

## **Sabbatical FAQs**

### **Q. What is a sabbatical?**

A. A sabbatical is a period of extended leave from one's normal work. Sabbatical leave provides clergy with time away from the day-to-day duties of being minister, and allows space to rest, renew, and reconnect. Ministers can use their sabbatical leave for study, education, writing, meditation, and other forms of professional, religious, spiritual, or personal growth.

### **Q. What are the terms of sabbatical leave, in a typical UU congregation?**

A. Sabbaticals are common for ministers in most religious traditions, including Unitarian Universalism. The structure of sabbatical leave is often detailed in a minister's employment contract, as it is in WellSprings' contract with Rev. Lee. Our contract is aligned with the recommendations of the UU Ministers' Association: Rev. Lee accrues one month of sabbatical leave for each year of full-time service to the congregation, and can take no more than six months of sabbatical at any one time.

It is generally recommended that ministers take sabbatical leave at least once every 4-7 years. Our denomination recently released a detailed and updated guide to clergy sabbaticals, which includes a wealth of information about what sabbaticals are for, and why they are needed in these times. You can read it [here](#).

### **Q. Why is Rev. Lee taking sabbatical now?**

A. Rev. Lee's original plan was to bring her sabbatical request to the Board of Trustees in 2020 but world events made that impossible. She guided us through the pandemic and began to feel the effects of burnout, which she shared with the congregation. Working with the Board, we were able to put a plan in place that gave Rev. Lee time for self-care and enabled her to be there as WellSprings emerged from that incredibly stressful time. A four-month period away from her duties, to take that now-delayed sabbatical, is an extension of that plan.

### **Q. What will Rev. Lee do on her sabbatical?**

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A. Rev. Lee is making plans now for the four months she will be away. She will submit a final sabbatical plan to the Board in the Fall, for their approval. Sabbaticals typically involve a mix of rest and restorative time, travel, independent study and reading, trainings or other guided learning opportunities, and work on projects of the minister's choosing. Rev. Lee intends to plan for a mix of these activities – that will both feed and refresh her spirits, and will add to her skills in ways that benefit the congregation as a whole. We will share more details with the congregation as they are finalized, this Fall.

### **Q. Will Rev. Lee be out of contact during her sabbatical?**

A. Yes, for the entirety of her four months away, Rev. Lee will not have any communication with the congregation, including on social media.

### **Q. Who preaches while Rev. Lee is away?**

A. We are fortunate to be located in an area where local UU ministers have a tradition of supporting each other through sabbaticals, at no cost to their congregations. When any given minister is on a sabbatical, local colleagues will “fill in” for a Sunday, with the expectation that this would be reciprocated by that congregation's minister during their own future sabbaticals. Rev. Lee has already done this for a few nearby congregations during their own ministers' sabbaticals, over the past decade, and four local ministers are already signed up to provide a service during WellSprings' sabbatical period. We will share a final schedule of preachers with the congregation later in the Fall.

### **Q. Who will be available to provide WellSpringers with pastoral care (e.g. visits in the hospital, grief support, conversations about spiritual questions or life changes)?**

A. Our Ministerial Intern, Nick Sanchez, came to WellSprings with a few learning goals in mind: to develop his voice as a preacher, to grow in his administrative skills, and to engage more with our youth and family-oriented ministries. What he already arrived with – in spades – is skill and experience as a pastoral caregiver. Nick is excited for the opportunity to serve as WellSprings' primary pastoral caregiver during the four months of sabbatical. Just as Nick has been a pastoral “backup” for Rev. Lee when she's taken vacation or study leave during the first year of his internship, he will also have “backup”

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from local colleagues during the sabbatical period, should any pastoral care needs arise while Nick is unavailable.

### **Q. Who will be available for rites of passage (e.g. weddings, memorials, baby dedications)?**

A. Nick has prior experience officiating both weddings and memorial services, and is well-prepared to add to this experience should the need arise for any rites of passage during the sabbatical period. If, for any reason, Nick is unavailable to officiate on a particular date, he is also connected to a network of local colleagues who can step in as needed.

### **Q. Who will manage the Staff Team?**

A. We have an excellent Staff Team, which is long in the habit of meeting weekly: to coordinate their tasks, offer mutual discernment and support as new questions and problems arise, and to plan for upcoming events in the life of WellSprings. They also set annual goals with Rev. Lee each summer, for the congregational year ahead. Their regular meetings and tasks will continue during the sabbatical period. As the Staff Team supervisor, Rev. Lee typically helps the Staff troubleshoot any issues that come up in the regular course of the congregation's work, including seeking guidance from our Board of Trustees when needed. Nick will fill in, in this respect – as a liaison between the Staff and Board – should any unexpected Staff challenges arise during the sabbatical period.

### **Q. Sounds like Nick will be doing a lot... will he be full-time, during the sabbatical?**

A. No, Nick will continue to serve WellSprings half-time (20 hours per week) during the sabbatical period. This is why you will hear from our lay and guest preachers more often, during the sabbatical – Nick is not simply stepping up into every aspect of Rev. Lee's full-time role. During the four months of sabbatical, he will continue to preach 1-2 times per month, to make room for what will likely be an increased emphasis on pastoral care and administration.

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**Q. Will our Ministerial Intern have support from other colleagues while Rev. Lee is away?**

A. Yes! Because Nick is pursuing ministerial candidacy within the UUA, he is required to meet with a UU minister weekly for supervision. Rev. Lee and Nick are currently putting together a schedule for substitute supervision during the sabbatical. Any minister who steps into this supervisory role for Nick is required by the UUA to be in Full Fellowship (i.e. with a minimum of 3 years of full-time experience in ministry, in a single congregation, evaluated and approved by our denomination). Nick is also connected to our local UU Ministers' Association chapter, and can reach out to those colleagues for additional support, if needed.

**Q. Are there any expenses associated with the sabbatical? What will this cost?**

A. There are no additional expenses associated with the sabbatical, outside of our regular annual budget. Sabbatical is paid time away for the minister, so Rev. Lee's salary and benefits will continue uninterrupted. Thanks to mutual support from local UU colleagues, our guest preachers and substitute supervision for our Intern will be provided at no cost. We do have a modest annual budget for guest preachers, which is currently funded at the same amount for FY25 as it was in FY24. In the case that we are not able to fill the sabbatical preaching schedule with our Intern, lay preachers, and local UU clergy, we will dip into that budget to pay guest preachers for open Sunday mornings, if needed.