

Proposal Narrative: 2011 Clergy Renewal Program

Rev. Lisa Smith Fiegel and Central Lutheran Church

A-1: *By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.* (Ephesians 2:8) My sabbatical proposal is a joint faith journey for me and Central Lutheran Church. Note this proposal is written in first-person with one exception indicated.

The theme of the sabbatical is articulating faith stories and living out faith in daily life. A Lutheran understanding of faith begins with God's faithfulness to us. Our faith is a response to God as we live out our vocation as baptized Christians. Lutherans understand vocation as the intersection of one's gifts and abilities with the world's needs. Lutherans believe God is at work in the world and in our lives; we are called to respond. In Alaska, Lutherans live out that faith in our unique context: deeply secular, "spiritual not religious" and nature-oriented.

The purpose of the sabbatical is for my own renewal and the renewal of our congregation. Congregation members have committed to this time as their sabbatical too, to explore their own faith stories, as individuals and corporately. Many are asking, "Where is God calling us?" This sabbatical will enable members to reflect on this question and move into response.

A-2: During Lent 2011, we participated in a faith story sharing program in Sunday worship services. So many were willing that the project extended beyond Easter. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive; the project found deep resonance in our congregation.

Meanwhile, we struggle to find a common purpose. Central is a program-sized church with two pastors and the largest Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregation in the Anchorage area. We offer diverse programs and services, and yet are scattered in focus. By focusing on faith stories and vocation, we hope to unite in a more common vision. The constitution of the ELCA, Chapter 4.02, states that this church shall, "*nurture its members in the*

Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see the daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.” Thus, our sense of vocation is the vehicle that integrates faith into daily life.

During my sabbatical, I will explore my own faith story and my family’s faith stories, with a special focus on my paternal grandmother, a survivor of a WWII work camp. This is a good time to explore my faith story, as I am newly married and refining my sense of call.

Now is also a good time for our congregation to take a sabbatical. After significant staff transitions in 2005-2007, and decisions made by our national church in 2009, many people left our congregation. We suffered emotionally and financially. Now, we are more stable, and finances and membership rolls are steady. We are asking again who we are and what to do. Our congregation is ready to engage in this time of renewal and re-creation, with the expectation of arriving at a clearer focus on ministry and mission.

A-3: During the sabbatical, I will engage in a daily practice of yoga, meditation and listening for God. I plan to read, study and write. My reading list covers three main study focus themes: my faith story, my family’s stories and stories of others; faith in our context and faith lived out in the world (vocation). The reading list is intended to be flexible. I will write about visits to pastors and congregations on their experiences of faith in daily life. I will journal or blog about insights gained from reading. I will write about my family’s faith stories and my own faith story. I will meet monthly with my spiritual director to process the experience and explore how God is working in my life.

Timeline for the sabbatical

January 1, 2012: Sending and blessing ritual for sabbatical, reception after worship.

January 2-13: Study focus: my story, my family’s story and the faith stories of others. I will talk via phone to extended family members about my grandmother’s story. Reading options:

Becoming a Healthier Pastor, by Ronald Richardson; *A World According to God: Practices for Putting Faith at the Center of your Life*, by Martha Ellen Stortz; *The Pastor: A Memoir*, by Eugene H. Peterson; and *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, by Laura Swan.

January 14-23: “Yoga in Paradise,” retreat on the Big Island, Hawaii. I am a certified yoga teacher, teach weekly at our local Y and have taught yoga at Lutheran events and retreats. This retreat will be led by my yoga mentor. Yoga is a part of my spirituality and connects me with others who feel similarly, both in and outside of our congregation. While in Hawaii, I will visit Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity on the Big Island.

January 24-February 6: Study focus: faith in cultural context. I will visit Anchorage churches: St. Mary’s Episcopal, St. John United Methodist and Trinity Presbyterian. I have connections in these congregations. Reading options: *Velvet Elvis*, by Rob Bell; *Unchristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons; *Everything Must Change*, by Brian McLaren.

