pastors to rest, disengage, study, reflect, and travel. Then they return to minister among us refreshed and renewed. body, mind, and spirit.

Sabbatical is more than a vacation from meetings, budgets, sermons, and people in need. It is a time for the pastors to receive spiritual nourishment and a change in perspective, to deepen their relationship with God, themselves, and their family — a season of spiritual growth.

Will the church just be in a “holding pattern” while the pastors are away?

This special time will also be a season of growth for the entire congregation as we intentionally engage in a time of prayerful discernment for our future together in mission and ministry.

How long will Pastors Susan and Diana be gone?

Pastor Diana’s sabbatical is from Feb. 16 through May 31. Pastor Susan’s sabbatical is from June 28 through October 11.

A

What will the pastors be doing on their sabbaticals?

Please read the articles on pages 3-7 of this issue of **Abundant**.

Who will cover Pastor Susan’s and Pastor Diana’s responsibilities during their absence?

The Sabbatical Team includes Pastor Susan, Pastor Diana, Pastor Tracy Parker, Pastor Suzanne Castle and Melissa Stephens. You can read more about how they each will participate in the life of the church while the pastors are away in their articles in this magazine.

Who will I call to plan a special service?

The church office will be open during its usual hours (Monday-Thursday, 10 AM - 3 PM), staffed by our Ministry Assistant and Communication Coordinator. They and the presiding pastor will arrange for funerals and other special services.

Who will conduct the worship?

Two Sundays a month the presiding pastor will lead worship. The Second Sunday will be a recorded service produced by Suzanne Castle. Pastor Tracy and Melissa Stephens will lead on the remaining Sundays.

O

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

One of our pastors will be serving as the presiding pastor while the other pastor is on sabbatical. There will always be a pastor available to minister to the congregation.

Who will administer the congregation in the pastors’ absence?

The presiding pastor and Board Chair, Drew Murphy, aided by the Sabbatical Team, will supervise the staff, facilitate communications, and oversee the use of church facilities.

How will the sabbaticals be paid for?

Pastors Susan and Diana both received grants to fund their sabbaticals. Pastor Susan received \$15,000 from The Pastoral Study Program. Pastor Diana received \$50,000 from the National Clergy Renewal Program.

How will we celebrate when the pastors return?

In June Pastor Diana will share her reflections in the sermon series “Crossroads.” In October we will have a celebration welcoming Pastor Susan back. We will all be replenished to begin work on a bright future of ministry together.



Abundant Love, Grace & Acceptance

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Florencechristian.org

2021 SABBATICAL EVENT CALENDAR

Sun., Feb. 14	10:30 AM	Sabbatical Blessing, Pastor Diana's Last Sunday
Feb. 16-May 31		Pastor Diana's Sabbatical
Sat., Feb. 20	10 AM to 1 PM	REPLENISH! A Leadership Retreat
Sun., Feb. 21	10:30 AM	KICK-OFF Rev. Dr. Suzanne Castle preaching
Sun., Mar. 14	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sun., Apr. 11	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sun., May 9	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sundays in June	10:30 AM	"Crossroads" Sermon Series, Pastor Diana shares her sabbatical reflections
Sun., June 13	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday with Worship Team
Sun., June 27	TBD	Annual Meeting
June 28-Oct. 11		Pastor Susan's Sabbatical
Sun., July 11	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sun., Aug. 8	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sun., Sept. 12	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday - Dr. Castle
Sun., Oct. 10	10:30 AM	Sabbath Sunday with Worship Team
Oct. 16-17		REPLENISHED! Sabbatical Celebration