

March 22, 2026

Central Church  
1991 FM 158  
College Station, Texas 77845

Dear Central Family,

We're honored to be able to share with you about the launch of a sabbatical program for our ministry staff. Preparation for this, as mentioned, began nearly five years ago, and was multiple years in its planning, approval, and implementation.

While programs like this are not at all uncommon at churches around the country, it will undoubtedly feel new to us as a church. That's why we've been very careful to work hard to identify the right time to start. It's also why we wanted to take the time to share details with our entire church—to make sure we all understand the purpose of and heart behind these plans. You can find these below.

We say regularly we want to be generous investors and authentic family who strive together for the advance of the gospel. We believe plans like this will make an appreciable investment in the lives and families of our leaders, who pour themselves out faithfully year in and year out.

Blessings in Christ,



Shelby J. Holloway  
*Chair, Personnel Team*



Daniel P. Stagg, III, M.D.  
*Oversight Team*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our church's sabbatical program is designed to be in-line with nationwide church best practices, right-sized for our church, was multiple years in the planning, and another multiple years in its implementation. Our first sabbatical recipients will be Jeremy Lewis and Phillip Bethancourt. Below you'll find more details about it and answers to some potential questions.

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### **What are the details of the sabbatical program?**

Our full-time Ministry Staff (currently 11 people) are eligible for paid sabbatical leave ranging 3–12 weeks based on tier every 5 years of consecutive full-time employment. The purpose of these sabbaticals is to provide extended time to rest, reflect, and prepare for years of additional future ministry at Central.

### **When will Pastor Phillip be on sabbatical?**

This summer for 12 weeks, beginning the Monday following Mother's Day and returning the first Monday in August. This time horizon was selected intentionally to minimize disruption to the church, as this is already a time when many people travel and many of our staff share the summer preaching load.

### **Who will be in charge while Pastor Phillip is out? Who will preach?**

Primarily our church's Lead Team, who with Pastor Phillip already manage the church's day to day needs and staff. By way of reminder, these are the members of our Lead Team:

- Daniel Patterson, Executive Pastor
- Tim Skaggs, Associate Pastor for Congregational Care
- Sean Gould, Senior Director for Discipleship and Administration
- Shane Mikeska, Senior Director for Missions and Operations
- Ben Prater, Senior Director for Worship and Communications

Among these, Pastor Daniel will take a particular additional layer of responsibility, both in terms of leadership (filling in some of the places Pastor Phillip normally would), and on Sunday (preaching on many of the Sundays this summer).

### **How and when was this sabbatical program developed?**

Research and planning began in 2021, was approved in 2024, and is being implemented now in 2026.

#### **• 2021 • Research Begins**

Beginning in 2021, the church began a comprehensive review of all its personnel policies—ranging from its hiring practices, employee expectations, along with a comprehensive remuneration and benefit analysis. Research for a sabbatical program, then, began as a part of a review of what benefits we do and do not provide church personnel.

#### **• 2024 • Personnel Team Approval**

After 2 years of research and development, the Personnel Team reviewed and approved a formal approach, timeline, and policy for sabbaticals, which was reviewed and reaffirmed in 2025.

#### **• 2024 • Sabbatical Program Deferral**

Per the originally-approved plan, sabbaticals would have begun in the summer of 2025. With that

being the middle of NEXT and the lead up to the 100th Anniversary, Pastor Phillip insisted on deferring his sabbatical request until the following year.

- **2025 • Oversight Team Review and Approval**

Over the course of multiple meetings, our Oversight Team met with Pastor Philip to review and approve his plans for this inaugural sabbatical, to make sure it was mutually beneficial to him, his immediate family, and our broader church family.

### **Why do we feel like we need a sabbatical program?**

Simply stated, we think it's wise. To be clear, we don't think it's mandatory, or that a church is somehow incomplete without one. But we think it will be beneficial on multiple levels:

- It gives church leaders space to rest and replenish, which serves everyone in the long run.
- It demonstrates to our church leader's family how important his/her well being is to the church.
- It builds resilience and capacity, as more people learn new skills to fill gaps.
- It shows the church that ministry doesn't revolve around a single, gifted leader.
- It causes the one on sabbatical to learn things about himself he wouldn't otherwise be able to learn, which will in turn bless the church.

### **When will people be on sabbatical?**

Sabbaticals will begin this summer, proceed based on length of service at Central, and be spaced and placed to minimize the felt impact by the church, most often being taken during winter/summer breaks.

### **What about non-ministry staff? Do they get sabbaticals?**

For other roles, we have recently expanded our Paid Time Office policies to provide a more generous allowance for our entire team. The sabbatical program, however, is designed specifically for those serving in our Ministry Staff positions up to and through our Pastoral Staff. These are the roles where the unique demands of ministry are felt more sharply and the positions for which retention is most consequential.

### **What if people leave the church while the Lead Pastor is gone?**

We don't think that's a huge risk. There are a few elements here worth considering. First, we have remarkably gifted leaders and teachers here already who will fill in. Second, many in the church are in and out during the summer already (thus the felt absence is lower), and Pastor Phillip already concentrates most of his annual vacation to the summer (so the church is used to other voices then anyway). Finally, and most frankly, if one person's preaching is the only thing keeping someone at the church, they aren't "all in" with us anyway and will likely leave soon enough for some other reason.

### **If many other jobs don't receive a sabbatical, why do we think our Ministry Staff should?**

This is a reasonable question, and we want to be sensitive to it. There are lots of statistics you can find about pastoral burnout, lots more we could say about the unique weight of vocational ministry—all of them relevant. But we don't want to give the impression that ministry is somehow categorically different-and-more-deserving than the faithful work others do. Instead, we want to do a few things.

1. ***We want to be proactive rather than reactive.***

We are convinced that the proactively designated time away for our team will cause them as individuals and our church to be healthier over the long-haul more so than any other alternative.

**2. *We want to model healthy rhythms of work and rest.***

The world would have us believe we are machines, and we are what we accomplish. Instead, we believe we are creatures made in the image of God, and as creatures we ought to observe the rhythms of work and rest God reveals in Scripture. On top of that, the church is designed to be like a movie preview—showing by the way we live with one another and in the world what the beauty and rest of the gospel will be like in Christ’s everlasting kingdom. If that’s the case, then modeling healthy rest patterns—even those not common in the modern workforce—can be part of our distinctiveness.

**3. *We want to be generous investors.***

We use this language all the time, and that’s what this sabbatical program is—a generous investment.

- It’s **generous** because it isn’t mandatory. Again, we aren’t in sin if we fail to launch a sabbatical program. And no one on our staff is asking for this—we are extending it to them as a gift.
- But it’s also an **investment**. Even though this program is low-cost to the church, it’s a richly-felt benefit by our leaders. It’s a way we can show honor to those who pour themselves out for us each week and help them rest, grow, and continue to be the kind of servants who serve us well.

Our hope is that our heart posture would be generous too—rejoicing in *giving* something (in this case, a sabbatical to our ministry staff) that we may not *receive* ourselves, as a means for us to demonstrate the grace and generosity of the gospel. At the same time, this program is something we believe we will all benefit from—because the long-term health and stability of a church’s leaders will contribute to the long-term health and stability of the church.