February 7-25: My husband Erik and I will hike and explore New Zealand. Our relationship is buoyed by a deep reverence for the outdoors; we met while hiking in Alaska. My faith life has been shaped by time outdoors and at Lutheran camps.

We will begin in Auckland for two days, and then fly to the south island to Nelson, to kayak in Abel Tasman National Park. Kayaking is another one of our passions. We will spend three days kayaking and camping, and then bus south for 5-6 days of backpacking the Routeburn Track and possibly the Greenstone Track. We will fly from nearby Queenstown back to Auckland for a 5 more days shared between Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula.

I will visit at least Lutheran one church in New Zealand, likely Mountainside Lutheran in Auckland. I have an acquaintance in the Lutheran Church in Australia, the parent organization of Lutheran churches in New Zealand, who is helping me make contacts.

February 26-March 3: Study focus: faith lived out in the world and vocation. Reading options: *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds; *Real Faith for Real Life*, by Michael W. Foss; *Evangelism for “Normal People,”* by John P. Bowen; and *Listen! God is Calling!: Luther speaks of Vocation, Faith and Work,*” by D. Bennethum.

March 4-12: Time with family and friends in Iowa. I will talk with my mom about her faith story as well as my aunt and godmother. I also will ask my parents about their remembrances of my grandmother’s life and faith story.

I will visit St. Paul’s Lutheran in Waverly, Hope Lutheran in Des Moines, and my college chaplain and mentor at Wartburg College, Waverly, to discuss faith in daily life.

March 13-15: I will use this time to rest, read and catch up at home.

March 16-19: Erik and I will ski cabin-to-cabin on the Resurrection Trail, near Anchorage.

March 20-31: Rest, writing my faith story, reading for pleasure or re-reading favorites: *When God Meets Man*, by Gerhard Forde and *The Prophetic Imagination*, by Walter Brueggemann.

April 1, 2012: My first Sunday back. I plan to attend as a worship participant. There will be a welcome-back litany and time for conversation at a reception after worship.

A-4: Sabbatical will renew me and our whole congregation! I have done intentional discernment through prayer, spiritual direction and visits with our bishop and other clergy. I am ready for rest and renewal. I notice it is easy to slip into ruts, to lose energy for creative projects and to accomplish only short-term tasks instead of seeking long-term vision for ministry. This time of

rest will energize me for ministry, revitalize my creativity and inspire me to see and respond to God's "big picture." Sabbatical will help me balance my call as a wife with my call as pastor.

I deeply desire that our congregation find renewed energy and focus on the sabbatical. Our congregation will benefit by examining our individual faith stories and learning to articulate what God has done. As we come know ourselves better, we will be more connected to each other and ready to unite in a common vision. We lack a clear vision of who God is calling us to be. This sabbatical will provide space and creativity for the congregation to refocus and re-engage as God's hands in this world.

A-5: Statement by Judith Moore, Council President, 2011: Pastor Lisa Smith Fiegel is much loved by the congregation of Central Lutheran and will certainly be missed during sabbatical. Nevertheless, the congregation supports her proposed leave, both for her benefit and for ours. We recognize that during her almost six years here she has faced exceptional challenges, not least a prolonged search for a new lead pastor and turmoil when the national church--and ours--were deeply split over recognition of gay and lesbian clergy. We lost some members, but we remained whole thanks largely to the tireless care of Pastor Lisa.

Pastor Lisa's proposal stresses renewal for her but for Central also. We have seen signs of this renewed energy already, as pastor and congregation work together to shape the plan and to present it in this grant application. Support for the sabbatical has been uniformly positive from a broad cross-section of the congregation, and Pastor Lisa has remarked that she has found new energy for ministry as she plans for the sabbatical. We commit with her to examining and sharing our faith and connecting our church life with our lives in the world. We understand Alaska's deeply secular context and we experience the same need to connect the separate parts of our lives rather than separate them further. Our congregation is ready to work on our own

renewal and to greet Pastor Lisa refreshed and eager to join her with a new sense of mission, one appropriate to Alaska and its unique problems and opportunities.

