



Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Greetings Paragould FUMC,

I write to you with both a church and personal update following the FUMC Church Council meeting Sunday, May 18, 2025. After working with the District Superintendent and the FUMC Staff Parish Relations Committee the last few months, a plan was presented and approved for my **Spiritual Renewal Leave June 30 - September 7, 2025**. Included here is a letter explaining my rationale for this time away and expectations for the church during my break.

In August of 2025, I will celebrate my fortieth birthday. Obviously 40 is a significant number in the Biblical record. Rain fell for 40 days and nights with Noah and family on the Ark. Moses spent 40 years in Egypt and 40 years in the desert as a shepherd for Jethro. After the Exodus, Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai and the Israelites spent 40 years wandering before entering the Promised Land. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness where he was tested. Jesus returns from the wilderness famished, but strengthened and ready for his public ministry to begin. 40 days or years is often a time of testing, waiting, watching, and expectation. 40 represents fullness and wholeness. I feel I am entering a significant, new chapter. My time as an associate pastor is behind me. My first few years of learning to be a senior pastor have been very positive but challenging. I am needing both rest and a renewed sense of vision and vocation as I continue to grow as a United Methodist Elder and local church pastor.

As of July 1, 2025, I will begin my seventh year as Senior Pastor at Paragould First United Methodist Church. It is no secret that the last few years have been challenging for congregations and clergy. Concerning research around pastoral well-being has been widely shared. I have experienced the challenges of ministry including impacts on my physical health and spiritual life. Pastoral ministry is a unique profession with obligations and stresses that extend beyond the time in the office or pulpit. With guidance from the District Superintendent and in conversation with encouraging colleagues, I began considering plans for a potential Spiritual Renewal Leave in 2024. I believe this time away will strengthen and refocus my pastoral ministry for the next chapter.

Spiritual Renewal Leave is outlined in the 2020/2024 UMC Book of Discipline ¶350.3: *"A clergy member may request a formational and spiritual growth leave of up to six months while continuing to hold an appointment in the local church. Such leaves are available to clergy members who have held full-time appointments for at least six years. Such a leave shall be with the approval of the committee on staff/pastor-parish relations, the church council, and the district superintendent. Annual conferences are encouraged to assist with pulpit supply and other temporary support for such leaves."*

Some people may be more familiar with the term “sabbatical.” Sabbatical is rooted in the Biblical word “sabbath” meaning the seventh day of the week, a day of rest. A sabbatical is an extended sabbath. For example, in Leviticus every seventh year is designated as a “sabbatical year” when the land rests, debts are forgiven, and slaves are freed. The idea of sabbatical rest includes individuals where a period of leave is granted for study and renewal. According to UMC Discipline, a “sabbatical” is a one year break from pastoral ministry where the pastor is no longer serving the church and begins a new appointment following the year away. Therefore I am not technically taking a “sabbatical” according to UMC Discipline. Though the spirit of short-term “spiritual renewal leave” is aligned with the Biblical concept of sabbatical.

This type of renewal leave is very common. A number of colleagues and friends within and beyond the Conference have taken such leaves in the past year, especially in larger churches with long-tenured pastors. This is a good and normal thing for me and for the church.

This request came from me as I recognize the need for rest and renewal. This total time away includes a combination of two weeks of continuing education/travel plus three weeks vacation time as well as designated time on leave at a reduced compensation level. This time away will be received by me and my family as a gift from Paragould FUMC. I understand this is the church doing something very kind and supportive. This gift will be honored with great integrity, gratitude, and humility.

Please reach out to me, SPRC Chair HT Moore, or Council chair Gene Weeks with any questions.

With deep appreciation,
Rev. Dane

FACTS & FAQs regarding Rev. Dane’s June 30 - September 7 2025 Renewal Leave

+ What is a Renewal Leave? Under Paragraph 350.3 of The United Methodist Book of Discipline, “a clergy member may request a formational and spiritual growth leave of up to six months while continuing to hold an appointment in the local church. Such leaves are available to clergy members who have held full-time appointments for at least six years. Such a leave shall be with the approval of the committee on pastor-parish relations, the church council, and the district superintendent.” A renewal leave is defined as a time freed from normal duties intended to prepare pastors to return to their pastoral appointments, empowered to continue their ministries.

