

# **PI Sabbatical Guide**

**September 2010**

## *Important*

1. The purpose of this PI Sabbatical Guide is to provide you with guidelines, templates, and resources that will be helpful in your decision making and planning. It does not represent “PI policy” but is rather an attempt to collect and offer to you some of the best experience gained by others who’ve planned and taken a sabbatical.
2. This PI Sabbatical Guide draws heavily upon The Navigators’ Sabbatical Guidelines: A Season of Renewal by permission. April 2010
3. It is important to acknowledge the culturally-limited nature of this first edition of the PI Sabbatical Guide. The materials compiled to date are largely from the sabbatical experiences of ministry leaders from North America. Our hope is that this will be only the first step in developing a dynamic resource and that future editions will have a more international flavor. Toward that end we request your suggestions from your sabbatical experience and especially from other cultural perspectives.
4. Please give suggestions via the "Contact Us" form on GeoSync with “PI Sabbatical Guide” in the Subject Line.

*- ILT Sabbatical Action Group 2010*

# Table of Contents

PAGE NUMBERS

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I.	LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION	5
	To Those Starting Sabbatical	5
	To Sabbatical Advisors / Mentors	6

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II.	OVERVIEW	7
	PI Sabbatical Statement	7
	Sabbath Lifestyle	7
	Biblical Foundations for Sabbatical	8
	Why Take a Sabbatical?	8
	Definition of a Sabbatical	9
	Approval for Sabbatical	9
	What Will You Do During Your Sabbatical?	10
	What PI Leaders are Saying About Their Sabbaticals	10
	Getting Started	11
	Selection of Sabbatical Advisor/Mentor(s)	12
	Sabbatical Care Interview	12
	Sabbatical Support Group	13
	Marriage Intimacy Retreat	13
	A Word to Spouses	13
	Reassignment Process	13
	Spiritual Transformation	14
	Resources	14
	Helpful Tips and Lessons Learned	16

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III.	SABBATICAL PHASES	17
	Phase I - Release and Relinquish	17
	<i>Exiting from leadership roles and ministry responsibilities</i>	
	Phase II - Rest and Recovery	19
	<i>Establishing margin &amp; managing pace of life</i>	
	Phase III - Reflect and Refocus	21
	<i>Experiencing God and self in new or deeper ways</i>	
	Phase IV - Realignment and/or Reassignment	22
	<i>Empowering for maximum contribution</i>	
	Sabbatical Debriefing Questions	23
	Phase V – Re-Entry and Re-Engagement	24
	<i>Engaging at right pace</i>	

<i>IV.</i>	<i>SABBATICAL PROCESS CHECKLIST</i>	25
	Sabbatical Initiation	25
	Sabbatical Time Overview	26
	Post-Sabbatical	27
	Follow-up	27
<hr/>		
	<i>APPENDIX</i>	29
Appendix A	Communicating about a Sabbatical	29
Appendix B	Will People Give to Me When I Go on Sabbatical?	30
	Sample Letters	31
Appendix C	Rest for the Weary	34
	Twelve steps to renewal: Tips for Planning Your Own	
	Personal Retreat	37
Appendix D	Sample Sabbatical Plan	38
Appendix E	Inventories: Role Fit; Burnout; Personal and Marital	40
Appendix F	Sabbatical Support Group	49

# I. LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION

*TO THOSE STARTING SABBATICAL*

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September 2010

Dear PI Member,

If you're reading this, you're probably considering a sabbatical.

Our hope and prayer is that if God leads you to set aside time from your normal ministry responsibilities to rest, reflect and realign with His calling on your life, it will be a rich experience that will pay dividends for years to come.

The purpose of this *PI Sabbatical Guide* is to provide you with guidelines, templates, and resources that will be helpful in your decision making and planning.

It is in part adapted by permission from the *Sabbatical Guidelines: A Season of Renewal* developed by the Navigators, and in part a compilation of input from PI leaders who have experienced a sabbatical.

Note: You get what you plan for! A sabbatical is a treasure and a privilege that doesn't come around often for most of us, so it is critical to plan well. People come to sabbatical in varying conditions. If you have the energy to be self-directed in creating your sabbatical plan, you should find adequate resources here. It is not uncommon, however, to be quite weary leading up to a sabbatical, and if that is your experience you may want to take advantage of the Navigators Sabbatical Orientation Workshop. You will still come out with a plan uniquely fitted to your needs, but you'll be guided through the planning process by experienced mentors.

In His Sabbath rest,

*ILT Sabbatical Action Group 2010*

"Let's pray that we will be a mission hard at work and disciplined at rest!"  
John Fletcher – PI International Director, February 2010

September 2010

Dear Sabbatical Advisor,

A sabbatical is a unique and powerful opportunity to hear from God, but potential “downsides” do exist. During sabbatical, people have experienced discouragement, loneliness, isolation, and loss of perspective. A significant part of the solution is a friend...a **spiritual friend**. That’s a good way to describe a sabbatical advisor. The sabbatical advisor doesn’t do much teaching. He doesn’t do much directing. He takes the initiative to **come alongside** and listen, clarify, suggest, and possibly protect. **A sabbatical advisor shepherds the member through the sabbatical process, helping the member achieve his or her God-directed goals.**

The following pages will guide you in being the best possible friend to the member on sabbatical. If you’ll apply the process described in these guidelines and make sure the checklist for each phase is completed, you’ll make a significant contribution into the life of another. Successes and lessons learned from many members who’ve experienced a sabbatical have shaped these guidelines. When they’re faithfully applied, members return to ministry with renewed excitement, creativity, and passion.

One advisor was helping a couple prepare for their sabbatical. As they discussed priority needs and action steps to meet these needs, the advisor noticed tears in the husband’s eyes. He stopped and asked if everything was okay. The man paused and then replied, “Yes, I’m fine...it’s just that someone cares.”

Thank you for being someone who cares!

## II. OVERVIEW

In September 2010 the International Leadership Team (ILT) made a decision to include the below statement on sabbatical in the PI International Handbook. This *PI Sabbatical Guide* and the resources in the appendices are the result of that decision.

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### PI SABBATICAL STATEMENT

“PI members are encouraged to cultivate a Sabbath lifestyle, reflecting a biblical rhythm of work and rest, and beginning with one day a week for rest. Those desiring a sabbatical should consult with their leadership to develop an approved sabbatical plan. Refer to the *PI Sabbatical Guide* for guidelines, planning templates, and resources.”

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### SABBATH LIFESTYLE

The command to guard the Sabbath day is certainly the clearest Biblical mandate for rest. Beyond resting one day a week, however, is a fuller spiritual reality: All our efforts—apart from resting in Jesus who is our life—are vanity. To live a Sabbath lifestyle is to recognize and embrace the fact that we are made of dust and that God is our life. God gave us an example of a work/rest rhythm not because He got tired, but because He knew we would get tired and would need a regular lifestyle of ceasing from work and presenting ourselves to Him.

Sabbath lifestyle is integral to being all God would have us be. It is as much a posture of the heart that flows from a discipline, as it is the discipline itself. It is important to have a “daily Sabbath,” spending time in prayer with our Father, to allow Him to speak into the pressures, challenges, relationships and triumphs that we face in following HIM. As much as anything, Sabbath, silence, anonymity, prayer, reflection and REST help us to keep the total picture in right perspective. God also knew that man would naturally struggle with the fleshly, self-destructive tendency to work too much.

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places because he too felt the need for intimate encounter with His Father.

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## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SABBATICAL

A sabbatical is an extension of the Sabbath lifestyle. While Sabbath lifestyle includes a disciplined weekly approach to rest and regular dedicated times of prayer and refreshment in the Word, a sabbatical is an extension of this principle, applied on an occasional basis.

The book of Leviticus (chapter 25) describes the “shmita,” or Year of Jubilee, as a “Sabbath of Sabbaths.” It was again a rhythm of six on and one off, this time not on the micro scale of the week but the macro scale of the year. It was a “both/and” not an “either/or.”

The rationale for sabbatical is above all obedience to God, not “because I need or deserve a break.” While we undeniably need rest, the original precedent for Sabbath rest set by God after six days of creation was not because He needed rest, but just because rest in His estimation is good. Nehemiah 9:14 says God’s holy Sabbath was “made known” – fascinating! Whereas the other nine commandments were “given” from God to man, the Sabbath was a special “invitation” for man to join a God thing!

Biblically – Taking a sabbatical is one application of the biblical “Sabbath” principle that at times we should deliberately trust God with the unfinished. As an act of faith, we break from our regular work for the purpose of worship, rest, renewal, and repair.

Practically – In the ministry, the messenger is the message. The messenger **must** embody the message. A healthy Sabbath/sabbatical rhythm can help to keep the spirit fresh.

While future productivity is certainly a goal and outcome of sabbatical, increased intimacy with God is the priority. John 17:3 says that eternal life itself is wrapped up in ‘knowing’ God. That ‘knowing’, or intimacy with God, is the core of the message we are to embody. The fragrant aroma that Paul says we spread is ‘the knowledge of Christ’ (2 Cor. 2:14).

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## WHY TAKE A SABBATICAL?