A-6: During the sabbatical, the senior pastor will preach most Sundays. Other pulpit supply will be covered by lay ministers, retired local clergy and a Central member who is an ordained Lutheran hospital chaplain. The senior pastor and aforementioned clergy will also share duties for any weddings, funerals or counseling needs that may arise.

Central's Thursday evening worship will be led by lay leaders, including Sandra Mjolsnes, who is training to become a Synodically Approved Minister (SAM). This lay certification allows the SAM to offer pulpit supply and pastoral services. I am serving as Sandra's mentor in this process, so her leadership while I am away will enhance her training.

The youth and family minister will teach confirmation classes. A retired pastor and lay volunteers will do hospital visitation as needed. Central has a group of assisting ministers who help with the worship service; if necessary, their role could be expanded.

The congregation and I have already begun the discernment process that leads to renewal. We are energized and enthusiastic to be on this path together. The faith stories project was the beginning, and an April 2011 women's retreat further explored the theme. This summer will be a time of continued discernment as we plan fall programming that will deepen the faith of the congregation and prepare us all for growth and renewal. We will offer an adult education class this fall exploring Christian vocation in daily life, team-taught by both pastors and lay leaders. Course content will be drawn from two anthologies which are an outgrowth of a previous Lilly project - *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, edited by William Placher, and *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, edited by Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass. The church council will initiate one-on-one meetings with

members to explore vocation. The congregation is familiar with one-to-one meetings from faith-based community organizing.

During sabbatical, the 2012 women's Lenten retreat will center on Christian vocation, inspired by the two books mentioned above. Lay leader Sandra Mjolsnes will facilitate the retreat, and coordinate a second faith story sharing project on Sundays while I am away.

A-7: Communication is an important part of the sabbatical and follow-up time. The congregation can read my blog while I am away on sabbatical. When I return, I will host an adult education forum (or perhaps two) on my study, travel and lessons learned. I will write a newsletter article about the sabbatical both before and after I return. I will also share my faith story during worship, reflecting on how the sabbatical has impacted my faith and vocation.

A-8: Members of the last several years of church council have discussed the need for renewal and clarity of vision at Central Lutheran Church. I initiated the idea of a sabbatical for the benefit of my ministry and the ministry of Central. In 2010, I discussed the sabbatical with the executive committee of the church council, a member of the personnel committee, our synod bishop, the senior pastor at Central and with my mutual ministry committee. The latter recommended my sabbatical to the church council, who gave formal approval in early 2011.

B-1: In the 1940s in the territory of Alaska, a small group of Lutherans gathered for worship in Anchorage in a room used otherwise as a dance hall. In 1944, leaders founded Central Lutheran Church. A church building was dedicated in downtown Anchorage in 1951. The mortgage was burned in 1957, and in 1961, property was purchased at 15th and Cordova (our current location) to build a new church building.

On Good Friday, March 1964, the largest recorded earthquake in the US struck Anchorage. The church survived the earthquake and Easter services were still held. Current

members remember that day was joyful, as members saw that their friends had survived the quake. Another local church building did not survive, so Central sold the downtown building to that congregation and began building their new worship space. The current building at 15th and Cordova was dedicated on August 29, 1965.

In the mid-1980s, Anchorage suffered a deep recession. The church lost members as people left Alaska or stopped attending worship. Current members recall a sense of pulling together at the time, and the congregation grew in the 1990s.

From 1956-1992, Central helped start Lutheran churches around Alaska: Seward, Kodiak, Dillingham and three in Anchorage. Central provided considerable financial support to Lutheran churches in Wales, Juneau, Wasilla, Palmer and Chugiak. Currently, Central shares the building the Alaska Native Lutheran Church, which Central helped establish in 1992. It is significant to note that there are only 32 ELCA congregations (and one boat ministry) in Alaska; Central had a role in establishing almost one-third of them.

