

A-1

Our Sabbatical Vision: Hands-on mission in partnership with Presbyterians in the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico has been a cornerstone of our church's core ministry and a passion for our people for more than a dozen years. More than a third of our 330 members have traveled. More than \$150,000 has been invested. We envision personal, pastoral and congregational renewal through bringing our passion for ministry in Mexico home to a partnership with our local Hispanic community.

The Plan: The Lily Endowment grant will enable the exploration and nurture of multicultural mission and leadership to which we feel called by providing time and resources for Rev. Utley to:

- 1) Learn Spanish through an intensive language immersion experience,
- 2) Observe and participate in the Mexican-Mayan-Presbyterian culture of central Chiapas,
- 3) Strengthen and build new relationships with our partners in the Tzeltal Synod through shared mission projects, and
- 4) Come home with enhanced skills for partnership with our Hispanic partners and neighbors in the central Piedmont of North Carolina.

A-2

We have seen for ourselves and Rev. Utley has articulated what makes his "heart sing": learning anything new, connecting with people, traveling with an experience of local life and culture, and doing hands-on mission. Our proposal provides for Rev. Utley's renewal needs and our congregation's call to extend our mission.

The Timing: We are a "transitional church" and understand the high rate of burnout of lay leaders and clergy in churches our size. So, we included a sabbatical leave in Rev. Utley's

terms of call, giving it increased attention over the last fifteen months. We anticipate that this sabbatical will serve to renew Dr. Utley's energy and vision for a challenging ministry while enabling us to follow a ministry path we have discerned as our call to serve. We are a strong, growing church and enjoy a strong, healthy relationship with Rev. Utley and are excited about the future with him.

Why *This Proposal*? We share with our pastor a passion for mission in southern Mexico. As our new pastor, he made his first pilgrimage with us in 2006 and caught the vision. Since then, he has become a leader in this ministry with local, presbytery, and national involvements. However, he is keenly aware of his limits due to inadequate Spanish language skills and limited cultural understanding. This sabbatical is designed to become a catalyst for next steps in both his ministry and ours.

The Essential Components

Educational renewal: Ten weeks of Spanish language and Mexican cultural immersion to provide language skills and cultural understanding that will enable our ministry together.

Ministry renewal: Time, guidance, and technology to launch a DVD education ministry for course materials in the Tzeltal language of Central Chiapas, Mexico.

Spiritual Renewal. A two-week period in San Cristobal for a silent meditation retreat and Holy Week worship services, and a week for reflection and writing upon his return to North Carolina.

Family and Relationship Renewal: Leading their first mission trip for members from Rev. Utley's first church and enabling his family to participate in the ministry that is so important to Rev. Utley's life and ministry.

A-3 (The Activities, Timeline and Rationale)

WEEKS 1-6: Spanish Immersion in San Cristobal. (Group Lessons)

Activity: After his commissioning in worship on January 8th, Rev. Utley travels to San Cristobal, Mexico, and begins intensive, group Spanish language classes on January 9th at Instituto Jovel, an established language school. The program includes 30 hours of instruction per week in grammar, vocabulary, and conversation. Students live with a host family, providing complete immersion. On weekends Rev. Utley intends to rest, enjoy cultural activities, and worship in local Spanish-speaking congregations. Rationale: Rev. Utley will enjoy an opportunity to learn Spanish which he will also be able to use to overcome the language and cultural barriers that keep him from being fully engaged with Hispanics in our community and in our mission partnership in Chiapas.

WEEK 7: Construction Mission Trip with Family and Former Church Members

Activity: Rev. Utley will lead his family and a small group from First Presbyterian Church in McGehee, Arkansas, in a week of mission work on a project determined by the Tzeltal Synod. (Rev. Utley reports that introducing new people to the Tzeltal mission is as renewing as going himself.) They will work alongside members of a local congregation in a construction project, lead area children in Bible School, and worship with local congregations in the evening.

Rationale: This will strengthen the Utley family bond, honor connectional relationships with the McGehee church and their pastor, and introduce new people to the work of Christ in Chiapas.

WEEKS 8-11 Spanish Immersion in San Cristobal (Private lessons)

Activity: Rev. Utley will return to his host family in San Cristobal for 4 weeks of private lessons at Jovel Instituto, focusing on his particular needs and the vocabulary of ministry. On weekends he will drive to Ocosingo, 98 kilometers away, to worship with the Spanish mission church that is located nearby and work with local pastors to finalize plans for the teaching-video component of the sabbatical. Rationale: Rev. Utley will continue his learning, strengthen relationships with

Tzeltal pastors, experience the culture in local worship services, and prepare for mission component of his sabbatical.

WEEKS 12-13: Ten Day Silent Meditation Retreat and Holy Week Worship.