The primary purpose of a sabbatical is time, space, and quiet for intentional pursuit of intimacy with God and seeking to understand Him as our source for life and ministry. However, it may also include various other emphases: further study, writing, or other creative projects that equip a person for more usefulness to the kingdom or which are aimed at producing something.

While sabbatical may be somewhat counter to our culture, it can pay weighty dividends to the individual and to the organization.

Those within PI who have taken a sabbatical believe their time was an opportunity to reflect, assess and recharge; a restorative and healthful time that fostered longevity in cross-cultural service.

Personal projects have been completed on sabbaticals—completing master studies and co-writing a book, for example.

Some observed a sabbatical time for the purpose of searching God’s direction for the future.

For others, observing a sabbatical practice was an act of obedience for the purpose of refreshment, re-visioning, spiritual growth and renewal; a time for soul-rest and a slower pace; and to address the patterns of low-grade fatigue produced by 20 years of ministry.

In the case of some, they were so weary they hit a “wall.” They had such a sense of depletion and soul weariness that they lost motivation and knew they were dangerously low.

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## DEFINITION OF SABBATICAL

“Sabbatical” is not another word for vacation, but is an *intentional* process for disengaging from normal ministry and leadership involvement for a period of time to allow for evaluation of life and ministry. It’s an extended time for pursuing God and for the restoration of one’s soul and “disciplining” oneself after godliness. This is a time to quiet the noise of life and hear the voice of Jesus.

Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Matthew 11:28-30 in *The Message* captures this thought:

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.*

In terms of timing, a sabbatical of six months (+/-) is suggested every seven to 10 years.

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## APPROVAL FOR SABBATICAL

Those desiring a sabbatical should consult with their leadership to develop an approved sabbatical plan. For many PI members this will involve their field leader, their mobilization base leader, and their sending fellowship leader. In order to plan a sabbatical well, it is advisable to start a year in advance.

A sabbatical plan should include -

- sabbatical mentor(s)
- a plan for handling current responsibilities
- sabbatical timeline and goals
- a plan for accountability
- and a financial plan if necessary

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## WHAT WILL YOU DO DURING YOUR SABBATICAL?

1. **Release and Relinquish** – During this first phase you disengage from the ministry and leadership responsibilities, and you establish a plan for your sabbatical. This sabbatical plan is an initial framework for direction and reflects priority needs.
2. **Rest and Recovery** – “Rest” in the second phase of the sabbatical doesn’t mean ceasing from all activity. Rather, you stop ministry activities and, where possible, other areas of stress. You consider **what restores you emotionally and feeds you spiritually**. During this phase, be sensitive to feelings of isolation or lack of significance. **You should be out of regularly scheduled ministry activity, but not out of fellowship.**
3. **Reflect and Refocus** – During this phase, you ask the question, “Lord, is there anything You want to say to me?” Consider how God has spoken to you in the past and posture yourself to hear His voice. Scheduling extended time alone with God is a priority.
4. **Realignment and/or Reassignment** – This doesn’t necessarily imply a change of roles. During this phase of the sabbatical, it’s important to review and reaffirm your calling. The goal is to experience maximum contribution in this next season of life, which may or may not mean changing jobs.
5. **Re-Entry/Re-Engagement** – In this phase you transition back into ministry. Expect emotional stresses, pace issues, spiritual warfare, and struggles in working out desired changes in life and ministry. Also expect the joy of being refreshed physically, reaffirming His vision for you, and gaining renewed perspective!

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## WHAT PI LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THEIR SABBATICALS

*“We feel God re-energized us and gave us a new sense of His calling for our next season, a renewed sense of who He wants us to be . . . as we look toward the future. It gave us the opportunity to immerse our souls in the deep truths of His Word and prayer, enjoy nature and beauty, revamp our way of making decisions and ordering our lives for Sabbath lifestyle, and work in our lives to address issues, values and perspectives that were not God-centered, etc.”*

*“I learned lots about my giftedness and so to seek areas with those skills in the future.”*

*“It was a really positive experience. I’m looking forward to the next one in a few more years! Mine was 4 months long. In retrospect, I probably would have asked for an extra month or two. I think it paid some rich dividends with family, time in the Word, and in recalibrating my personal life – preparing me for this last busy year.”*

*“It was restorative in about every way possible . . . spiritually, emotionally, and physically.”*

*“God met us!! [Our sabbatical] renewed us. For us it was like being full time in God’s school. His Word came alive and ministered deeply to our hearts. It was a time of accelerated spiritual growth. God brought many things to light . . . healed us in places we didn’t know we needed healing . . . broke spiritual bondages that we were unaware of. It was an incredibly intense time of God’s ministry to us.”*

*“If you know in your own heart and have received confirmation from your immediate co-workers or supervisors about your genuine need for a sabbatical, then plan appropriately and implement it, even if there are some people who may not understand why you are doing this. One key to a sabbatical is not to ‘feel guilty’ while you are taking it. If you feel guilty during that process, it will take the glow off the experience. Just accept it as a rare gift from the Lord.”*

*“I would like to encourage PI leaders to give deep and serious consideration to regular sabbaticals. I believe it is inappropriate for us to miss or skip these critical health times. We need our leaders, and our leaders need regular periods of God-ordained rest.”*

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## GETTING STARTED

Sabbatical planning may be initiated by you or your supervisor.

- Find a mentor(s)
- Present a plan for handling current responsibilities
- Present a sabbatical plan with a timeline and goals
- Include a plan for accountability
- Include a financial plan if necessary

Sabbatical timing should be set according to your ministry/family needs and in consultation with your leadership. A typical sabbatical is about 6 months, but could be shorter or longer. You, your field leader, your mobilization base leader, and your sending fellowship leader should agree on the length. Additionally, adequate lead time is needed to plan a sabbatical well.

*I can state without wavering that the single greatest need of the church today is the restoration of ministers. What is required is a quite different approach to their life and work. It is a matter of leading them into a massive shift of the dynamics of their personality under God, and one that cannot be done by more books and conferences. They need to be taken out of the circulation for a sufficiently long time to re-vision and re-structure their lives in communion with Jesus and his kingdom. - Endorsement by Dallas Willard on back of brochure for Hilltop Renewal Center, Brea, CA*

Note: PI members found mentors, supervisors, their team, supporting church pastors, board members, counselors and others who had taken sabbaticals to be helpful places to start for advice.

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## SELECTION OF SABBATICAL ADVISOR/MENTORS(S)

The role of a sabbatical advisor is to shepherd you through the sabbatical process. It should be a person with whom you're willing to be transparent and vulnerable. (Transparent = open and honest about yourself. Vulnerable = invite others to speak into your life.)

You may draw on the counsel of several advisors while creating your sabbatical plan, but it is also important to have at least one advisor geographically nearby throughout your sabbatical. Include in your sabbatical plan periodic meetings with your advisor(s) for the sake of accountability and processing.

Members taking a sabbatical can be in danger of experiencing lack of community, loss of perspective, and a sense of isolation. While we all need times alone, we live and minister in community. Your advisor can help to monitor these needs.

A sabbatical advisor should be someone who is willing to pray with you throughout the sabbatical and give input before, during and after. It is helpful if that person is someone who has had a meaningful sabbatical him or herself. An advisor provides accountability, helps you think through and plan your sabbatical, provides mid-way engagement, and debriefs and helps bring closure to your sabbatical. An advisor is all the more powerful if he or she is committed to speaking into your life with boldness.

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## SABBATICAL CARE INTERVIEW

Just as you take an annual physical to check your body, the beginning of sabbatical is a great time for a spiritual and emotional checkup. It would be helpful for you and your spouse to complete the following inventories in preparation for an interview with your PI supervisor or other member care person (see Appendix E).

- Role Fit Inventory
- Burnout Inventory
- Personal and Marital Survey

You can also discuss these with your sabbatical advisor so the issues and possible action steps can be incorporated into your sabbatical plan (see Appendix D).

The purpose of a Sabbatical Care Interview is to determine priority emotional or spiritual issues that should be dealt with during the sabbatical. This interview should be scheduled as early as possible – preferably during the Release and Relinquish Phase.

NOTE: Several PI members who have had the opportunity to take a sabbatical considered this step essential in identifying the issues that needed to be addressed by themselves and their sabbatical advisor(s). In addition to the inventories included in this guide, The Highlands Ability Battery, The LEAD Program, a stress inventory, and a gift-analysis/role-match assessment were recommended.

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## SABBATICAL SUPPORT GROUP

To meet the need for community, some people on sabbatical have found a sabbatical support group to be helpful. See Appendix F for ideas regarding establishing a sabbatical support group.

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## MARRIAGE INTIMACY RETREAT

People in ministry often become so involved in giving to others that their personal lives are neglected. They focus on the biblical principal found in Matthew 10:8, *Freely you have received, freely give*, but may not experience another principle from Galatians 6:6 – *Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with him who teaches*.

Couples on sabbatical are encouraged to take advantage of one of many retreats (usually 2 days), specifically designed to help couples better understand and meet each other’s emotional intimacy needs. These are times of personal renewal and encouragement and some are designed exclusively for ministry couples. It’s a time to freely receive and to be reminded that the Great Commandment to love others begins at home.