In 2000, the congregation moved toward a focus on ministry in the neighborhood. Central is largely a “commuter” church; most people drive to church. Central is located in Fairview, a low-income neighborhood with a high population of homeless individuals. In response, Central began hosting an annual summer barbeque for the neighborhood and opened a free after-school center for neighborhood youth. Faith-based community organizing researched and addressed homeless issues. This shift in ministry resulted in conflict. Today, there is much more “buy in” for neighborhood ministry and our congregation is more diverse.

B-2: Central has 519 baptized members; our average worship attendance is 212 per Sunday.

B-3: The four pastors prior to the current pastors include the following. Six names are listed, as two were interim. Pastor Eric Ottum, interim: Nov. 2006-Aug. 2007; Pastor Marcia Wakeland:

Feb. 2001- Dec. 2006; Pastor Michael F. Keys: Feb.2001-Jul. 2006; Pastor Al Solomonson: Feb. 2000-Dec.2000; Pastor Frederick Lampe: Jan. 1990-Oct. 1999 and Pastor Ronald Martinson: Mar. 1982-Dec. 1999.

B-4: Central has three Sunday services, a Thursday night contemplative service, Advent/Lent midweek services, adult and youth Sunday school and several regular Bible studies. Members volunteer for worship duties: reading, ushering, baking bread, and leading liturgy. Others serve in choir, bell choir or altar guild. Caring Ministers visit shut-ins and hospitalized members. Parish nurses provide blood pressure monitoring and health resources.

Central offers affordable space to community groups: Narcotics Anon, a quilting club, the Alaska Children's Choir, and a Campfire USA after school program for grades K-6.

The Central Drop in Center is a free, non-religious, after-school program for teens. Youth from this program have become church attendees and volunteers and some even joined.

Central's youth program includes meetings, retreats, youth gatherings, Vacation Bible School and summer camp. Women's activities include four women's Bible study groups (one for younger women) and an annual women's Lenten retreat. Other activities include: Theology Pub Club (young adults), Farmers Market (in our parking lot) and faith-based community organizing. Central joins other churches in food and gift distribution at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Central has regular volunteers at a soup kitchen and women's shelter. Central members take annual mission trips to restore flood-damaged homes around the US and to Brevig Mission, an Alaska Native village, to lead Vacation Bible School.

B-5: See separate sheet

C-1: I attended Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, a Lutheran liberal arts school, and earned two Bachelor of Arts degrees in Journalism and Religion in 1999. I earned a Master of Divinity degree in 2005, from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif.

C-2: I was ordained on October 30, 2005, by the bishop of the Eastern Iowa Synod of the ELCA. I began service at Central on November 1, 2005.

C-3: I have demonstrated leadership in a variety of ministries at Central, in our city and in our national church body. I share pastoral responsibilities with the senior pastor and supervise the youth and family minister. I've worked with lay leaders to initiate and support various ministries, such as leading Vacation Bible School in an Alaska Native village, women's small group ministries, youth events, community outreach and faith-based community organizing.

I am currently board chair of AFACT (Anchorage Faith and Action – Congregations Together), an ecumenical, faith-based community organizing ministry. I serve on the boards of the Alaska Children's Services, a youth residential treatment facility, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Calif. I recently completed a 2-year term as Dean of the ELCA clergy in Southcentral Alaska. I serve on the Alaska synod's governing body, the Synod Council. I have also served on the ELCA's national committee for Global Mission.

As mentioned previously, I teach yoga weekly at the Y and am active with a local running club. People from those communities often seek me out for pastoral care, including counseling, weddings and funerals. I am grateful that congregation members recognize the contributions I have made at Central and in the wider community. Note that I will be taking a sabbatical from board work as well and have notified those organizations.