



40
years

NEW DIRECTIONS
SABBATICAL PROGRAM

Remember to Keep Holy the Sabbath

The 3rd Commandment isn't a pious suggestion of the Church, I like to remind our sabbatical students, but God's biblical injunction: "*Remember to keep holy the Sabbath.*" As Director of the New Directions Sabbatical Program of Santa Clara University's Jesuit School of Theology (JST), each semester I find myself reaching back to this foundational biblical and Judeo-Christian tradition to welcome the new students.

For over forty years, JST has welcomed ecclesial ministers to Berkeley—clergy, women and men religious, and laity. When the program began in 1973 as the Institute for Spirituality and Worship (ISW), under the leadership of Jesuit Fathers Jake Empereur and Don Gelpi, the focus was on liturgical and spiritual renewal. This was a reflection of the particular gifts of the two founders and the ecclesial needs post - Vatican II. The Council had released enormous energies in these areas, but at the time there were few competent vehicles designed to adequately prepare church leaders to understand the Church's living, treasured heritage of encounter with Christ, spiritually and in the Eucharist.



New Directions cohort 1987-1988

The response was dramatic. Within two years forty sabbatical students had registered, and such numbers perdured well into the next decade. By the 1990's the pool of applicants had shrunk, and inquirers were expressing interest in a more flexible model. In 2000, the ISW was redesigned and renamed "New Directions". In 2010, JST became the graduate Theology and Ministry School of Santa Clara University, though maintaining its favorable Berkeley location. Weathering all the changes, the program continues to thrive while many similar sabbatical programs have closed.

Today, JST is proud to count more than 1000 people, from over thirty countries, as sabbatical alumni. Today's cohorts number approximately fifteen each semester, which enables a desirable depth of interaction among participants. Program stability is grounded in a constellation of fundamental resources—the vibrant JST Eucharistic worshipping community which includes over eighty Jesuits, outstanding theological and spiritual resources, competent spiritual directors and the natural beauty and cultural bounty of the San Francisco Bay Area.

New Directions is semester-based, though some prefer to stay for two. Each semester the participant chooses two courses for audit, with the areas of spirituality and scripture typically the most appealing. (Some inquirers are nervous about returning to graduate school with younger, degree students at a Jesuit institution, but I point out that the “audit” option means they are not required to take any tests nor complete any papers.) In 2014 no less than in 1973, ecclesial ministers seek to understand the conciliar teaching, to internalize its spirit and to grow in its graces. In this sense, New Directions continues its founding mission.

Today the program reflects a global church, with a cohort of thirteen in Spring Semester 2015 drawn from nine countries. A survey of their resumes demonstrates a combined contribution of over 400 years of ministerial service! The population is typically clergy and religious, with a median age of 54. Three years ago, interestingly, we welcomed a married woman from Lusaka, Zambia who is an apostolic colleague of Jesuits in her country. In fact, New Directions may be witnessing the birth of an exciting enrollment development. Two years ago the program welcomed a married man from Australia who sought an extended period of faith formation, and in spring semester 2015 we were joined by a single woman from London who sought guidance and inspiration for a new life direction after years in the corporate sector.

New Directions Cohort 1980-1981



Participants seek personal integration, vocational renewal and guidance for new directions in ministry. Reflecting the increasing globalization of the 21st century church, the program increasingly attracts international clergy and religious finishing terms of governance. One recent cohort included two outgoing Superior Generals from indigenous women’s congregations in India, and one outgoing Superior General from an international men’s missionary congregation based in Rome.

“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath.” Originating in a somewhat mysterious past, Sabbath was the religious consecration to God of one weekly day of worship and festival. There were larger dimensions as well. Some scholars see a biblical injunction to periodically let the land lie fallow in order to renew its productivity. Others see a more ethical dimension, emphasizing free and full access to the land for the indebted tiller so as to reduce or eliminate his debts. In any case, Sabbath has come to be viewed in both Jewish and Christian spirituality as a robust metaphor to invoke the human need for rest, Covenant renewal, and joy. The aim is integration – the search for authentic Sabbath should overflow into the labor of daily life and give it a quality and tone akin to God’s creative labor.

Ministers ignore Sabbath at their own risk, I remind the typically exhausted, arriving cohort. A sabbatical can protect us from ourselves and our compulsions, promoting authentic worship and joyful, just relationships. Contemporary culture challenges us by its heightened pace, sexuality and escapism,

a deep breath, stop, and embrace the “one thing necessary” recommended by Jesus to the anxiously busy Martha. The renewed, integrated pastoral worker recognizes, with Martha’s sister Mary, that effective missionary disciples are more person-centered than task-oriented.

If ecclesial ministers let their own wells run dry, they become ineffective witnesses to the Gospel - salt gone tasteless, unable to proclaim the “Joy of the Gospel” which Pope Francis embodies and articulates in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation.