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## A WORD TO SPOUSES

“When do I get my sabbatical?” is a sentiment often expressed by spouses of members on sabbatical. This is especially true for a wife whose main ministry is mothering and maintaining a household. Her work continues and may even increase when her husband is at home. Her opportunity to rest, reflect, and refocus is often limited. (See Appendix C.)

When putting together the sabbatical plan, a sabbatical advisor should acknowledge the spouse’s workload, encourage husband and wife to examine parental and household responsibilities, and consider how the load can be lifted or shared during this sabbatical so both can participate as much as possible.

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## REASSIGNMENT PROCESS

In planning for sabbatical “keep the end in mind.” The reassignment process will build on the member’s sabbatical findings to help them find a good ministry fit. It may result in a change of role or changes in how they carry out their role. The member’s counselors in sabbatical planning—including supervisor, mobilization base leader, sending church leader, and your sabbatical advisor—will also be counselors in reassignment.

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## SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Spiritual transformation is a major focus during sabbatical. Experiencing inner freedom and more Christ-like character occurs as we allow the Holy Spirit, the Word, and others to speak to our inner person.

*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost parts.*  
(Ps 51:6)

*The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.*  
(Proverbs 18:15)

*Spiritual growth does not occur by changing our behavior, but by changing what we believe.*  
Dallas Willard

As we come to understand what we believe about God, the world, ourselves, and others, and as we allow Jesus to touch those beliefs, we become more transformed into the image of God and experience more of the freedom of the Gospel.

The Reflection Phase is a good time to look at issues like lack of brokenness, false identity, unresolved sin and woundedness, addictions, hiddenness, shame, fears, guilt, pride, anger, etc. Dealing with these below-the-line issues in our lives helps us move from living from the heart of flesh to living from the heart Jesus gave us.

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## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

#### Biblical Foundations

[The Holy Bible](#) (Many who have experienced a sabbatical counsel us to let the Word be our main sabbatical resource.)

[Sabbath Keeping](#), by Lynne M. Baab

[The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath](#), by Mark Buchanan

[Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives](#), by Wayne Muller

[Working the Angles](#), by Eugene Peterson

#### Listening Prayer

[Can You Hear Me?](#), by Brad Jersak

See resources for listening prayer from Dave and Jean Coles at [www.freemin.org](http://www.freemin.org).

## **Wholeness Prayer**

See resources for wholeness prayer from Dave and Jean Coles at [www.freemin.org](http://www.freemin.org) and [http://www.en.freemin.org/Simplified\\_Version.htm](http://www.en.freemin.org/Simplified_Version.htm).

## **Sabbatical Planning**

Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of A Leader, by Shelley Trebesch

The Overload Syndrome, by Richard A. Swenson

The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath, by Mark Buchanan

Contemplative Pastor, by Eugene Peterson (last chapter especially)

## **Community**

The Safest Place on Earth, by Larry Crabb

## **Life Lessons**

Windows of the Soul, by Ken Gire

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, by Peter Scazzero

## **Healing Prayer**

Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive, by John Eldredge

Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World, by Henri J. Nouwen

## **Soul Care**

Embracing Soul Care, by Stephen W. Smith

Soul Keeping, by Howard Baker

Intimacy with the Almighty, by Charles Swindoll

Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy, by Larry Crabb

## **Personal Contribution Assessment**

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation, by Parker J. Palmer

Prayer and Temperament, by Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey

## RETREAT CENTERS

Check with your Mobilization Base for recommendations for retreat and counseling centers.

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### HELPFUL TIPS AND LESSONS LEARNED

1. If you have school-aged children, consider taking a sabbatical during the school year rather than summer.
2. It's okay to sleep more.
3. This is not a sabbatical from life. Expect to spend time on family responsibilities, expense reports, updating your supervisor, etc.
4. Expect to feel stress as you transition into the rest phase—change is stressful.
5. Don't skimp on the planning of your sabbatical (take 6 months or longer in order to ensure things are passed off well), and don't cut your sabbatical too short.
6. Wait on the Lord to see at least part of the sabbatical just unfold like a rose.
7. If at all possible, the husband and wife should do a sabbatical together.
8. Spend long, lingering times in the Word and before HIS face.
9. If possible, separate geographically from the ministry context.
10. Consider being in a **place of physical beauty** to greatly enhance the intimate journey with God.
11. Learn and practice new disciplines like staying quiet, reducing your activity level, getting more exercise, meditating and memorizing, reading, etc. In other words, "Take a sabbatical and change your life."
12. **Use the time** to organize your personal world in a way that will make you more effective and efficient when you return to work.
13. Have confidence in God to meet you, even if He waits until very late in the process to do so.
14. Taking a sabbatical as part of a planned home leave worked well.
15. Communicate openly and early with supporters about your sabbatical.
16. Do some reading on sabbatical before entering into it.
17. **Reengage slowly, both for personal balance reasons and to not offend those who have been carrying a much heavier load during this period.**
18. If taking a sabbatical were to offend supporters and cause you to lose their support and confidence, it would be better for you to adjust to a 3-day work week and extended retreat (3 weeks) than to take a full "sabbatical."
19. Compile a list of personal "takeaways" throughout your sabbatical.
20. Make it a sabbatical goal to re-order your values and habits toward a "rest-full" post-sabbatical lifestyle that is reflective of and honoring to God.
21. Plan personal get-aways into your sabbatical for the sake of silence and solitude.

# III. SABBATICAL PHASES

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## SABBATICAL PHASE I – RELEASE AND RELINQUISH

### **Exiting from leadership roles and ministry responsibilities**

During this first phase, you disengage from ministry and leadership responsibilities, get needed funding, and draw up a plan for your sabbatical. Typically, **this phase starts 3-5 months before the sabbatical** begins. You may want to consider attending a Navigators Sabbatical Orientation Workshop with your spouse, and even your sabbatical advisor.

At the beginning of Phase I, your sabbatical advisor helps you and your spouse develop a sabbatical plan. Begin by meeting with your supervisor to get his input. Your plan revolves around priority needs identified by your supervisor, the sabbatical care interview, and the following inventories found in Appendix E:

- Role Fit Inventory
- Burnout Inventory (as needed)
- Personal and Marital Survey

Once you (and your spouse) identify your priority needs, your sabbatical advisor works with you to come up with possible resources and action steps. You then create a sabbatical plan draft that includes your funding plan, **priority needs**, action steps, and other resources. Your sabbatical advisor and supervisor read the draft and give you input and suggestions.

The sabbatical plan is an initial framework for direction, based on your priority needs. It's a dynamic tool that can be tweaked throughout the sabbatical process. Early phases often have more detail than later phases. A copy of the finalized sabbatical plan should be sent to your supervisor, MB leader, sending church leader, and your sabbatical advisor.

### **Questions to Ask Yourself During This Phase:**

- With whom do we need to process this decision? And from whom do we need permission?
- How will we communicate with our churches, supporters, family, etc.?
- How will we close out our leadership responsibilities so that the baton is passed smoothly?
- How will my responsibilities be carried out in my absence, and who will carry them out? (If done well, this can be a fantastic leadership development opportunity, assisting other leaders to grow in their own leadership skills.)
- How do I get the permission/support necessary from PI and from my sending base to take a sabbatical?
- What will my goals be for each of the sabbatical phases?
- What are the financial ramifications of a sabbatical, and how can we address them?
- Who will I ask to be a part of my sabbatical accountability team?
- How will we handle stepping away from email?
- How can we plan where we will live so that our objectives can best be met?

- What will accountability look like?
- When and how will we evaluate during and after the sabbatical process?

### **Questions Sabbatical Advisors Might Ask During The Release And Relinquish Phase:**

1. How are you feeling about disengaging from the ministry?
2. Are you worried about losing financial support while on sabbatical? How's your funding?
3. How have other members and friends reacted when they learned about your sabbatical?
4. How does your spouse (children?) feel about your sabbatical?
5. Since drawing up your sabbatical plan a couple of weeks ago, have you had any further thoughts? Do you still believe it reflects your priority needs and desires?
6. Does the starting date for Phase II: Rest and Recovery still seem realistic to you?
7. What excites you most about your sabbatical?
8. What are your priorities for the next couple of weeks?
9. What can I do to help you?
10. What can I be praying for you?

### **Sample Sabbatical Advisors Checklist: Release And Relinquish Phase**

- Member has attended a Sabbatical Orientation Workshop in Colorado Springs.
- Member has communicated the sabbatical to supporters
- Member has completed or turned over ministry and leadership responsibilities.
- Sabbatical support group has been established.
- Sabbatical Care Interview with member (and spouse) has been completed.
- Member has requested input from his supervisor, mobilization base leader and sending church leader.
- Sabbatical plan, based on priority needs, has been approved by supervisor.
- Copy of the approved sabbatical plan has been sent to the supervisor, mobilization base leader, sending church leader, and sabbatical advisor.

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## SABBATICAL PHASE II – REST AND RECOVERY

### Establishing Margin and Managing Pace of Life

It isn't unusual for members on sabbatical to have trouble letting go of the ministry. Some don't quite believe it's really okay to step out. It's important that you and your sabbatical advisor make sure ministry commitments have been handed off or finished. During this phase, be sensitive to feelings of isolation or lack of significance. Often, members who are no longer "doing ministry" struggle with their identity. You should be out of regularly scheduled PI ministry but not out of fellowship. Plan to - spend unscripted time with family members and iron-sharpen-iron friends – those enriching relationships God has given you.

