

**Pastor for Parish Life**  
**The Rev. John H. Brock**  
**Sabbatical/Summer Report for September 2023**

My August Sabbatical went well. I was able to accomplish most of what I had hoped to. I spent the majority of the month working on the Associate Pastor/Deacon conference (tentatively titled *Ministry from the Second Chair*) to be held at the Gettysburg Campus of United Lutheran Seminary, February 26/27, 2024.

I had hoped to meet with as many of our synod's associate pastors as I could. As it turned out, August was the month for vacations, as most of the seven other associate pastors were out of town when I had free time. That portion of my sabbatical objectives will have to be conducted in the upcoming weeks.

As far as my travels went, I started off by visiting with my sister and her family in Eau Claire, WI. From there, I ventured to Minneapolis, where I met up with Sister Marianne Brock for a few days. I was also able to meet and talk with Sister Krista Anderson, who is deployed staff for the ELCA, working out of Region 3. She assists congregations in building team ministry. I was able to recruit her to be one of my small group leaders. I was also able to meet up with Sister Deb McClennan, from here in Lower Susquehanna Synod, who is willing to lead one of the sessions.

Sunday morning, I attended worship at Prince of Peace Lutheran in Burnsville, MN. This is one of the larger ELCA congregations, with around 5,300 members. I attended their outdoor morning worship. I would guess there were around 200 people in attendance. Chairs were set up in their semicircular driveway. The praise band was on a covered platform. Two large sections of the drive were covered as well, and there was a large tree in the middle section. All of this covering allowed most people to sit in shade.

The music was good. Several of the songs are ones we sing. Even though there were three (yes, *three*) baptisms that day, liturgy was close to non-existent; the worship experience had very relaxed vibe to it. There was no communion, as they only celebrate Sunday communion on the first Sunday of the month. They do, however, celebrate communion weekly at their Saturday evening worship.

The baptisms were very casual. The font was on the drive, in front of the platform. One of their pastors, who I later determined to be Pastor Paul Gauche, *Pastor of Life Transitions*, presided at the baptisms. Again, it was a very casual manner, but he did a wonderful job of explaining to the parents and the congregation about what was happening, and why. A different person, a woman named Jody, gave the main message. I was not able to determine if she was a special speaker, or staff. It was a good message.

The nine piece band was really good. They have a banjo, and Pastor Paul played keyboard. Worship lasted about an hour.

From Minneapolis I headed southeast to Atlanta, where I met up with a couple of folks from Lutheran Church of the Redeemer (LCR), in downtown Atlanta. They are a long established congregation, with a beautiful stone cathedral-like worship space. They are similar in membership and staffing to Trinity (1,600 baptized members, twelve staff members, and weekly attendance of around 700, most of which is on-line). I chose to go to LCR because I happen to know one of their staff, Deacon Mary Houck, who is former Camp Nawakwa staff

while Sister Marianne was director. Mary is *Children And Family Ministries Director*, and gave me a wonderful tour of their facility. Much like Trinity, they have joined separate buildings together to create a gathering area. And, also like Trinity, they are dealing with a leaking roof. Their attendance has not recovered post-pandemic. They have a live stream worship, which brings in most of their attendance (over 500). Interestingly to me at least, they do not have a “contemporary” worship; they do a weekly jazz service.

Mary introduced me to one of the associate pastors, The Rev. Jenny McLellan, *Associate Pastor For Congregational Care*. My lunch conversation with Mary & Pastor Jenny was very productive. They had several good ideas for workshops/small group discussions.

While at LCR, I serendipitously ran into a friend of mine, The Rev. Matt O’Rear. He is currently pastor at St. Luke Lutheran in Atlanta, and was formerly the assistant to The Rev. Louise Johnson, president of Wartburg Seminary. While at Wartburg, Matt developed a workshop on “The Power of No,” dealing with those in the number two position being able to say “no” to those to whom they report. Matt volunteered to lead a session on this for me, and I feel will work wonderfully with this conference.

From Atlanta I headed further south and east to Orlando, where I found a few things to do for a couple of days. Although I must say, it was Stupidly Hot, and I was dealing with a recently diagnosed osteoarthritis in my right hip. However, neither of those deterred me from walking twenty-five miles in the four days I was at Walt Disney World.

Heading north, I stopped in Charlotte NC to visit with The Rev. John Mouritsen, lead pastor at Morning Star Lutheran in Matthews, NC. John was a classmate of mine at Gettysburg Seminary. He has served Morning Star for twenty-four years. He began as an associate pastor with a co-terminus call (meaning, when the lead pastor leaves, he would be required to leave as well). When his lead pastor announced his retirement, the congregation determined that not only did they Not want John to leave, but desired to call him as lead pastor. John went through his own discernment process, and accepted the call as lead pastor. He then went through the process of calling an associate pastor, who was with them for four years. When she took another call, the congregation shifted and choose to call a Deacon, who has been serving them for about the last four years. That individual has now accepted a call to serve the North Carolina Synod, so the congregation will again be going through the call process, this time reverting back to an associate pastor. We had good discussion on the differences in all those positions, what he learned, what worked and what didn’t work, and I will hopefully figure out how to get at least one workshop along those lines.

Obviously, I will continue to work on this conference in the upcoming months. I will also do my best to not allow my preparations for this conference to interfere with my duties at Trinity.

Speaking of which, I should probably report that over the summer I presided at four baptisms, one marriage, and a funeral. I put together the 2023/2024 Tuesday Men’s Bible Study. And I aided Moses in ferrying our Guatemala crew to and from Philadelphia airport, among many other regular duties.

God’s peace,

Pastor John Brock