

Rev. Jeff's 2026 Sabbatical Report

I would be remiss if I didn't begin this report by thanking the congregation for the gift of this sabbatical time. I feel as though the six weeks away truly gave me a chance to recharge and renew so that I am ready and excited to begin another program year with you here at UCCT!

But what did I do, you may be wondering? Here's what I accomplished:

Narrative Lectionary—Part of my time away was spent researching what's called the Narrative Lectionary (NL). Created by two professors from Luther Seminary in Minnesota in 2010, the NL is an alternative to the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). The NL is a four year look at the Bible which offers a more comprehensive and cohesive look at the stories which make up our scriptures—bringing in voices and stories that are absent from the RCL. Many weeks the stories will build off of what was heard in previous weeks so as to give our exploration of scripture more of a narrative framework. Gwen, Allan, and I are excited to start delving into this in September and Caroline and Gwen have been working to pick out Church School curriculum that will parallel the readings we do each week. I hope you're all as excited as we are to try something new!

Critical Incident Stress Management—One of my jobs as a fire and police chaplain is to help first responders deal with the emotions and feelings that come as a result of being on difficult and tragic scenes and calls. Some of this is done on an individual level and some at the group level (the latter primarily by the police). Having done this work for a while, this sabbatical I dove a bit deeper into learning best practices for doing this work by taking a class with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. The Assisting Individuals in Crisis and Group Crisis Intervention class was 27 hours long and had an accompanying exam. I am happy to say that I passed the exam and am now Certified in Critical Incident Stress Management. These are skills that will help me immensely in the chaplaincy work that I continue to find so rewarding to do.

Nature Therapy—I also wanted to spend some of my sabbatical time researching the field of Nature Therapy. This new field of study, for me, introduced the concept that nature holds the power to both help heal after traumatic events and to make us healthier as a whole. It makes sense since God is in nature, why wouldn't it then have the power to heal and make us whole? This is a huge field of study that I have just dipped my toes into, by reading four books: *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* by Florence Williams, *Healing with Nature: Mindfulness and Somatic Practices to Heal from Trauma* by Rochelle Calvert, *Healing in the Wild* by Carter Check, and *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul: Celtic Wisdom for Reawakening to What Our Souls Know and Healing the World* by John Philip Newel. I am excited by what I learned and look forward to both sharing my gleanings with you in the months ahead and practicing what I learned on the trails!

Personal/Hiking—Finally, I wanted to spend some time with my family this summer, since work so often pulls me away from them. Kristen and I were able to get away for a couple of days in New York City. Our whole family spent a relaxing week in Vermont with one of my brothers and his family. Luna and I were able to hike 7 mountains—5 new mountains in Maine, bringing us closer to summiting all 67 4,000' peaks in New England (we're at 58 of 67!). And I was able to spend time with my parents and Kristen's parents. The older I get the more I realize how quickly the years go by and how important it is to spend time with those I love the most. I am grateful for that opportunity this summer.

Having accomplished a lot in six weeks, there is something I came to realize during my hiking, reading, relaxing, studying, and talking with my therapist: I was tired, truly tired. I didn't realize how tired I was, and what impact it was having on my health, until I was able to take that time away to reflect. 2025 was an incredibly challenging year on many levels, and I was feeling the physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological effects that had taken on me.

My goal is to not find myself in that place again. So moving forward I am going to try and be better at carving out some more time for myself and my family. So this may mean that, if I've had a full weekend, I take some time off the next week. It may mean that if I've had a few long days in a row, that I leave the office earlier than usual. It may mean that I sneak a trip up to the mountains to clear my head and renew a little. I believe that my being deliberate about this will help both me and all of you! It will help me to not be quite so tired and it will help you in that I will be in a better position to care for all of you! As my therapist said to me: If you don't take time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness.

So I would ask for your help and indulgence as I give this a try. Admittedly this has not been my strong suit, but I am realizing how important it is. I truly hope my efforts will be successful.

Thank you again for the gift of this time away. I look forward to enjoying the second half of my sabbatical in the summer of 2027 and coming back even more refreshed and renewed to journey wherever God is calling us to go.

What a blessing it is to serve you all,

Rev. Jeff