Activity: Rev. Utley's daily meditation at a San Cristobal church within walking distance of his host family will begin with a light breakfast at 6:30 a.m., followed by meditation from 7:30-12:30 and 2:00-5:00 p.m. Evening reading and meditation is from 7:00-8:30. The meditation retreat will end on Wednesday of Holy Week. Maundy Thursday through Easter will be devoted to worship in San Cristobal. Rationale: After nearly three months of immersion, Rev Utley will be ready for a change of pace. His past meditation experience shows it is a valuable practice for his rest and renewal. Holy Week worship will further enhance cultural understandings and language acquisition.

WEEKS 14-15: Ministry Launch: Tzeltal Educational Video Production

Activity: On Easter afternoon, Rev. Utley will drive to the Tzeltal Synod owned Alpha-Omega Bible School in Ocosingo, Chiapas, where he will work with synod-appointed teaching pastors to tape the first two courses of a DVD series: Basic Christianity and Essential Church Officer Training. Courses will be taped with a live audience, edited, and prepared for duplication. Rev. Utley has already laid significant groundwork for a unique ministry creating video and written resources in the Tzeltal language. Rationale: Rev. Utley's time and resources will provide a productive initial start-up and establish a schedule for the completion of the taping and editing. This meets a tremendous need in the rapidly growing churches and the pastors stretched so thin who serve them.

WEEK 16: Re-entry and Reflections

Activity: Rev. Utley will return to North Carolina on April 24th for the final week of his sabbatical, a time for him to re-adjust, re-connect, and begin reflecting on his cultural and spiritual insights. Rationale: It is expected that he will resume his work at Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church on Monday, April 30, renewed, eager to re-connect with our congregation, and ready to lead us in mission with the Hispanic communities in our area.

Post-sabbatical Activities: Rev. Utley plans to initiate a weekly Bible study with Spanish speaking pastors in the Winston-Salem area so that he can continue to use and strengthen language skills. He and his wife will work with a Winston-Salem therapist who was a mission co-worker in Chiapas, attending to both cultural and marital re-entry concerns. Other plans include a shared VBS program with local Hispanic congregations, a Mission Committee retreat, and implementation of joint Hispanic/English worship.

A-4

The congregation will benefit in several ways. 1) The congregation experiences a needed catalyst for bringing international mission home to North Carolina. Their local mission awareness will grow as a result of the renewal activities in which they will be engaged while I am away. 2) Our lay leaders will grow in their leadership skills and faith as I am gone during an active season of the church, and we have important building considerations on the agenda. 3) The congregation will enjoy and benefit from new voices in preaching. 4) Finally, we will pray for each other. Prayer changes and strengthens us, moving us toward the will of God for our lives.

As for me, I love learning, meeting and connecting with people, and I find helping others to be energizing. For me, a change of pace is better than complete rest. Engaging with people in mission is the most energizing part of my call. The sabbatical frees me from ordinary duties and

allows me to simplify and focus my life on these opportunities for mission that I love. I cannot adequately describe my hope and anticipation of my family joining me in Chiapas. They have observed the Mexico mission transform my life and ministry, something they cannot fully understand until they go. Making that possible would be a gift that cannot be measured.

A-5

In its 17 years of existence, Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church (ORPC) has been heavily involved in Mexico missions. We have formed close personal connections over the years, and now send two teams a year to work with our friends in Chiapas. Although ostensibly to help fund and provide labor for various construction projects, we realize the personal connections and very concrete sharing of our common faith are the true products. This focus is a very important segment of our church's mission efforts.

When Pastor Utley told us he wanted to use his sabbatical further develop our church's connection with friends in Mexico, we were thrilled. The culture and language learning is an important step in enhancing our future mission effectiveness. During our years of Mexico mission, we have become aware of the need for trained pastors and lay leaders to support the growing rural protestant churches in Chiapas. Dr. Utley's experience and gift for teaching provide the perfect opportunity to fill this additional mission direction. His demonstrated skill in training new pastors and lay leaders, and his open and gregarious style will help him to be especially effective. Pastor Utley is invigorated through coaching and teaching situations. This sabbatical will provide him both a clear departure from present responsibilities and a truly energizing experience.

During the proposed sabbatical, ORPC will experience and prepare for a renewed focus on Local Mission. The combination of our church's human resources and our location in semi-rural

North Carolina provide clear opportunity to reach out to our Hispanic neighbors in Christ. Although passionate about mission in Chiapas, our mostly white, upper middle class congregation hasn't naturally connected with local Hispanic churches and our immigrant neighbors. We realize that goal will require very deliberate, focused and achievable actions. Pastor Utley's sabbatical proposal, and the accompanying proposed church leadership support during his absence, will be the catalyst for that kind of move. We know that the vision stated in the proposal will have a lasting impact on our entire community and will continue to be supported for many years to come.

