SABBATICAL LEAVE REPORT – REV. NICHOLAUS CHOVE

Submitted to the

COMMUNITY OF HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH COUNCIL

Administered by Northern Texas Northern Louisiana Synod

Project Title:
SABBATICAL LEAVE
Time For Renewal and Vitality – Rest, Learn, and Explore

Reporter Pastor:
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Community of Hope Lutheran Church
Fort Worth, Texas
May 1, 2026

Sabbatical leave time frame June 1st, 2026 — August 6th, 2026

Places visited: Dallas/Cruise/Italy/Greece/Tanzania

1. Thanksgiving

I take this opportunity to give thanks to God for his mercy endures forever. I give thanks for his grace which is sufficient to me. I give thanks for the leadership of the NTNL Synod under Bishop Erik K.J. Gronberg, PhD. And Leadership of Community of Hope Lutheran Church, Fort Worth under President Larry Mercer for your financial and prayer support which made this Sabbatical successful.

2. My Sabbatical Vision was: To Rest, Learn, and Explore

All these goals are accomplished by 85% and that is due to running out of time and finances and other things that are beyond my control.

Goals: To find sometime for spiritual renewal, to find some rest, spend some time with my family, and explore some biblical sites for more education and experience and learn how other congregations do ministry and bring back to my congregation and see how we can apply in our own context. If possible. I will visit some churches in Tanzania and learn how they do ministry now, because is over twenty years since I left, I have not been back for that purpose.

Family – I need to have special time with my family focusing on our relationship and strengthen our bond. My wife and I are having 26th wedding anniversary on June 17, we want to spend some time together. And I will spend some time with our children, some of them we have not seen each other for a long time.

Educational – I want to learn how people do ministry in different settings. I will go and worship with different churches in the state and out of the country if possible. I will buy some books and try to read during my sabbatical time.

Explore – If finances allow, I want to visit some of the biblical sites such as Rome and Greece, also Tanzania and some of the places in the United States. The goal is to learn more of what I have been proclaiming and to learn how other people do ministry. I hope to bring the knowledge and see if will be beneficial to my congregation and my synod.
I believe this Sabbatical will help me to renew my strength and to give some time for the ministry (my congregation) to utilize their strength in my absence. It is good to take a break from each other.

This sabbatical will take me on time to rest and meditate for few days, then spend some time with my wife in our 26th years wedding anniversary, 8-day pilgrimage through Italy and Greece—the biblical geography of Paul's ministry and the historical geography of the Reformation that Luther's journey to Rome in 1510 helped set in motion. I will stand at Paul's tomb in Rome. I will walk the Areopagus where he preached to philosophers. I will visit Philippi—where Europe's first Christian was baptized—and read Philippians 4 at the riverside where Lydia knelt in the water. And few days in Tanzania to visit the churches there and learn how they do ministry.

This journey is not tourism. It is theological embodiment—allowing the geography of Scripture to interpret itself in a way no commentary can replicate. I expect to return a different preacher, a more grounded pastor, and a renewed servant of my congregation.

3. Dallas

Dallas (Days 1 – 18)

I was able to spend some time on the prayer mountain in Dallas for meditation and reflection. I spent some time with my children helping them to organize for graduation of Nicole (High school) and Maria (College). Then I and my wife went on a cruise out of Gaveston to the Caribbean, the experience that I never had

before. It was a great time together where phones were utilized at the minimum level and we celebrated our 26th Wedding anniversary in the cruise.

4. Italy – Rome (19 – 24)

Rome

I arrived in Rome and received by the Priest who took me to my hotel at the city center. After some rest he took me to the ruins of the Colosseum where the emperor used to wath events. That is the place where the early Christians were persecuted in front of the Roman emperor. Some were killed and eaten by lions who were kept hungry for that purpose. I visited the prison where the apostles Poul and Peter were kept and the palace where the emperor used to live.

The next day I went to visit Vatican and learn more about the Roman catholic regime. I visited the tombs of popes and the chapels in the Vatican. The place was very crowded with people around the world who came to visit Vatican.

The next day I visited St. Mary Bacilica, which is the largest Basilica, it was built to honor Mary as mother of God. Pope Franciscvs was buried in this Basilica. Then I visited St. John Basilica, which was built to honor John the Baptist. The Bishop of this Basilica is the Pope. They have a university operates an international campus in Rome, Italy. Then I visited Sancta Sanctorum - Scala Santa; the holy stairs Luther reportedly climbed on his knees in 1510—an act that tradition suggests planted a seed of questioning that bore fruit seven years later in Wittenberg. This is the holiest place in Roman catholic tradition because the stairs that Jesus climbed on his way to be judged was brought and set up for people to climb on their knees, in fact Martin Luther climbed them on his knee just before the reformation, I climbed on my knees too.

The following day visited the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, built over the tomb of the Apostle Paul—the same Paul whose letters on grace and faith provided the exegetical foundation for Luther's breakthrough.