It's also common for members to treat their sabbatical as another Type-A frenzied activity. As you consider the inevitable ministry opportunities that will pop up during a sabbatical, the guiding principle is: "Keep the sabbatical the focus." Can you attend the meeting or prepare and deliver the workshop without losing the focus of the sabbatical? "Extra opportunities" should be examined individually, cautiously, and with accountability to your sabbatical advisor. Generally it is recommended that you make a full break from ministry activities. This is the time for rest.

"Rest" in this phase doesn't mean ceasing from all activity, but rather, pulling back from ministry activities and (where possible) other areas of stress. This gives you room to explore and discover what relaxes you and what restores you emotionally. **Mark Buchanan says, "Cease from what is necessary; engage in what is life-giving."**)

Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of A Leader, by Shelley Trebesch, is a very helpful resource for this phase to read, journal, and discuss with your sabbatical advisor. The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath, by Mark Buchanan, is another excellent resource.

#### What Others Have Done During This Phase To Rest:

Duck hunting	Gardening	Journalled
Read novels	Home projects	Cooked dinner for the family each day
Fly-fishing	Travelled	Audited Bible courses
Slept more	"Fast" from media	Wholeness Prayer seminars
Played softball	Exercised	

*"Would you believe that one of the most difficult things for me to model to my team leaders and fellow workers is vacationing? Sometimes I fall into the trap of believing the lie that workers should not rest or take vacation. 'The devil never takes a vacation,' some say. But, as Howard Hendricks once replied, 'I didn't know he was your role model.'" - PI Leader*

### Questions Sabbatical Advisors Might Ask During The Rest and Recovery Phase:

1. How would you define or explain rest?
2. Do you feel that you're resting? What rests you?
3. Are you experiencing any obstacles to rest?
4. Have you noticed significant changes in your eating or sleeping habits?
5. What things are stressful for you right now? Can anything be done to remove or reduce them?
6. How is your relationship with your spouse? With your children?
7. What are your thoughts about your last meeting with your sabbatical support group? What kind of feedback are you getting from them? Do you think they understand you?
8. Is your sabbatical going the way you expected? How so?
9. Have you given your PI supervisor an update recently?
10. What are your priorities for the next two weeks?
11. Is there something I can do to help you?

### Sample Sabbatical Advisors Checklist: Rest And Relax Phase

- Member has pulled back from ministry and leadership responsibilities.
- Action steps have been taken to promote rest.
- The book Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of A Leader, by Shelley Trebesch has been read and discussed.
- Sabbatical support group has met at least once each month.
- Member has contacted PI supervisor at least once with an update.
- Member has attended a Marriage Intimacy Retreat.

**NOTE:** These phases are based on a six-month sabbatical model.

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## PHASE III – REFLECT AND REFOCUS

### Experiencing God and Self in New or Deeper Ways

This is the work phase of the sabbatical, although goals will often be more “receptivity goals” than “productivity goals.” During this phase, you should be asking the question, “Lord, is there **anything You want to say to me?**” God speaks to us in a variety of ways. You should consider how God has spoken to you in the past and position yourself to hear His voice. Extended time alone with God for reflection is the focus of this phase. This is the time to go after whatever it is you want to pursue. It is the time for soul enlargement. Read, meditate, write, pray – soak up nutrients freely **without immediate** demand for production.

#### What Other Members Have Done During This Phase:

- Spent extended times alone with God
- Went away to a retreat center
- Focused on emotional healing
- Read books of interest
- Crystallized personal passions
- Grew purposefully by reading in an area that stimulated thinking
- Took a class
- Interacted with highly-interesting people that stretched them

#### Questions Sabbatical Advisors Might Ask During The Reflect and Focus Phase

1. Are you aware of anything that would hinder God from speaking to you during this phase? (Busyness, unforgiving spirit, conflict, unconfessed sin, etc.)
2. Is there anything I’ve missed that would be helpful to discuss?
3. What things are currently stressful for you? Can anything be done to remove or reduce them?
4. How’s your relationship with your spouse/children?
5. Tell me about your last meeting with your sabbatical support group. What kind of feedback are you getting from them? Do you think they understand you? Are they speaking into your life?
6. Is your sabbatical going the way you expected? How so?
7. When did you last give your supervisor an update?
8. What are your priorities for the next two weeks?
9. Is there something I can do to help you?
10. Have you completed your Life Lessons? How can I help you get them completed?

#### Sample Sabbatical Advisor Checklist: Reflect & Refocus Phase

- Member has contacted supervisor at least once with an update.
- Sabbatical support group has met at least once each month.
- Member has crystallized his personal passions.

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## PHASE IV – REALIGNMENT AND/OR REASSIGNMENT

### Empowering for Maximum Contribution

At the beginning of this phase, it is **IMPORTANT** that you contact your supervisor and/or mobilization base leader to solicit their partnership in planning to reengage ministry responsibilities.

This is the application phase of the sabbatical. During this phase you want to answer the question, “What changes in life and ministry should I make as result of hearing from God in the Reflection Phase?” This might involve changing your ministry role or a change in how you’ve been handling your current ministry role. What realignments do you need to consider?

This is a time for rekindling and clarifying vision for ministry. Review and distill sabbatical journals and response papers. What has God been saying, and what is He saying for the future? How has God answered sabbatical prayers? How were sabbatical goals met? What are my key sabbatical takeaways? What practical “Sabbath lifestyle” applications will I include in my life going forward?

#### What Other Members Have Done During This Phase:

- Reviewed and reaffirmed their calling
- Updated their resume
- Received input from their supervisor and sabbatical advisor
- Received counsel from friends and co-workers
- Visited possible ministry locations
- Entertained various ministry options
- Developed a plan for what to do differently in their role
- Renewed their commitment to the Lord and discerned afresh His call upon their life
- Wrote a few, clear, concise statements of what was learned through this time

#### Questions to Ask Yourself During This Phase:

1. How will we transition back into ministry while translating life-giving patterns into the reality of challenging ministry demands?

#### Questions Sabbatical Advisors Might Ask During This Phase:

1. With what you’ve learned in the last phases, what adjustments do you need to make in your life or ministry to more accurately reflect your design and desires?
2. What do you sense God has for your future?
  - Realignment?
  - Reassignment?
3. If you lack clarity about the future, what specific steps might you take to see more clearly?

4. Can you describe your perfect job? Be sure to include elements or functions you consider essential. Also pinpoint those that should NOT be your primary responsibility.
5. Does your sabbatical support group think you've completed your sabbatical? Do they affirm your job selection and job description?

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## SABBATICAL DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

It's very important for you to take time to reflect on the sabbatical and capture major lessons in writing. After you complete the debriefing questions below, send a copy to your sabbatical advisor and supervisor and discuss your responses with them.

### Personal Questions

1. What decisions have you made related to your ministry assignment?
2. What are major lessons learned and how do you anticipate them making a difference?
3. What do you believe God has spoken to you during your sabbatical?
4. Do you have any emotional healing or relational healing issues you realized you need to work on? What's your next step?

Process Questions (Please send these responses to [sabbatical@mygeosync.com](mailto:sabbatical@mygeosync.com) with "PI Sabbatical Guide" in the Subject Line.)

1. What activities were most helpful during each phase of your sabbatical?
2. What activities were least helpful during each phase?
3. What would you do differently?
4. Would you consider being a sabbatical advisor to another member? If so, please share this with your PI leader.
5. Do you have ideas, suggestions, or comments to help us improve the *PI Sabbatical Guidelines*?

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## PHASE V – RE-ENTRY AND RE-ENGAGEMENT

### Engaging at the right pace

Re-engaging correctly is an extremely important part of the sabbatical process. It can make or break the success of the whole experience. Below are some helpful tips:

- Plan your re-engagement even before you start the sabbatical.
- Plan a phased-in engagement where you don't resume all of your responsibilities again overnight. The temptation will be to plunge in quickly, but this will reduce the long-term benefits of your sabbatical.
- Make sure that your re-entry includes an emphasis on relationships and reconnecting with people.
- Try to incorporate into your lifestyle new enduring habits and disciplines that can be traced back to your sabbatical.
- Process ahead of time how your new sabbatical lifestyle will translate into the ministry context. Which patterns will you retain? How could some patterns be modified for a busier schedule? What is non-negotiable?

At the beginning of this phase, be aware that your pace of life will increase and that transition is stressful. Expect emotional disorientation and spiritual warfare as you re-engage.

### What Other Members Have Done During This Phase:

- Resumed ministry responsibilities half time for the first month
- Set up extra accountability relationships to help with changes they want to make in life and ministry
- Coached ministry and teammates on their desired changes
- Scheduled no major responsibilities for at least the first 4 months

### Questions Sabbatical Advisors Might Ask During This Phase:

1. What changes have you experienced as you've re-engaged?
2. How can we help you as you re-enter ministry?

### Sample Sabbatical Advisor Checklist: Re-Entry & Re-Engagement Phase

- The member has communicated and worked out with their supervisor and team their desires and expectations for re-entry.
- The member is maintaining a good pace.