A-6

We will cover pastoral functions through a combination of the part-time employment of a supply pastor / head-of-staff, and through existing staff. The supply pastor will be contracted to preach, oversee the staff, and lead our congregation in a series of ministry conversations related to the needs of Hispanic people in our area. With the deacons, our Parish Associate and Director of Christian Education will be responsible for crisis care during the sabbatical period.

The sabbatical plan for Rev. Utley and the congregation will be presented in November of 2011. A commissioning service will be held on Sunday, January 8, 2012. A welcome home reception will be held on the first Sunday of May 2012, with a first presentation to the congregation about his experience to be given by Rev. Utley on the third Sunday of May.

In addition to ministry conversations led by our supply pastor, we will host Fifth Sunday services on Sunday evenings with the Hispanic congregation in Greensboro, beginning on the 5th Sunday of January and continuing through 2012. A Wednesday evening Lenten season series will be offered to the congregation and community on local immigration issues and ministry. A shared VBS will be held between Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church and a local Hispanic

congregation in June. Then a Mission Committee retreat will be held in July to lay plans for the next steps in our local mission.

A-7

We expect that Rev. Utley and the congregation will share their mutual experiences and insights in the congregational meal and celebration on the 3rd Sunday of May, then as we plan for the Vacation Bible School, and again during the Mission Committee Retreat in July. We also fully anticipate that Rev. Utley's preaching will be informed by his sabbatical insights. Finally, we expect that a specially appointed Sabbatical Committee, the Session, and Rev. Utley will share insights about the leadership functions in his absence and the insights we can carry into the future.

A-8

The process of approval for this sabbatical proposal began in August of 2006, when the congregation unanimously approved a sabbatical as a part of the pastor's terms of a call. In February of 2010 the Pastor and Personnel Committee began to consider dates, a sabbatical focus and plan, leading to Session approval in May of 2010. The pastor then shared his sabbatical vision with the congregation in June 2010 at a congregational wide meal, where it was enthusiastically received. Rev. Utley subsequently shared the plan with the Tzeltal Synod officers and lay pastors in July of 2010. In the budget process for 2011 the Finance Committee began to anticipate the sabbatical period and to anticipate the financial needs of the congregation in the event that the grant is not approved. In January of 2011 Rev. Utley reconfirmed with the Mission Committee Moderator the committee's willingness to expand our local outreach to Hispanic people. In May of 2011 the pastor conferred with Vacation Bible School leaders about a multicultural experience in 2012. Finally, in April and May of 2011, the grant application was

completed, approved by the Session, and submitted to Lilly Endowment, Inc. The plan has been widely discussed and the sabbatical is widely anticipated. We are ready to act as soon as approval is given.

B-1

Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church was chartered in December of 1994 in our present location. From the beginning we have sought to be a loving, learning, giving and growing congregation, with a heart for discipleship, mission and reaching out to others.

B-2

We currently have 330 active members, with an average of 220 people in worship, representing 150 households.

B-3

We have only had two installed pastors since our founding in 1994. Rev. Rob Evans, the organizing pastor, left in April of 2004. After an interim period, Rev. Utley came in August of 2005.

B-4

We have been involved in hands on mission from the beginning: in Mexico, in Greensboro Urban Ministry through serving meals to the homeless and collecting food 365 days a year, at Tabitha House – a ministry to women in recovery, through disaster relief in the Gulf, West Virginia and North Carolina, Habitat for Humanity, and an exceptional Scouting ministry for both boys and girls. Our member ministries are typical of a Presbyterian Church: two worship services, fellowship events and retreats, education for all ages, and congregational care. We strive to be a loving church family that balances our concern for each other with concern for others.

C-1

Rev. Utley graduated with a BA in Philosophy from Ouachita Baptist University (1980), and pursued graduate studies in philosophy at Baylor University before earning his Master of Divinity degree at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Dec., 1983). He completed his DMin with an emphasis in Preaching and Worship at Austin Seminary in May of 2000.

C-2

Rev. Utley was ordained by Presbytery of the Pines on March 25, 1984, as Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, McGehee, Arkansas. Subsequent pastorates include: Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Corsicana, Texas, 1989-1991; Associate Pastor, St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas, 1991-1996; Pastor/Head-of-Staff, First Presbyterian Church, Hastings, Nebraska, 1996-2003; Interim Pastor, Kirk of Kildaire, Presbyterian in Cary, North Carolina, 15 months; Interim Pastor, Starmount Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, 15 months; Pastor at Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church from August 2005 to the present. (Rev. Utley served interims following his wife's call to North Carolina.)

C-3

Rev. Utley is a loving, hard working, intelligent and creative pastor. His love for mission has blossomed since being at Oak Ridge. After six years with us and twenty-seven years in ministry, he has certainly earned a sabbatical. We believe that both he and our congregation will benefit from his rest and renewal. He is well liked and well respected in our presbytery and in Mexico. He is loved by our congregation, and meets people with energy and an open heart. The sabbatical will offer him, his family, and his congregation the gift of time and resources to do things he loves with people he loves.