

*Pastor Kyle's Sabbatical Plan  
Summer 2024*



*American Thin Places*



*Proposed to the Session January 28, 2024*

## Sabbatical Leave Policy

In its Sabbatical Leave Policy, Salem Presbytery defines a sabbatical as planned time for rest and renewal for pastors and educators, meant to enhance their ministry and mission.

**The purpose of a sabbatical is not vacation; it is the renewal of vocation.** Sabbatical leave began to be included as a standard part of the terms of call for pastors in the 1990s. Statistics were showing that a growing number of clergy were experiencing burnout and leaving the ministry altogether.

Vocational ministry presents unique challenges. Pastors are always “on call.” They bear the emotional weight of grief, tragedy, and pain for the whole congregation. Their schedules often keep them from time with family and friends. Sabbaticals are one way for churches to tend and care for those who spend so much of their time tending and caring for others.

Salem Presbytery as a rule requires sabbatical leave to be included in the terms of call for its pastors. As the practice of offering sabbatical leave is rooted in the Biblical concepts of the sabbath day and year, the presbytery recommends sabbaticals be taken after six years of service to a congregation. Sabbatical leave lasts three months. Pastors are asked to commit to serving the church for at least a year following the conclusion of their sabbatical. In May 2024, Kyle will have served Alamance for seven years. Jess will have served Alamance for six years in August 2024.

Though sabbatical was included in the previous terms of call for our pastors, Alamance has never had a pastor take one in its 262-year history. This is a new opportunity for our congregation. Rather than approaching this as a challenge we overcome, the Session is looking at Kyle's sabbatical as an opportunity for growth, not only for him, but for the whole congregation. With four months left to prepare, teams are being readied to help with worship, pastoral care, and administrative responsibilities. The sabbatical can be a time for the lay



leadership of the congregation to shine! Pastor Jess will have a learning opportunity as well, as she steps into the Head of Staff role during that time. We will bring in some additional pastoral leadership to assist with these responsibilities. And thanks to an incredibly generous grant from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, we are able to turn a three-month adaptive challenge into a whole year – or more – of renewal for our congregation's worship life.



## The Vital Worship, Vital Preaching Grant

Every year, the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship awards grants for projects designed to renew and strengthen worship practices within churches in the United States and Canada. These grants are for amounts between \$8,000 and \$25,000. With the Session and pastors in agreement, APC decided to apply for one of these grants to help us with the sabbatical. With her regular responsibilities plus the added weight of the Head of Staff's administrative tasks, Jess is not able to preach every week. We thought that nine Sundays of pulpit supply ministers would be an unpopular and expensive way to provide three months of worship. So instead, we devised a plan to empower lay leaders to help. Mindful of the considerable resources available with this grant, we assembled a team to write a grant proposal to the Calvin Institute... and we got it! We were awarded \$19,235.00! You can find out much more about the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship at <https://worship.calvin.edu/grants/>

Our grant proposal has three phases. First, in the spring, Kyle and Jess will teach a class called the **Art of Worship** to a group of fifteen lay leaders in the church. With some encouragement from the pastoral staff and eager volunteers, we recruited these folks in record time! Many of them are familiar faces in our pulpit. They have preached or led dramas for us, they have read scripture, they have led youth services and music, they have provided minutes for mission and more. They do a great job with these things, even though they have not been trained to do them. Imagine how fantastic they will be after this learning and coaching! We will educate them on the theology behind our worship. We will teach them about the public reading of scripture and prayers. We will help them develop messages and children's moments. We will show them how our staff creates worship every week.

In the second phase, these volunteers will lead worship at Alamance in teams during Sunday services this summer. For the thirteen weeks of Kyle's sabbatical, Jess will preach three times, we will have three Sundays of pulpit supply, and the teams will cover six of the Sundays. The thirteenth Sunday will be our quarterly hymn sing. Other than the two weeks she will be away with our youth on summer mission trips, Jess will be here to help facilitate and encourage the teams. We hope and trust that you all will be faithful attendees this summer, showing up to support and to be blessed by the amazing talent and thoughtful leadership of lay people within our congregation.

The third phase of the grant comes after Kyle's sabbatical. We were awarded quite a bit of money to try creative things with art, drama, music, dance, banners, puppets, crafts... the sky is the limit. There will be plenty of chances for the whole church to participate. Through this grant, we hope weekly worship will be the highlight of our congregation's ministry this year.

## What to Expect at Alamance This Summer

Worship will continue every Sunday at 10:00, though the faces in the pulpit will look a little different. Kyle will not be here, but Jess and the rest of our capable staff will be here to facilitate our worship services. The exact summer schedule is still being developed, but you could expect something like this each month:

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday: Jess preaches and leads worship.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday: one of our Art of Worship teams leads.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday: a supply pastor preaches and leads.

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday: another one of our Art of Worship teams leads.