# IV. SABBATICAL PROCESS CHECKLIST

## RESPONSIBILITIES

- Member and spouse – Give themselves to the sabbatical process and experience all God has for them.
- Supervisor – Give feedback on issues, and approve sabbatical along with sending church and Mobilization Base leaders.
- Sabbatical advisor – Shepherd member through the sabbatical process, hold accountable, help process.

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### SABBATICAL INITIATION

#### Things to think through as you consider a sabbatical:

##### Initiation

- Process can be initiated by member or supervisor.
- Member and supervisor review PI Sabbatical Statement in IHB and *PI Sabbatical Guide*
- Supervisor approves the sabbatical, along with mobilization base leader and sending church leader.
- Member and spouse consider how to maximize one another's involvement in the sabbatical.

##### Selection of Sabbatical Advisor

- Member determines who could be a sabbatical advisor.
- Begin drafting a sabbatical plan for approval by PI leadership.

##### Sabbatical Orientation Workshop

- Member considers attending a Navigators Sabbatical Orientation Workshop during Release and Relinquish Phase.

##### Becoming One Retreat/Galatians 6:6 Intimacy Retreat

- Member considers attending a Marriage Intimacy Retreat, determines the best time and location for them, and makes travel arrangements.

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## SABBATICAL TIME OVERVIEW

### Once the Sabbatical decision is made:

#### **Sabbatical Phase I – Release and Relinquish – *Exiting from leadership and ministry responsibilities***

- Member disengages from leadership and ministry responsibilities (usually takes 6 months +/-).
- Member gets input/feedback from supervisor for the sabbatical.
- Member may attend Navigators Sabbatical Orientation Workshop.
- Member drafts sabbatical plan.
- Member sends a copy of sabbatical plan to supervisor, Mobilization Base leader, sending church leader, and sabbatical advisor.
- Member tells current ministry and support team about the sabbatical.
- Member does fundraising to fund the sabbatical.

#### **Phase II – Rest and Recovery – *Establishing margin and managing the pace of life***

- Sabbatical advisor (SA) makes sure member has pulled back from ministry and leadership responsibilities
- SA helps member keep the sabbatical their focus.
- SA ensures that action steps have been taken to promote rest.
- Member, spouse, and SA have read Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of A Leader, by Shelley Trebesch and discussed it.
- SA has met with member at least bi-monthly.
- Member has contacted PI supervisor at least once with an update.
- Member may have attended a Marriage Intimacy Retreat.

#### **Phase III – Reflect and Refocus – *Experiencing God and self in new or deeper ways***

- Member has experienced extended time alone with God.
- SA has met with member at least bi-monthly.
- Member has contacted supervisor at least once with an update.
- If needed, member has experienced Healing Prayer.
- Member has read books of interest.

#### **Phase IV – Realignment and/or Reassignment – *Empowering for maximum contribution***

- Member contacts supervisor to discuss his future role. SA can serve as liaison for negotiating a job adjustment or change.
- Member clarifies/reaffirms his calling.
- SA has met with member at least bi-monthly.
- Member and supervisor have agreed on Realignment or Reassignment.
- Member completed and discussed debriefing questions with supervisor and SA.

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## POST-SABBATICAL

### Once the sabbatical is completed:

#### Debriefing/Closure Questions

It's very important to take time to reflect on the sabbatical and capture major lessons in writing. The member should complete the debriefing questions and discuss them with their sabbatical advisor and supervisor. A written copy of the completed questions should be sent to the individual's supervisor and sabbatical advisor.

#### Personal Questions

1. What is your final (current) decision on your ministry assignment?
2. What are the major lessons learned and how do you anticipate their making a difference?
3. Do you believe God has spoken to you during your sabbatical?
4. Do you have any emotional healing or relational healing issues you want to work on? What's your next step?

Process Questions (Please send these responses to [sabbatical@mygeosync.com](mailto:sabbatical@mygeosync.com) with "PI Sabbatical Guide" in the Subject Line.)

1. What activities were most helpful during each phase of your sabbatical?
2. What activities were least helpful during each phase?
3. What would you do differently?
4. Would you consider being a sabbatical advisor to other member?
5. Do you have ideas, suggestions, or comments to help us improve the sabbatical process?

#### **Phase V – Re-Entry and Re-Engagement – Engaging at right pace**

- Member re-engages at a pace beneficial for him (and spouse).
- Member talks with his team about his expectations and desires for re-entry into his ministry role.

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## FOLLOWUP

### 3-6 Months after Sabbatical

Initiate debrief with a PI leader:

1. How's it going?
2. What changes have you experienced?
3. What has been the impact of your sabbatical?
4. Is there anything we can do for you?

# APPENDIX

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## COMMUNICATING ABOUT A SABBATICAL

Here are some helpful thoughts from Steve Brown of The Navigators on how to communicate *practically*, *corporately*, and *biblically* about sabbaticals to your church and friends.

### **PRACTICALLY**

In Christian work, the messenger is the message. If we don't embody the message, the morals, and the model, it's probably time for a sabbatical: an extended time of rest, reflection, and realignment. Someone in a secular role could have an affair, struggle with an addiction, or be distant from God, and still be "effective" at work. But in a Christian ministry, this would be hypocritical.

The pace of life in the U.S. is accelerating. With every generation we need to figure out fresh ways to deal with the added pressures. Moving too fast over too long a period of time leads to burnout. Every leader experiences depletion to some extent and wishes for a way out.

Here are some thoughts on burnout and busyness from Dave Legg:

- Life in overload → life without margin → stress without recovery → physical/emotional exhaustion and spiritual dryness = burnout
- Busyness → no unhurried time to think, pray, listen, be in Word → barrenness (no fruit)
- Burnout - when you start to resent your calling, something is wrong.

### **CORPORATELY**

Testimony from The Navigators mission: *"For 65 years The Navigators did not encourage members to take sabbaticals. In 1998 we initiated a policy to change our corporate culture; all members are strongly encouraged to take a 3-6 month sabbatical every 7-10 years. We believe (and have experienced) that it pays us and them dividends in the long run. This is part of being good stewards of the resources God has given us. Our people are our greatest resource."*

### **BIBLICALLY**

Any sabbatical is a cultural application of the biblical principle of Sabbath – "regular times of no regular work". Although the Bible has numerous verses on Sabbath, there is nothing in the Bible on sabbaticals per se.

Two passages that have spoken to me are:

Gen 1-3 – I find it interesting that the third thing God blessed was rest (2:3) and the third thing God cursed was the work of man's hand (3:17-19). God blessed rest and cursed the work of man's hand. Our nature is to get the things of God backwards; today we bless work and curse rest. That is not the way God did it.

Lev. 23 and 25 - I don't want to put us under the law, but it is interesting that God laid out a lifestyle for His people. In Lev. 23 and 25 God lays out the Sabbath day, the appointed times/feasts to the Lord, the Sabbath year, and the Year of Jubilee. Notice God intended that there should be regular periods of no regular work as a lifestyle for His people.

*The greatest gift you can give the world is your intimacy with God.*

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## APPENDIX B

### WILL PEOPLE GIVE TO ME WHEN I GO ON SABBATICAL?

YES!

When I began overseeing the sabbatical process, the first survey I asked of a member who had been on a sabbatical included four questions:

- Did you lose any donor support when you went on sabbatical?
- Did you gain any donor support when you went on sabbatical?
- Did you have any negative feedback from going on sabbatical?
- How did you communicate about your sabbatical?

No one lost any donor support. Some actually gained support. Two different members each had someone give negative feedback for going on sabbatical. When the members explained our sabbatical process to these critics, both negatives became very positive. One even said, "If anyone gives you a hard time, send them to me."

We encourage you to raise funds for your sabbatical and use this opportunity to make up any deficit you have. When I was preparing for my sabbatical, an aunt who'd never given to us before sent a generous gift, just because we were going on sabbatical.

Most misgivings about donors funding our sabbatical come from our own fears. They're not founded in reality. Most donors give to you because they love you and share your vision. Churches, too, have been supportive when they understand our sabbatical process.

God promises to meet all your needs. This includes your needs during your sabbatical.

On the next few pages are sample letters used by our members to raise funds or to tell their support team about their sabbatical. May these help you as you plan your funding strategy.

*...by His power may He fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.*

2 Thess 1:11

*And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Phil 4:19

**SAMPLE LETTERS**  
**Sample Sabbatical Fundraising Letter**

February 15, 2006

Dear Friend,

We wanted you to be among the first to know what’s happening in our ministry with The Navigators and to ask for your continued partnership in funding.

Jane and I have reached significant milestones in our lives and ministry in the past two months. We celebrated 25 years of marriage in October, and this month we mark 22 years of serving with The Navigators. Both have been rewarding adventures!

We began with The Navigators in 1982 by pioneering new ministry at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs. For the last 14 years, we’ve supervised 150 Nav staff who minister at 47 military installations around the world. We have gladly given our lives to help advance the gospel among military personnel for these 22 years and feel we still have so much more to do! Yet, in recent months, we’ve felt fatigued and spiritually and emotionally depleted.