+ Has Rev. Dane ever taken a renewal leave? In his 11 years of full-time pastoral ministry, Rev. Dane has not taken a renewal leave.

+ How long will Rev. Dane be on leave? Rev. Dane will be on renewal leave June 30 – September 7, 2025 (10 weeks/Sundays). Pastor Dane is and will continue as the Senior Pastor of Paragould FUMC.

+ Why is this a good time for Rev. Dane and for Paragould FUMC to have him take leave? It has been a busy and demanding few years since Rev. Dane's appointment began in 2019 including completing the "More than Bricks" building & remodeling project; managing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; leading the "Next 100 Years" debt reduction campaign and projects such as the office suite remodel; staff changes; property and parsonage changes; and denominational unrest. At this time, Paragould FUMC is strong and healthy. Church leadership and staff continue to guide the congregation in growing and flourishing ministries. It is a good time to allow Rev. Dane to focus on rest and renewal as we all prepare to enter into a new season of ministry together.

+ What will he do while on leave? Renewal leave is a time for a pastor to rest, reflect, or travel in order to return to the ministry renewed and refreshed in body, soul, and mind. Rev. Dane's plans include: extended visits with family members; two-week family vacation; time away with his wife; one-on-one experiences with his children; and (re)establishing relationships with friends. Rev. Dane will continue to strengthen his physical health including managing diabetes (diagnosed Jan. '25), heart health, stress, etc. Rev. Dane will examine and refocus his spiritual life through regular and new disciplines including a personal, silent retreat at Mt. Eagle. Rev. Dane will attend the Emerging Clergy Network Wesley Heritage Trip to England with Pastor Adam Hamilton. Rev. Dane plans to interview colleagues and mentors about this new stage of life and ministry to help guide his future.

+ What will Dane's family do while he is on leave? Dane's family will continue to be involved in FUMC's ministries where applicable. The family will be traveling some, but will still share in church activities.

+ What should FUMC members do at this time? Continue to be a faithful member of Paragould FUMC! This means remembering your church membership vows of upholding FUMC with your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. **Pray** for Rev. Dane, his family, Pastor Sarah, and the ministries of FUMC. **Worship** at FUMC each week. Continue to support the church financially through dedicated stewardship and **giving**. **Serve** the church and community including VBS, Ready Set READ, the Witt House, and more! **Witness** to what God is doing in your life and in the world.

+ Who will assume pastoral and other responsibilities? The church is in very capable hands including Associate Pastor Sarah, full and part time staff, and church leaders. This time will allow Pastor Sarah to continue to grow in her leadership skills. Pastor Sarah will lead and preach in worship alongside guest preachers scheduled for half the Sundays. Guests will include: FUMC member Riley Pearson, Director of A-State Wesley Foundation Rev. Dennis Ellzey, ARUMC Dist. Superintendent Rev. Zach Roberts, Methodist Foundation of Arkansas Director of Development Rev. Lynn Kilbourne, and ARUMC Dist. Superintendent

Rev. Dr. Ulysses Washington. Pastor Sarah will oversee pastoral care including funerals with the support of FUMC staff and church members. Denise and Karoline and other staff will continue in their roles and responsibilities.

+What key ministries need attention and support during this time? July 14-18 Youth Assembly; July 21-25 Ready, Set, READ; July 28-30 OMP101; August Youth Back to School Trip; August Back to School emphasis.

+ How can I keep up with Rev. Dane while he is on renewal leave? Rev. Dane plans to give far *less* attention to phone, email, and social media during his leave. Contact Pastor Sarah or the FUMC offices with immediate concerns. Rev. Dane will be out of town and even out of the country some, but he can be reached in case of emergency or crisis. Rev. Dane will be keeping you in his prayers throughout his time away and he hopes you will keep him in yours.

+What should FUMC expect upon Dane's return? The FUMC Fall 2025 pastors' Connect Wednesday study will focus on Wesleyan history and theology. Rev. Dane anticipates a fall sermon series on Wesleyan revival. Rev. Dane would like to explore the possibility of FUMC members sharing in a similar Wesleyan heritage tour in future years. Dane plans to collect thoughts and plans about the next phase of ministry in the life of Paragould First United Methodist Church with a focus on mission, vision, and values.