

Sabbatical Report for June-October 2022
Rev. Laura Thompson MN Valley UU Fellowship

MVUUF generously provides a Sabbatical leave for spiritual renewal for its minister after 5 years of continuous service. The profession of ministry can be particularly demanding on a person's mind, spirit and even their body. It is hoped that sabbatical leave will result in a reaffirmation of the call to the ministry and a rededication to the work and mission of MVUUF.

My sabbatical gave me time for this renewal through focused self-care, reading, spiritual practice, rest, travel, and time with family and friends. It was great to have this time away from the daily responsibilities of ministry, and I am eager now to return to MVUUF to hear about progress the fellowship has made in my absence, and to discover together where our shared ministry is leading us next.

I offer this report to the congregation, its leaders and staff as a means of accountability for my time away.

Self-Care and Healing

The day my sabbatical started in June, I began an intensive recovery journey at the Emily Program. The Emily Program is located right here in the Twin Cities and serves patients who struggle with all manners of eating disorders. I had turned to them for help with my disordered eating which presents in the form of binge/overeating behavior, poor body image and excessive thoughts around food. In June, I attended programming 6 hours per day in-person. By the end of June, I stepped down into a 3 hour per day online program which I continued until mid-July. I continue to meet regularly with a therapist and nutritionist from the Emily Program and I attend a weekly study and support group.

While my professional role at MVUUF often has me espousing the benefits of self-compassion, my personal relationship with self-compassion has historically been lacking. My recovery journey with the Emily Program presented an intensive pathway for me to practice radical self-acceptance while at the same time creating space for healing deep personal wounds and addressing unhelpful patterns and behaviors around food/eating. It has unveiled harsh judgments that I carry about myself and some members of my family and invited me into healthier ways of acknowledging and responding to those feelings that arise from my most vulnerable self. This experience is inviting me deeply to "practice what I preach" in honoring my own inherent worth and dignity.

My involvement in the Emily Program was the largest focal point of my sabbatical. I would not have had time to do this, without it greatly affecting my work, had I not been on sabbatical.

Rest and Renewal: Family and Travel

In mid-July, as my daily commitments to the Emily Program lessened, I was able to begin traveling and enjoying time to rest and time with family. Emily, a good friend and I spent 10 days at our beloved getaway on the North Shore. As Minnesotans we are truly blessed to be surrounded by such stunning nature. It is truly balm for the senses and for the spirit. Following that trip, I spent a few days visiting my brother and his family near Mille Lacs Lake. I had not been up to visit him since the summer of 2020, so it was good to see him and all the kids.

During the first week of August, Emily and I moved... again; all the way across the hall! We had been in a 1 bedroom unit in our apartment complex and then a coveted unit across the hall from us opened up. It is a 1 bedroom plus den, which is great since Emily works from home. It also has 2 bathrooms, 3x the closet space we had before, a larger patio and a bigger kitchen. We are very happy to have all of this additional space. I spent the rest of August focused on little craft projects, canning jams, reading novels and taking it easy, in general.

In September and October, I traveled to spend time with family and friends. I visited my son in Portland, OR and my parents on the Oregon Coast, before going to California to spend time with my sister and her family. The highlights of this trip were a visit to the Japanese Garden in Portland, time with my mom, shopping with my sister and meeting my 11-month old grand-nephew! I returned home for about 10 days and then hopped back on a plane for my second round of travel.

The next stop was Alabama where I spent time with my half-sisters, their families and my biological father. The weather was spectacular while I was there (glad I waited until October) and we were able to take in many walks in local parks. I also relished the experience of southern hospitality. From there, I headed to Boston to spend time with a very dear friend and colleague where we spent all of our time chatting and watching old sci-fi movies from the 1950s and 60s.

Having time to travel in the fall was wonderful as the weather is generally fantastic. I don't usually take time to travel in the spring or fall, because those are busier times in the church year that require more of my attention. As per my leave agreement with the Board before I left, I will still have two weeks of vacation and two weeks of study leave to use for the remainder of the 2022-23 church year, upon my return.

Spiritual Practice and Study

Meditation Study: A smaller portion of my sabbatical time was dedicated to study and spiritual practice. On the practice side, I regularly engaged in meditation on my own or as part of the weekly practice group at Common Grounds Meditation Center. I also attended two day-long silent retreats at the center. This practice has opened me up to being more fully present and mindful in daily living. I plan on continuing this practice on a regular basis to both improve my mindfulness and as a means of centering myself.

Pastoral-Care Study:

- The Art of Spiritual Care Training at the UU Institute: this was the training that the Pastoral Care Associates at MVUUF took as I was leaving for sabbatical. I took it to be a conversation partner with them in their learning; 20 hours of learning.
- Pastoral Care Crisis Intervention through the UUMA; 24 CEUs

Leadership:

- I am currently engaged with studying Brené Brown's *Dare to Lead* both by reading the book and engaging the workbook and tools provided to accompany it on her website. I will continue this study as I return to MVUUF and hope to start a group study with congregational leaders in the future.

Multiculturalism:

- I have been practicing Spanish with an online app everyday since the beginning of September; ¡Muy bueno!

Some books I read: *Daring Greatly & Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown, *You Are Here* by Thich Nhat Hanh, *Wherever You Go There You Are* by Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Sabbath* by Wayne Mueller, *Take What You Need* by Jen Crow, *Why Fish Don't Exist* by Lulu Miller

Gratitude

While my sabbatical was certainly a success for me, in that I do feel rested and renewed, it was also a success for the congregation. This is the first time that MVUUF has provided their full-time minister with a sabbatical leave. This was no small feat!

I am grateful to our Board for continuing to do the hard work of leading the congregation in an ever-changing environment, while giving me a needed break. Likewise, thanks to our committee leaders who keep the daily work of the church going. I am thankful to Congregational Care and our Pastoral Care Associates; Eve Bergmann, Tom Ehlinger and Becky McPeek for continuing to keep our care for one another a central part of our community. I am grateful to our amazing staff for stepping up during my absence. We are incredibly blessed to have such a capable, skilled and thoughtful staff at MVUUF. I could not ask for a better team!

Special thanks to those who helped lead Sunday services while I was gone; Linda Hayen, Fran Bohlke, Tom Ehlinger, Maria Bavier, Nicole Collins, Carla Ries, and Richard Duffin. And finally, HUGE thanks to Nancy Buckman, Linda Hayen and Leslie Swenson for taking on organizing Sunday services while I was gone. Sunday services are the cornerstone of our programming and they are a big under-taking week after week. In that space we show up for one another and challenge ourselves to show up in the world in the best ways we can, while grounding and recentering ourselves. I look very much forward to returning to MVUUF after a restful sabbatical.