The Navigators recognizes that for staff to have long-term effectiveness in ministry, they must occasionally step back from ministry to rest, recover, reflect, and refocus. The Navigators has created a sabbatical process for that very purpose. With the support of our leadership, Jane and I will begin a six-month sabbatical in April.

No, sabbatical is not a vacation! In fact, it’s a structured, supervised time to intentionally replenish and regroup for future ministry. The first phase is resting and recovering—doing what puts energy back into our tired bodies. The second phase is reflecting and refocusing—learning more about God and ourselves. The final phase is realignment—seeking God’s best fit for us in life and ministry. During our sabbatical, we’ll meet regularly with an advisor as we work through our personalized sabbatical plan. All of this is to prepare us to finish well the ministry to which God has called us.

Financial needs can add pressure to our lives at a time when we need to reduce stress. We face a shortfall of \$987 in our regularly pledged support, which calculates to \$11,844 annually. More than ever, we need our faithful ministry partners to stand with us as we go through the sabbatical. Thank you for being so committed to us in the past. Now during this unique time in our ministry, **would you prayerfully consider increasing your monthly support or making a special contribution to help with our financial needs?** Whatever God lays on your heart for us is received with gratitude.

Your investments make a difference for eternity. Please know how we appreciate you.

Sincerely,

Joseph and Jane Workers

P.S. To make a gift, please return the enclosed card with a check made payable to The Navigators. May we hear from you by April 15? Thank you!

SERVING WITH  THE NAVIGATORS

Joseph and Jane Workers • 123 My Street • My Town, MT • 12345

Purpose

Relationship

Sabbatical

Ask

## Sample Letter #1 for Communicating Your Sabbatical to Your Supporters

*"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some **rest**."* – Mark 6:31

Arlene and I are on the threshold of a welcome and timely opportunity.

Six months ago, after 25 years with PI and nine years of leadership here in the U.S., the PI board of directors encouraged us to schedule a period of time for rest, reflection, and personal renewal. Embracing the idea, we began planning a 4-month sabbatical to begin October 20, 2008, and to conclude February 28, 2009.

We have some projects in mind, but the overriding goals are simple – time with the Lord, time with family, and an opportunity to recalibrate spiritually, emotionally and professionally. Needless to say, we are really looking forward to it.

We anticipate returning to our PI responsibilities in a few months with fresh vision and perspective.

Here are some ways you can pray for us:

1. Pray we will truly quiet our hearts and wait on the Lord, listening for His voice.
2. Pray we will experience a rejuvenating change of pace. For example, Arlene and I hope to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary with a special trip.
3. Pray for executive VP Ted, my dedicated assistant Barb, and the entire PI-USA team of 120 staff as they press ahead with various programs and activities, including the Story '08 conference December 28-January 1.

With your kind permission we will pretty much “disappear” for a while!

The Lord bless you, and thank you for your friendship and faithful prayer support,

Steve and Arlene

## Sample Letter #2 for Communicating Your Sabbatical to Your Supporters

We wanted to share a bit about how the Lord has been working in our hearts recently. Over the past 12 months or so, Ellen and I have begun to sense that God is moving us toward a transition in our life. We have served as regional leaders for the PI Mid-Asia region for the past six years, and we sense that the time is right to 'pass the baton' of leadership to others. We have been mentoring our replacements for several years now, and we believe that there are several wonderfully-gifted and Godly leaders ready to step in and take up the cloak of leadership responsibility for this region.

We believe strongly in the spiritual authority of the church, and so we are sending a letter to the pastors of our supporting churches to request prayer and counsel. We do not sense that God is calling us away from ministry among the unreached, or that we are called to leave PI, but simply that this is the right time to transfer the leadership of our region to another and move into our next assignment from God. We do not yet know what that assignment might be – whether back into a direct CP ministry somewhere in the region, or perhaps into another leadership role to support CP efforts. John, our International Director, has committed to processing this with us.

Our current term as regional leaders will be completed on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, and so we have asked John to choose our replacement by October of this year so that we can further train them and give them specific orientation to their new roles. Our hope is to complete the leadership transition by that date in March 2009. John will actually select two new regional leaders because the region has grown so large and is ready to be sub-divided into two smaller regions.

Ellen and I remain committed to God's call on our lives to full-time cross-cultural ministry among the unreached. We sense that this transition is a wonderful forward step in God's Kingdom, and is not a result of fatigue or discouragement at all. We are actually thrilled to be able to empower the next leaders, and have a deep sense of anticipation about whatever God has next for us. It is with great joy that we step out in faith just as we did when we first left for China nearly 20 years ago.

As part of this decision-making process, we would be very grateful for any input and wisdom you might have for us. We have been praying earnestly and trusting that God will direct our paths. As part of this transition, we sense the Lord directing us to take a sabbatical in early 2009 before launching into home assignment (furlough), and then our future ministry role. For the past 19 years, we have not had a significant rest from ministry, and we are prayerfully considering this transition window as an excellent opportunity to stop, reflect, study, and devote ourselves to prayer before moving into the next season of ministry. We trust that He would use this time to launch us into His next trust for us. We really would love to have the input and advice of our sending church leaders into this idea also. John Fletcher has agreed to mentor us in planning and setting goals for an effective, suitable sabbatical. Also, Sunder Krishnan (brother-in-law of Ravi Zacharius) has agreed to mentor us through this process. He is a pastor in Canada who will be taking his third sabbatical in the spring of next year.

We look forward to hearing from you, and we deeply appreciate your prayers. We are thankful for you and for your faithful prayers and support.

With joy and anticipation, Eric and Ellen

**REST FOR THE WEARY**

Renewal for women through mini-sabbatical events

by Denele Ivins

My hands gripped the steering wheel as my mini-van cut through the ranch-strewn countryside of eastern Oregon. I was escaping to a retreat center for cross-cultural workers, in desperate need of rest and restoration. It had been nine months since we packed up our lives in East Asia and returned to the U.S. After 18 years of Asian life, our move back to the States was not a return “home,” but was a painful uprooting of what God had planted deeply in the land where we raised our children and made disciples.

As I drove, rest and restoration seemed unlikely. All I could think of was what I’d left behind—my undone to-do list and loose ends for my family in my absence. My mind raced with doubts and guilt: “I don’t really need to do this,” “What kind of mother leaves her family for a week with an empty refrigerator?” and “I should have brought my family along; they need it too.”

But as the miles passed, the almost-empty roads, the rural landscape and the quietness began to work magic. My hands began to loosen their tense grip on the steering wheel. I already felt calmer—and hope was building in me that God might use this time away to restore me.

Five days later, I retraced my journey on those rural roads. With the windows down and the radio off, my mind was still busy, but with thoughts of a different type. As I thought of my husband and children and their needs through our recent East-to-West transition, I was able to pray for them in a deeper, more trusting way than I had for a long time. My heart for ministry, which had been numb for a stretch of time, was waking up. I dreamed about the possibility of taking a group from our church back to our adopted land on a short-term trip. I broke the nine-month musical silence when I sang praise songs in the privacy of my van. All at once, as I maneuvered curving mountain roads, I realized that I was refreshed. Creativity and energy and praise were returning—and hope had been restored.

**THE ROAD TO RECOVERY**

My five days at a cross-cultural worker retreat center was just what I needed. But how did I even know that I needed to get away? The truth is that I was weary to my core and unable to take any action to help myself. Caring brothers and sisters saw my condition and made a diagnosis: emotional exhaustion and possible burnout because of the trauma of our transition back to life in the U.S. Beyond a diagnosis, God was gracious to give them a prescription—a care plan to restore me back to emotional health.

Through debriefing with our church and the Navigators, I began to understand how very tired I was. I left China tired, and then, as mom’s do, I set aside my need for rest to attend to the huge task of settling my children—grades 6, 8 and 12—into their new lives in their passport country. Our sending organization very gently but persistently suggested the value of taking a sabbatical after 18 years of serving overseas. My husband was able to take a manner of one, but I found myself unable to even sit and read anything for more than five minutes. The needs around me—carpooling, phone calls, dusty floors, and dirty dishes—seemed to scream at me throughout my waking hours.

Across the table over lunch that week in Colorado, cross-cultural worker care counselor Shirley Wilson asked me about taking a sabbatical. My question, in a choked voice, was how could I even entertain the idea of a sabbatical—a release from regular responsibilities to refresh and renew and learn—when I faced the task of guiding my children through their transition, not to mention the relentlessness of the tasks of daily life. I can't just take off three months from life, I said.

Shirley saw my sense of drowning in my eyes—and she threw me a lifeline. “Why don't you take mini-sabbaticals?” she asked, coining a new phrase right then—mini-sabbatical events. With some well-placed questions, Shirley guided me to discover what would best refresh me. My deepest longing, she helped me see, was to get away by myself, in places with heavy doses of mountains and pine trees and quietness, where I could rest, explore, hike, bike, read and pray.

### **REST FOR MY SOUL**

My first foray into solitude came seven weeks later. I left our home in Boise, Idaho, and drove two hours to a little inn on the Billingsley Creek just before it pours into the Snake River. I wanted to quiet myself enough to hear God's voice. I took my Bible down to the creek-side swinging bench. My weariness was so deep that all I could do was open it up to the Psalms. I remember how I read a few verses, only to have my eyes blur over with tears. During my three days there, I did my part by showing up on that swing with God's word in my lap, asking Him to restore me. And He did! One of the greatest burdens I carried with me on that first retreat was the deep disappointment for my daughter Claire and her college admissions process that year. I was able to walk away from that three-day retreat with thankfulness for the scholarships to the local university—and feel a huge burden lifted.

