

November 6, 2009

Dear Church,

I write to you just hours before beginning a three-month sabbatical leave. I am grateful for the privilege of serving as your General Minister and President and grateful, as well, for the compassionate spirit of the church that offers me time for renewal, rest and reflection.

Long a tradition in the academic community, sabbatical leaves have become more common among ministers. My leave will be for three months, from November 7, 2009 – February 6, 2010. I have always understood that a sabbatical should be mutually beneficial to the minister and the congregation or place of service. As a result, I have three main goals for my sabbatical:

1. **Rest:** Sleep, exercise and finally emptying boxes in our garage.
2. **Discernment of Call:** This sabbatical is timed for discernment of whether I sense a call to serve a second term as General Minister and President. (The church's process for selecting the next GMP begins this April with final vote to take place at the 2011 Nashville General Assembly.)
3. **Study and Reflection:** A third purpose is to deepen my reflection on God's wholeness and our Disciples calling in Christ to be a movement for wholeness. To that end, I will spend three weeks in the Middle East, meeting with people who are engaging the challenge of living with diversity. For two weeks, I will be headquartered at the Near East School of Theology and will hold conversations with Protestants and other Christians, inter-faith dialogue groups and political leaders. Our Global Ministries partners in Lebanon, together with the intentionality of the Lebanese efforts to remain diverse yet undivided (even through civil war and involvement in the Israel/Palestine conflict) make Beirut a rich ground for this kind of reflection. The third week will be in Israel/Palestine with an inter-faith group of religious leaders from the United States.

In addition, our daughter has been approved for ordination. I look forward to that joyful occasion this January.

During my time away, colleagues will share the work I usually do. Associate General Minister and Vice President, Todd Adams, will be the point person for most calls. He and Timothy James, Associate General Minister and Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation, will handle much of what usually comes across my desk. College of Regional Ministers President, Ruth Fletcher, will take on regional questions. President of the Council on Christian Unity, Robert Welsh, will handle ecumenical matters that I would normally handle. In addition, Larry Brown, Moderator of the General Assembly, together with Vice Moderators, Juan Rodriguez and Marilyn Williams, will continue to give leadership.

This sabbatical period, I am going to be disconnected from email and telephone, in order to truly concentrate on rest, discernment, reflection and renewal. I am grateful to the church for the gift of this time.

Blessings,

Sharon



Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

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