Florence, The Renaissance was not only an artistic movement—it was a reawakening of classical and scriptural texts in the vernacular, but a movement also that prepared the soil in which the Reformation would grow. I visited Brunelleschi's Basilica di San Lorenzo and the Pazzi Chapel—monuments to the ordered, rational, human-scale beauty that shaped how Christians in the West began to imagine God and humanity differently.

My last day in Rome, I took a 5hr and 30min train from Rome to Bari on my way to Greece.

5. Greece (24 – 28)

I arrived Bari, southern Italy to catch a 9hrs boat to Igoumenitsa in Greece where I too a 5hrs bus to Thessaloniki. I felt like I was in missionary journey like the apostle Poul.

Thessaloniki

Paul planted the church in Thessaloniki on his second missionary journey and subsequently wrote two of the New Testament's earliest letters to this community. I visited Hagia Sophia Thessaloniki (7th century, UNESCO World Heritage) and visited the white tower and learn its history from its founding to the modern era. It has been a cosmopolitan urban Centre throughout history. Then I took a boat to explore the Aegean Sea for an hour learning the Thessaloniki history. The city is very nice, and the people are very kind, and the life cost is very reasonable, I stayed in the hotel which is in downtown.

Philippi

Of all the sites on this journey, Philippi may be the most significant for my tradition. It is where Lydia—Europe's first recorded Christian convert—was baptized by the river. I had the opportunity to visit the river and wash my hands in that river. I spent sometimes there learning the history. It is in this place where Paul and Silas were imprisoned because they set free the lady who was possessed by the evil spirit and she was the source of income to her masters. Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns at midnight, then the earthquake shook the foundation of the prison, the doors were openned. And it is where Paul, writing from his own imprisonment, composed the most joyful letter in the New Testament.

I spent a full day at the Archaeological Site of Philippi, walk to the River Gangites (Lydia's traditional baptismal site), and read Philippians 4:4–7 aloud at the water's edge. I have preached on "Rejoice in the Lord always". I said those words in the place where they were first heard. I went back to my hotel in Thessaloniki.

The next day I flew to Istanbul Turkey and spent nine hours before I connect my flight to Tanzania.

Fly to Tanzania to continue with Sabbatical in a different context.

6. Tanzania (29 – 44)

Dar es Salaam

Arrive in Dar es Salaam, I had a funeral to attend, one of my classmates had heart attack and lost his life. I had opportunity to speak and encourage the family and pray with them at the burial place. I spent the rest of the day with my family members who live in Dar es Salaam.

The following day I was at leisure adjusting my body from a lot of travels. I spent my evening with my classmate whom we have not met for over 30 years, it was a great moment to reconnect and share our life experience and pray together thanking God for the gift of life knowing that it is just by God's grace we are still alive, some of our classmate have passed away.

I drove to another city called Morogoro, this is where my older sister lives, W e were seven from my mother's womb four boys and three girls. Among the seven children three boys passed away in different times, I am the one who left and my sisters. So we planned the reunion for only four of us because we never meet and this was the opportunity. We met at my sister's place, and we spent two days together singing and praying, eating , drinking and had a great fellowship together.

I had a great opportunity to worship in my village where the Lutheran church and the Roman Catholic church are next to one another. It was a great surprise that after over 40years, some people were able to recognize me.

We drove from Iringa to Dodoma then to Arusha via the Mdori orphanage center where we spent some time with the children there. I visited Tumaini University Makumira and participate in a guided scripture study and prayer.

We drove to Dar es Salaam and spent three days visiting different churches before I catch my flight back to the United States. The final morning, I spent time journaling and packing, naming what I am carrying home and what I am leaving behind. I departed Dar es Salaam with a renewed sense of calling and a richer theological imagination.

I arrived in DFW metroplex ready to continue with the ministry. I spent some time to support a family to prepare my daughter for college, and rest before I get back to my congregation to serve.

4. Congregational Impact

I believe the congregation has a pastor who has been renewed not only personally but theologically—with fresh eyes on texts we have read together for years, and fresh gratitude for the tradition we share.

5. Congregational Readiness and Support

Community of Hope Lutheran Church is in a good hand. Our council fully supports this sabbatical and together we have planned the coverage during my absence. We have identified pastors and leaders to serve the congregation during the renewal period.

Our mutual trust has been built over 9 years of ministry together. The congregation understands that a renewed pastor is a gift to them.

6. Closing Statement

I did not seek this sabbatical for myself alone. I did for the congregation I serve and for the tradition I bear. A renewed pastor is a renewed congregation. I believe this journey is for all of us.

I am grateful for the generosity of the Mission Endowment and Community of Hope Lutheran Church for the vision behind this program—that the church is strengthened when its pastors are renewed. I humbly and gratefully submit this report.

Respectfully submitted,

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