### **A MIRROR FOR REFLECTION**

On my Oregon “mini-sabbatical event,” God revealed to me a root reason for my weariness. I'd been putting the blame solely on the transition of the past months, but He gently reminded me that my weariness came mainly from the accumulation of the sacrifices of 18 years of living and reaching out cross-culturally.

One day I sat in the sunshine on my private deck, meditating on Psalm 20:1-3:

*May the Lord answer you when you are in distress;  
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you.  
May He send you help from the sanctuary  
And grant you support from Zion.  
May He remember all your sacrifices  
And accept your burnt offerings.*

*I began by asking God to do this for me, to answer my distress, protect me, and send me help and support. As I took the time to reflect and let His spirit work through His word, I could see how He had been doing this all along! He remembered my sacrifices even before I did—and I began recounting in my journal a long list of ways He had answered, protected, helped and supported me.*

## **NURTURE FROM NATURE**

Significant as these spiritual moments were for me, it would be dishonest to make it sound like I spent entire days in monk-like meditation. In truth, these deeper moments punctuated days full of walks, bike rides, hikes, meals out and a good novel.

On my first trip, my walks were leisurely—mostly on the way to the small-town diner where I ate comfort food three times a day. But the springtime greenness and brilliant blue skies helped me rediscover both the beauty of my home state Idaho and the value of quietness. I cruised my van slowly down the country roads, marveling at the landscape carved out by the Snake River. On one drive down in the canyon, a bird burst into song just as I drove past; the beauty of it and a sense of God’s love brought tears to my eyes.

This was physical restoration, after almost two decades of urban life—where instead of mountains, construction cranes rose above the horizon at every turn, and instead of the serenade of songbirds, the blare of taxi horns and yells of teaming life were what constantly assaulted my senses.

The healing power of nature was just as important in my second and third retreats, but I felt more energetic and was able to be much more active, enjoying long hikes and bike rides.

## **RESOLVED TO REST**

While I couldn’t manage a lengthy sabbatical, Shirley’s prescription for personal retreats—my mini-sabbatical events—were just what I needed to renew my body, mind, and soul after the years’ sacrifices of service and the transitions of the last year.

As I climbed into the small backcountry plane to leave my last retreat—feeling energetic, rested and hopeful—I resolved not to wait until my weariness calls for emergency measures. I am determined to make this a life-long habit—to take time out to seek solitude, rest and renewal. To come to Him and let Him give me rest.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest....  
You will find rest for your souls.” Matt. 11:28, 29*

## TWELVE STEPS TO RENEWAL: TIPS FOR PLANNING YOUR OWN PERSONAL RETREAT

- 1. Admit your need for rest.** There's no shame in being tired because you're serving others. You're only human.
- 2. Put it on the calendar.** Once you determine your need for a rest, get a date on the calendar before it fills up. Stick to it! Resist the inevitable temptation to cancel as the time draws near.
- 3. Get the support of your family and friends.** Share with your husband why you'd like to try a personal retreat; after all, he's the one who'll hold down the fort when you're gone. Ask your close friends to pray for you through the process.
- 4. Resist taking someone else.** A personal retreat is a great idea, so everyone who hears your plans will want to come along. For maximum renewal, keep it solo. Encourage them to take their own personal retreat.
- 5. Don't feel guilty.** While it's true that you're leaving behind needs and tasks, the *unselfish* thing is to make renewal a priority. You'll return strengthened for the tasks at hand.
- 6. Customize your retreat.** Think through what's restful for you. Rustic or luxurious? Active or quiet? Mountains or ocean? Near or far?
- 7. Include the nature element.** The heavens do declare His glory, and are the perfect setting in which to be renewed.
- 8. Take advantage of resources.** Check with your ministry organization for retreat venues in your area designed especially for ministry workers. These are usually low-cost and sometimes offer counseling and other resources.
- 9. Think creatively.** Consider off-season church camps, a friend's mountain cabin, or an inexpensive motel in a place you'd like to visit.
- 10. Address the whole person.** Include elements of rest and renewal for your body, mind and soul.
- 11. Take a well-stocked tool chest.** Be prepared. Pack your Bible, a devotional book and other Christian books, a songbook or hymnal, and your journal. (But don't feel bad if you don't use much of what you bring.) For the whole person, pack a good novel for lighter reading, as well as your favorite snacks.
- 12. Have great expectations.** Expect God to meet you in a special way. He specializes in giving rest to the weary. All He asks of us is to come.

## SAMPLE SABBATICAL PLAN

Name: Joe and Jane Members  
Sabbatical dates: March-August

Sabbatical Advisor: Ben Johnson

### Phase I – Release And Relinquish (5-8 Months Before Sabbatical Begins) Exiting from leadership and ministry responsibilities

- Read Contemplative Pastor by Eugene Peterson (esp. the final chapter)
- Complete assessment inventories.
- Complete Sabbatical Care Interview.
- Develop sabbatical plan.
- Send sabbatical plan to PI supervisor, mobilization base leader and sending church leader for approval.
- Communicate sabbatical to supporters.
- Transfer or complete ministry/leadership responsibilities.
- Establish sabbatical support group.
  1. Jeff and Sue Smith
  2. Peter and Joan Wilson
  3. Paul and Marie Jones
- Attend Navigators Sabbatical Orientation Workshop in Colorado.
- Complete fundraising for sabbatical as necessary.
- Meet with sabbatical advisor to review sabbatical plan, process, pray

### Phase II – Rest And Recovery (March-April) Establishing Margin And Managing Pace Of Life

- Read: Isolation: A Place of Transformation in the Life of A Leader, by Shelley Trebesch  
The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath, by Mark Buchanan  
Abba's Child by Brennan Manning  
The Overload Syndrome by Dick Swenson
- Finish projects around house.
- Play in softball league.
- Fishing trip with iron-sharpen-iron friends.
- Go to Bed & Breakfast with Jane.
- Attend Galatians 6:6 Intimacy Retreat.
- Meet with sabbatical advisor to review sabbatical plan, process, pray

### Phase III – Reflect And Refocus (May-June) Experiencing God And Self In New/Deeper Ways

- Read Connecting, by Larry Crabb, and Reaching for the Invisible God, by Philip Yancey.
- Attend Bill Hybles' Summit on leadership.
- Take two extended prayer retreats asking God what He wants to say to me.
- Crystallize personal passions.
- Meet with sabbatical advisor to review sabbatical plan, process, pray

#### **Phase IV – Reassignment/Realignment (July-August) Empowering For Maximum Contribution**

- Clarify my calling.
- Confirm God’s direction for realignment in current role.
- Get counsel from supervisors, Jim and Gary.
- Complete Sabbatical Debriefing Questions and send to supervisors, SA, and SD.
- Meet with sabbatical advisor to review sabbatical plan, process, pray

#### **Phase V – Re-Entry/Re-Engagement (September-October) Engaging at right pace**

- Determine right pace to re-engage.
- Communicate to supervisor and team my desires and expectations for re-entry.

#### **Agreements**

1. Keep my sabbatical a priority focus.
2. Regular journaling.
3. Bi-monthly day alone with God.
4. Jane will participate as appropriate.
5. Take initiative to stay current with sabbatical advisor and supervisors.
6. Disengage from ministry activities and travel as agreed in the sabbatical plan.
7. Be transparent and vulnerable.
8. Consider becoming a sabbatical advisor for someone in the future.

#### **Accountability – take initiative for**

1. Bi-monthly meetings/phone calls with sabbatical advisor.
2. Monthly meeting with sabbatical support team.
3. Once per phase update supervisors.

#### **Priority Issues [Note: Normally A List Would Not Be This Long]**

From Sabbatical Care Interview, input for others, own prayers

1. Ministry overload, over commitment, overwork
2. Perfectionism
3. Partnering in ministry
4. Disappointment
5. Self-doubt
6. Critical spirit
7. Anger
8. Fear
9. Role-fit
10. Marriage

#### **Miscellaneous**

- Confirm meeting schedule with sabbatical advisor.
- Define possible future role with \_\_\_\_\_.
- Resolve conflict with \_\_\_\_\_.

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## APPENDIX E

### INVENTORIES: ROLE FIT; BURN OUT; PERSONAL AND MARITAL

#### ***ROLE FIT INVENTORY***

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Carefully read each of the ten statements below, and insert the number between 1 and 5 that best represents your response.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

- \_\_\_ In my current role, I'm utilizing my primary gifts and abilities.
- \_\_\_ I'm motivated and challenged in my day-to-day activities.
- \_\_\_ I draw satisfaction and fulfillment from my current contributions.
- \_\_\_ I feel energized and encouraged in my primary responsibilities.
- \_\_\_ I have a sense that I'm making a significant contribution to my organization.
- \_\_\_ The ability to fulfill my current responsibilities comes naturally and easily.
- \_\_\_ I receive feedback from others that I'm in a good role-fit.
- \_\_\_ I experience little frustration in my current role.
- \_\_\_ I don't experience unmanageable stress in my current role.
- \_\_\_ My relationships with co-workers are generally free of conflict.
  
