

SABBATICAL

Submitted by Sue Ellen Williams, SPC Member

When you hear this word [sabbatical], what is your first reaction? You likely know it means someone is going to take time away for education or reflection. At Shallowford after seven years of service, ordained staff members are advised to take up to 12 weeks leave. **In 2021-2022, a sabbatical is going to happen here at Shallowford for Rev. Catherine E. Foster, Associate Pastor for Mission & Discipleship. The Shallowford session has voted to support Catherine in her upcoming plans and to uplift her different take on how her “12 weeks” will take shape.**

In lieu of a sabbatical, Catherine requested that Shallowford invest in her pursuit of a Master of Business Administration over the next two years. Rather than taking time away, she will continue with her ministry and stay connected to her Christian Education and missions' networks.

“I am very excited to support Catherine in her MBA studies, and I am proud of her for coming up with such a creative forward looking way to use funds in lieu of a traditional sabbatical in these pandemic days,” said Senior Pastor Reverend Anna George Traynham. “I finished my MBA in 2019,” Anna added, “and I am passionate about the intersection of ministry and administration as we seek to follow Jesus and lead the church in an ever-changing world.”

Mark Shaffer, Chair of the Personnel Committee, brought Catherine's proposal to the Session.

“Catherine came up with the creative solution of channeling the funding that would have been used for her sabbatical towards MBA studies. Our SPC community, mission partners and Catherine personally will all benefit from the knowledge and experience she will gain from MBA coursework.”

The Personnel budget will include \$3,000 for 2021 and \$3,000 for 2022 which is consistent with past sabbatical investments. Catherine will also be able to use the \$2,750 continuing education funds already allotted for 2021 and \$2,750 in 2022 towards her MBA. The Personnel Committee endorsed the proposal and presented it to the session where it was approved.

Carolyn Carl, member of personnel, points out that we are providing the same support as we would for a typical sabbatical, “We are deeply grateful for Catherine's seven years of dedicated leadership as our associate pastor of mission and discipleship and honor her service. We are excited for Catherine and her creative approach. With the pandemic and limitations on conferences and in person activities,” adds Carl, “this innovative approach is a win-win.”

So, it's the best of both worlds for us here at SPC. Catherine stays active and present during her sabbatical as she pursues her MBA, and ultimately everyone benefits. Let's look at her response to the following questions:





Q&A

with Reverend Foster

Q: Catherine, knowing your innovative spirit and energy, it comes as no surprise that your sabbatical will take a different form. Can you share how and why you came up with this plan?

A: “The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment indicates that my top five strengths are achiever, input, intellection, learner, and connectedness. So, along with working hard and relating to people, what makes me tick and brings me joy is learning.”

Q: You have decided not to pursue a Doctorate of Ministry but rather an MBA which seems untraditional. Can you tell us why?

A: “After much thought which ultimately led to setting the DMin aside, I began to look at my skill sets and at what other skills might help me in my ministry. Every day I manage volunteers, classes, and mission projects which require fluency in spreadsheets and budgeting along with marketing. I can more effectively engage Shallowford’s volunteers, serve our mission partners, and advance our ministries if I can build these competencies. All this pointed to the value of pursuing a Master of Business Administration.”

Q: So, in lieu of the traditional sabbatical, will you explain how that time will be spent?

A: “Deciding that the MBA is the right degree for me, I will be pursuing this in 2021 and 2022. I asked that Shallowford provide financial support over the next two years at a cost comparable to a three-month sabbatical, pairing a sabbatical cost with my continuing education budget.”

Q: How will you make this work? And what does this mean for Shallowford?

A: “I will not take an “away” sabbatical, but rather maintain my current ministry. Most online programs are intended for full-time professionals so I will be able to perform my regular responsibilities. The yearly structure of MBA programs should have few conflicts with my regular activities. I hope to be able to invest what I learn into Shallowford, and this flexible schedule enables me to continue my existing Christian Education and mission activities. In addition, the church and staff will have no disruption nor will they have to transition my roles to others.”