Any successful “New Evangelization” of an increasingly materialistic population must be rooted in the life-giving touchstone of God’s abundant goodness and presence. In today’s parlance, a sabbatical offers a graced, ascetic “boundary” from the relentless encroachment of sinful tendencies within self and the world around us. As ever, we flee the world so as to embrace and enjoy it in Christ.

Some who matriculate to New Directions find themselves at an “impasse”, to draw from the paradigm of Constance Fitzgerald, OCD. The Baltimore Carmelite has thoughtfully described impasse as a contemporary manifestation of

the “dark night” of St John of the Cross. The impasse may be personal, ecclesial or some combination of the two. Those who might be called “modernized Westerners” seem most haunted by ecclesial impasse. Symptoms within the church include polarization, distrust, alienation from traditional Catholic belief systems, and abuses of authority.

What can name the sense of abandonment, even personal disintegration experienced by some veteran ministers of the Gospel? Fifty years after Vatican II issued a clarion “Universal Call to Holiness”, too many “in the trenches” feel their gifts go unrecognized. In such a context, holiness may mean vocational perseverance and personal renewal in Christ in the face of institutional doubt and alienation.

Is the Church universal, under Pope Francis, moving forward into a revitalized sense of identity and mission? Please God! In the meantime, ministers need to cultivate their gardens with care. **Evangelii Gaudium** exhorts “pastoral workers” to provision themselves with interior resources and mature interpersonal and pastoral skills, so they can be effective, joyful missionary disciples in a church always reforming itself.



New Directions cohort 1981-1982



View of the San Francisco Bay from Berkeley, CA

Others who seek sabbatical seem less burdened by ecclesial impasse, particularly those arriving from the younger churches around the world, for example in Africa and Asia. Many find their ministerial journeys at a crossroads, as they await their next assignment. But, like the first group, so often the well has run dry. If there are commonly shared desires among all participants, they include personal integration, a renewed relationship with Christ in the Spirit, and rekindled joy in ecclesial service and vocation.

Whatever challenge or temptation a particular pastoral worker may face, resources for healing and transformation abound. There is enormous value in bringing our experience of impasse into dialogue with traditional spiritual frameworks like John of the Cross's "dark night", or Ignatian categories like "desolation and consolation". Sometimes I find that the battle is with acedia, the "noonday demon" described by 4th century desert ascetics. The point is that the tradition easily contains the resources required for Sabbath renewal.



New Directions Cohort 1990-1991

Interestingly, the more things change the more they remain the same. Founded in 1973 as the Institute of Spirituality and Worship, New Directions continues to highlight the former. Here lies the primary continuity. Of course, like many areas of renewal born in the wake of Vatican II, the area of spirituality is still a work in progress. Happily, a sabbatical program in a Jesuit-sponsored institution, grounded in the Ignatian charism of the Spiritual Exercises, is well-equipped to serve the Church.

Program co-founder Empereur notes that the early 1970s witnessed the beginnings of interest in the field of spirituality. We take that interest for granted now, "but it was not always so". During that period there were no academic programs in spirituality. The field was limited to studying Catholic tradition, and was mostly a mixture of devotion and mystical theology. The directed retreat movement was in its infancy. JST was fortunate to have on its faculty modern pioneering scholars of authentic Christian spirituality such as Jesuit Father Michael Buckley and Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Sandra Schneiders. In fact, Schneiders succeeded program founders Empereur and Gelpi when she became ISW Executive Coordinator in 1976.

More than forty years from its inception, the program legacy remains strong. When today's students inquire what's so "new" about New Directions, I respond "You"! The sound bite simply highlights spiritual and sacramental renewal in the new covenant of Christ. "You shall be called by a new name", shouts the prophet Third Isaiah to the nations, no longer "Desolate" or "Forsaken" but "My Delight".

This section of the book of Isaiah celebrates the return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. God rejoices as a bridegroom over his bride. What had been prophesized by Second Isaiah has now taken place. But Jerusalem remains in disrepair, yet to be rebuilt. Indeed, highway access into the city must first be cleared of debris. Third Isaiah is undaunted, convinced that the prophecy will be completely fulfilled.



New Directions Cohort 1991-1992

So too, sabbatical proclaims the providential end to the ecclesial minister's exile from self, God, the church or human community. But beware cheap grace – the accumulated debris of many years of human life must be cleared and rebuilt afresh into a healthy and holy Temple. Self-surrender, resilience, humility and dedication are not optional.

Church history offers a touchstone moment. In his "Life of Francis" St. Bonaventure wrote of the famous incident in 1204 when one day the Poverello of Assisi was walking towards the countryside to pray. He passed by the aging church of San Damiano, which was collapsing in disrepair:

"Inspired by the Spirit, he went inside to pray. Kneeling before an image of the Crucified, Francis was filled with great fervor and consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from the cross, telling him three times: **'Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin.'**"

For missionary disciples who seek personal renewal and hunger for relationships of joyful integrity with God and God's people, I can do no better than to invoke Sabbath and proclaim with Isaiah: "The Lord delights in you, and makes your land his spouse." But Jerusalem must be rebuilt, and San Damiano repaired.

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