- \_\_\_ **Total**

#### INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

40 – 50 Maximizing  
15 – 39 Moderate  
0 – 14 Marginal

## ***BURNOUT INVENTORY***

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These questions may give you an idea of how heavily you're experiencing burnout. Rate your response to each question on a scale from 1 to 5. (1 = Doesn't describe me at all. 5 = Describes me very accurately.)

- I'm exhausted much of the time, and rest doesn't seem to help much.
- I don't get as much satisfaction from ministry as I used to.
- Most mornings, I dread beginning my ministry responsibilities.
- I feel like a failure in the ministry.
- I don't sleep as well as I used to; or I'm sleeping more than I used to.
- It's more and more difficult for me to deal with people's problems.
- I have more difficulty making decisions than I used to.
- I get very frustrated when things don't go well in the ministry.
- More and more I find myself thinking about leaving PI.
- I feel greatly bothered or guilty about ministry responsibilities not done or not done well.
- I get angry and/or irritable more easily than I used to.
- I often feel a sense of emptiness and depletion, as if I have nothing more to give.
- The ministry gives me very little or no joy.
- I'm concerned that I won't be able to last much longer in the ministry.
- It's getting more and more difficult to do some aspects of the ministry.
- I struggle with feeling pressure to perform and succeed.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Total**

### ASSESSING YOUR LEVEL OF BURNOUT

- 15-29: You probably don't have a problem with burnout.
- 30-49: You may be experiencing mild to moderate burnout.
- 50-64: You may be suffering significant burnout.
- 65-75: You may be in serious trouble.

Adapted from a similar *Burnout Inventory* prepared by Ken Williams, Ph.D., Wycliffe Bible Translators, Inc.

## PERSONAL AND MARITAL SURVEY

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(To debrief with member care specialist. Each spouse should fill out a separate survey. Information to be kept confidential.)

### I. GENERAL INFORMATION

In what area or areas of difficulty would you like help?

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What results you would like to see?

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*Optional Question – If you're comfortable, please list any physical conditions that may impact your sabbatical.*

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When was the last time you had a physical? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please indicate any conditions that apply to you:**

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches             | <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia              | <input type="checkbox"/> Fainting                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of initiative       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug problems            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness            | <input type="checkbox"/> Inferiority                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol problems         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indecisiveness        | <input type="checkbox"/> Nerves                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Nervousness              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Racing heartbeat      | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejection                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Stomach problems         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constipation          | <input type="checkbox"/> Appetite loss                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal thoughts        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vomiting              | <input type="checkbox"/> Work difficulty               | <input type="checkbox"/> Memory loss              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandonment           | <input type="checkbox"/> Weight gain                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems at home         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking               | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual control problems  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic difficulty   | <input type="checkbox"/> Marital difficulty            | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with parents    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss           | <input type="checkbox"/> Attention deficit             | <input type="checkbox"/> Phobias                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep too much                | <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessions               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual addiction      | <input type="checkbox"/> Strange thoughts              | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating disorder       | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with pornography     | <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse by spouse          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of hope          | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties with friendships |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty relaxing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Abusive to spouse             |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning difficulties | <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure           |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tiredness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares                    |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety               |  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Panic attacks         |  |   |

Do any other physical/emotional conditions apply to you?

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**STRESS LEVEL**

How would you evaluate your level of stress on a rating of 1-10 (10 = high stress)? Explain.

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Are you struggling with attitudes such as resentment, anxiety, fear, pride, etc.?

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How would you rate the level of pressure you feel to perform and succeed?

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What relaxes and refreshes you?

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How would you evaluate your level of restlessness?

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**RELATIONSHIPS**

Do you have unresolved conflicts with people that need to be addressed?

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Do you experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, or insecurity?

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## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

What have you always wanted to do but never had the time?

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In what character areas do you feel the need to grow?

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In what ways are you developing your God-given gifts and design?

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## II. SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Assess your spiritual intimacy with God by assigning each aspect a number from 1 to 10 (10 = excellent).

- \_\_\_\_\_ My intimacy with Christ is truly vibrant and growing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Word and Spirit of God are speaking to me and guiding my mind, decisions, and significant relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have passages and promises from God for life and ministry that motivate me in my walk with Him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In my time alone with God I'm growing in thankfulness, praise, and worship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Intercessory prayer tends to be foundational to everything I do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm praying and believing God for my life, ministry, and significant relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My spiritual disciplines are strong and consistent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My motivation to live a life of devotion to Christ in purity of heart, ministering out of interest in the welfare of others, is strong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The joys, hardships, sufferings, and circumstances of my life are drawing me to a deeper love for and dependence on Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have a consistent inner sense that God deeply loves me, is present within me, is for me, and is active in my life.

Is there a spiritual discipline that I sense is weak and would like to grow in?

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Reflect on the above parameters of your spiritual life, as well as any others that come to mind. Talk to God about them and ask Him to speak to you. Is He putting His finger on some area of your spiritual life, urging you to develop in it? If so, what?

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### III. MARITAL INTIMACY

Independently of one another, please assess the following areas of your marriage by assigning each aspect of intimacy a number from 1 to 10 (10 = excellent). Then enter your spouse's ratings and compare.

View of		Aspect of Intimacy
Hus- band	Wife	
___	___	1. Our spiritual closeness through prayer and sharing the Word together is rich.
___	___	2. Frequent times of quality communication and special times away together are high priority.
___	___	3. We practice honest confession and genuine forgiveness when we hurt one another.
___	___	4. My spouse is good at sharing appreciation, and at speaking and showing love.
___	___	5. My spouse and I often agree on important issues concerning values and beliefs.
___	___	6. We generally understand and appreciate each other's differences.
___	___	7. We often share deep feelings and strong emotions like grief, sadness, and joy.
___	___	8. We give each other undivided attention when listening or talking.
___	___	9. Our communication is characterized by sharing on important and significant issues.
___	___	10. The handling of finances isn't usually a source of tension in our relationship
___	___	11. My spouse and I understand and accept our marital roles.
___	___	12. My spouse is responsive and sensitive to my needs and desires concerning our relationship.
___	___	13. My spouse and I experience community and meaningful relationships with a few close friends.
___	___	14. We're comfortable in our relationship with our children.
___	___	15. My spouse and I take part together in recreation, relaxation, and rest.
___	___	16. We have good and meaningful relationships with our in-laws and parents.
___	___	17. We partner together in some areas of common interests, and in ways that are consistent with individual design and desires.
___	___	18. Generally I am satisfied with our level of sexual intimacy.

## Assessing Your Level of Intimacy

- A. Record your responses to the questions and share with one another.
- B. Identify and talk about areas of significant agreement and disagreement.

Areas of Agreement

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Areas of Disagreement

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As a couple, what are your three greatest strengths?

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As a couple, what are your three greatest weaknesses?

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Identify and agree on one or two issues as most important to focus on during your sabbatical.

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#### IV. CAREGIVING AND COUNSELING

Is there anything else you'd like to discuss or explore?

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Is there any area in which you seem unable to make progress on your own?

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Have you seen counselors in the past? In what areas did you seek help? Was it helpful to you? If so, how?

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## **SABBATICAL SUPPORT GROUP**

A sabbatical support group is a group that ideally consists of 3-5 couples for married members or 3-5 people for singles (both PI members and non-PI members where possible) who have a good relationship with you. If you have finished a role and handed it over, it is crucial that you identify leaders within PI who will take responsibility for helping you find a new role.

This group meets with you (and your spouse) each month to help process your journey in a safe environment. You facilitate the meeting, sharing first your current progress and then asking for input. (When possible, your sabbatical advisor will participate in the group.) Ideally, people in the sabbatical support group should meet the following criteria:

- Have your best interest at heart.
- Willing to speak truth to you.
- People with whom you're willing to be transparent and vulnerable.  
(Transparent = open and honest about yourself. Vulnerable = invite others to speak into your life.)
- Willing to meet monthly for the duration of the sabbatical.

### **Guidelines for Sabbatical Support Group Members**

Thanks for serving our PI member on sabbatical! Here are some guidelines to help define your role as a member of the sabbatical support group:

#### **Guidelines**

1. Provide community for the staff on sabbatical and help offset isolation.
  - a. Gen 2:25 – Help them be fully known and fully accepted.
  - b. Phil 2:20 – Help them feel cared for and understood.
2. Keep their best interest at heart.
3. Speak truth to them.
4. Meet monthly with them as a group.
  - Beware of canceling an SSG meeting because a few people will be absent.
5. Help them work through their sabbatical plan.
6. Expect and encourage them to be transparent and vulnerable with you.
7. Pray regularly for them.

#### **Illustration of your role:**

1. Speak to the timing of moving from one phase to the next. You may see a need to extend or change a phase.
2. Speak to issues they're working through.

### **Sample Agenda for First Meeting**

1. Each person introduces himself.
2. Staff shares sabbatical plan and expectations for SSG.
3. Question-and-answer time.
4. Schedule next few SSG meetings.
5. Close in prayer.