During the week, the office will still be open with usual (summertime) hours, and all our typical summertime activities will still take place. We always pause programs like Open Door, Sunday school, Kids ROCK, and Youth Group over the summer. The children will still go to Passport and the Senior Highs will go on their Charleston Mission Trip in June. Vacation Bible School is scheduled for the second week of July. The Middle Schoolers are going to Cross Missions in Charlotte later in July.



Pastor Jess will be the acting Head of Staff. She will oversee everything in the office except for the two weeks she is out of town. We plan to hire a quarter-time temporary supply pastor to help us with pastoral care, funerals, and other tasks as needed. During the weeks Jess is away, that pastor will be ready to take on more of the pastoral duties. Our Stephen Ministry Team already plays a vital role in our church's pastoral care, and they will continue to do so. The rest of the staff will continue to fulfill their roles, and the ministry team structure and the Session will keep all of its regular summer meetings.

The concern during a long absence is always, "What if there is a crisis?" The answer is that our church leadership and our staff are ready to handle anything that comes. Jess is an excellent pastor and leader, and she will do a fantastic job. She will be supported by the supply pastor as a colleague in ministry, the Session members are talented in many disciplines, and Salem Presbytery will be there to help if needed. Alamance will be in good hands during Kyle's sabbatical!

## Staff, Session, and Ministry Team Responsibilities

### Rev. Jess Rigel

- Serve as the acting Head of Staff
- Moderate the Session and staff meetings
- Lead worship and preach three times
- Conduct funerals at the current level of responsibility
- Continue to resource the Christian Education, Fellowship, and Mission Ministry Teams
- Resource the Admin. Team
- Administer the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship grant
- Resource the Art of Worship Sunday service leadership teams
- Provide pastoral care at the current level of responsibility
- Delegate pastoral care to the temporary supply pastor and Stephen Ministry Team
- Approve expenditures according to church policy, in consultation with Dana Adams
- Participate in church activities at the current level of engagement
- Support children's and youth ministry programs at the current level of responsibility
- Support two youth mission trips this summer as usual
- *Note: with the considerable amount of additional new responsibility Jess will be taking on, she will not be able to add any ministry teams, task forces, classes and studies, or presbytery committees beyond what is listed above.*

### Temporary Supply Pastor

- Provide for pastoral care as assigned by Jess
- Conduct funeral services as assigned by Jess
- Preach three times and lead worship
- Resource the Congregational Care and Outreach Team
- Provide greater pastoral and administrative support during the weeks Jess is traveling with the youth

### Other Staff

- Katie Long will be the primary staff member for the Worship Arts Ministry Team
- Joy Thomas and Andrew Long will continue to resource the Christian Education Team
- Lynn Barnes will continue to be the primary point of contact for all church communications, including emails, bulletin announcements, Relay articles, website updates, and social media posts.
- Dana Adams will continue to be the primary point of contact for all financial matters and property concerns.

## A Word from Kyle about His Summer Sabbatical Plans



This is not my first sabbatical. In 2014, the year Maelyn was born, I had a planned a summer sabbatical, June through August. At the time, I was pastoring the Concord Presbyterian Church in Statesville, NC. My plan was ill-defined. We hoped to travel to visit friends all over the Southeast. I had a stack of books I hoped to read. What I sorely needed at the time was rest. But it did not go well. With a newborn, we really needed to spend more time at home. Maelyn got sick, and we had to end our travel

earlier than anticipated. Then I ended up with the same affliction: Hand, Foot, and Mouth disease! I spent the last month of my sabbatical sitting on the proverbial ash heap covered in sores like Job! I returned to work much less rested than I left, and I returned to a church that experienced some turmoil while I was away. I vowed that the next sabbatical would be planned better and undertaken differently. I believe we are on the right track to make that happen!

I started imagining what I wanted to do with the next sabbatical almost immediately. I wanted to get it right next time! Though that vision has changed over the years, the core of it has always been this: I wanted to combine my passions for photography and travel to shape a trip out west centered on Spiritual renewal and discovery. That is what I have planned for this summer.



I am calling the project “American Thin Places.” We know the term at Alamance from our “Thin Place Gallery.” A Thin Place is a place in our world where the separation between heaven and earth seems just a little thinner – where people have gone on pilgrimage to feel closer to the presence of God. I intend to spend this summer visiting places like these in 21 states, most of them West of the Mississippi. I will be visiting seven national parks: Carlsbad



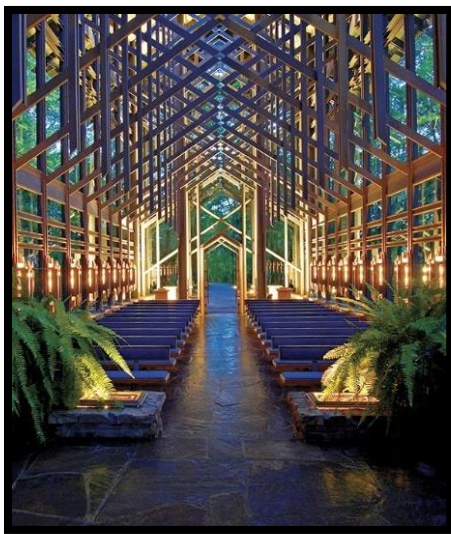
Caverns, the Petrified Forest, the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Yellowstone, Grant Teton, and the Badlands. I am planning to visit many churches and chapels across the country. Some of the most famous are Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Saint Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, Santuario de Chimayo and Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe, Church of the Holy Cross in Sedona, St. Sophia Orthodox Church and Christ Cathedral (formerly the Crystal Cathedral) in Los Angeles,

the Salt Lake Temple Square, Church of the Resurrection and Village Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, and Thorncrown Chapel in Arkansas. We are visiting monuments, art installations, and historical and cultural sites like the French Quarter, the Alamo, stops along Route 66, Hollywood, the Las Vegas Strip, Mount Rushmore, Red Rocks, and the Ryman Auditorium. Along the way, we are planning some family adventures to the San Diego Zoo, the Doorly Zoo and Aquarium in Omaha, and Disneyland!



By the time we return, we will have camped in canyons, slept in churches and a wigwam motel, and visited healing grottos and native sacred sites. We will have gazed at Cathedral Rock, Old Faithful, Devil's Tower, Scott's Bluff, Hoover Dam, the Valley of Fire, and the "Center of the Universe." The trip will last about 40 days. Since that is way too long to spend in a car, we are flying home in the middle and resting for two weeks before we head back out west to resume the trip. By the time our Honda Pilot pulls back in the driveway, we will have passed though 24 states including this one.

Along the way, I will be taking photographs and collecting stories for a book called "American Thin Places." I envision it as a coffee-table style book that blends images, first-hand stories, spiritual reflections, and a theology of pilgrimage and place. I would love to keep this project going and create at least one entry for all 50 states. In the meantime, I look forward to sharing stories and reflections from this pilgrimage with the church when I return from the sabbatical.



When we are not away on this grand adventure, the Goodmans will be at home here in Southeast Guilford County. We plan for Maelyn to attend Passport Kids Camp and Alamance's Vacation Bible School. During a sabbatical, the protocol is for church members not to have contact with the pastor. Nevertheless, the likelihood we will be spotted at the Southeast Swim Club, Food Lion, and Amigos is very high. When that happens, we do not need to pretend we don't know each other. The tough thing, for both the congregation and the Goodmans, will be leaving church business entirely out of the conversation. If you forget, I will simply say something like, "Please share that with Pastor Jess" or "Please send me a message for when I get back in the office in September."

## What Will the Sabbatical Cost?

According to Salem's Sabbatical Leave Policy, pastor sabbaticals are considered additional paid leave. Pastor Kyle will continue to receive his salary through the summer. Kyle plans to fund his sabbatical primarily through his continuing education and professional funds from 2023 and 2024. He received an increase in these funds in lieu of a raise in 2021 and is asking for the same thing in 2024. These funds will be used to cover fuel, lodging, meals, and entry fees to religious and historical sites on the trip, but not Disneyland or the San Diego Zoo.

The church has budgeted for a quarter-time temporary supply minister for three months during the summer. That person will not be eligible for Board of Pensions benefits. They will be reimbursed for mileage. We estimate the cost to be about \$4,000. The Vital Preaching, Vital Worship Grant has narrow restrictions on its use, and worship leadership is a relatively small part of the supply pastor's duties.

## What Can We Expect for Pastor Jess's Sabbatical?

Pastor Jess is due a sabbatical in 2025. She plans to start her sabbatical earlier in the year, – in the spring – in part to be available for summer trips with the youth group. We are currently working on another grant to help us fund her sabbatical and continue the growth started through the Vital Preaching, Vital Worship Grant. We are also exploring other possibilities, such as hiring a seminary intern for the Spring semester, among other ideas. These plans are only just beginning to take shape.

## How Can We All Benefit from Pastor Kyle's Sabbatical?

We will rely on the gifts and talents of our members, and our members are extraordinary! The *Art of Worship* course in preparation for sabbatical will equip a new cadre of Alamance lay leaders with additional skills and experience to benefit the congregation for many years.

The sabbatical gives our discipleship pastor a chance to step into the lead role. She will gain valuable experience and broaden her skillset. With strong support from the congregation and good boundaries kept, Jess will have the opportunity to grow in her vocation this summer.

The sabbatical gives our lead pastor a chance to rest, recreate, and refocus. Time for family, spiritual growth, and soul care are built into his plans. Assuming no reoccurrence of Hand, Foot, and Mouth disease, Kyle will return to the church energized for the next chapter at APC.

With good planning and preparation, we expect Alamance will truly thrive during the sabbatical. Instead of a summer of substitutes, we have planned a season of creativity and engagement. If the church invests in this as much as we hope, it could easily be one of the most dynamic *years* Alamance has ever had. *Join us for this journey!*