

Forming Lifelong Faith in a Loving God-Sabbatical Proposal from
Messiah Lutheran Church and First Lutheran Church on behalf of Rev. Nancy Hanson

A1. Pastor Nancy Hanson grew up within an environment of love and acceptance by family, by church members of all ages, and by God. Nancy's parents upheld Christian practices of weekly worship and education, home devotions, and service. Nancy realizes the value of having faith in a loving God passed to her in these ways. She compares her experience with that of her cousin Chuck who lived on a farm about one mile from Nancy's farm. Some members of Chuck's family and community ridiculed him as "different." Chuck grew up with faith in God and frequent church attendance. However, when he learned he was gay, he felt shame and assumed he was condemned by God. He internalized a home, cultural and church message of homosexuality as sin. He died in 1994 at the age of 32.

One of the main reasons Nancy answered the call to ordained ministry as a second career was to learn how to articulate God's abundant love to those who have been given messages such as: *God hates fags*; and *love the sinner, hate the sin*. She received such a grounding at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary with a theology that views people with a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities (hereinafter LGBTQ) as equally loved by God.

The sabbatical project, *Forming Lifelong Faith in a Loving God*, connects the two congregations (where Pastor Nancy serves) and Pastor Nancy in growing understandings of how lifelong faith in a loving God is formed. During the sabbatical Nancy will focus on a) learning how churches support cross-generational faith formation within the church and at home; b) learning how churches support LGBTQ people; c) discovering ways church people of all ages, sexual orientations and gender identities can help each other form faith in a loving God; d) having quality time with her husband (Robert) mother (Barb) and other family and friends; and e) living life without a work "to do" list!

During her sabbatical Nancy will observe how people in several U.S. churches and church and non-church people in Greece are (or are not) addressing cross-generational faith formation and LGBTQ inclusion. Members and friends of Messiah and First are writing stories for a book called *You Are a Beloved Child of God-People of all ages, sexual orientations and gender identities forming faith in a loving God*, to be done by fall of 2017. Copies will be printed in English and Greek for Nancy to give away while on sabbatical. In this way, we will get to share some of our journeys to full LGBTQ inclusion with people Nancy meets during her travels.

A2 Since the beginning of Nancy's call, the goals at both churches have included helping parishoners grow in faith through corporate worship and home faith practices. Messiah members stated their interest in LGBTQ inclusion in 2008! After many conversations, workshops, sermons and one failed vote, Messiah successfully voted in February of 2015 to become a Reconciling in Christ Congregation, adding a new welcoming statement: *We welcome people of every age, color, culture and political persuasion, every sexual orientation and gender identity, socio-economic status and ability as we celebrate together our unity in Christ*. First Lutheran has several active LGBTQ members; and at their 2016 Christmas caroling event, six of the ten singers hailed from the LGBTQ community. Both churches have growing reputations as places of full inclusion while many area churches still teach that homosexuality is a sin.

One reason anxiety, depression, addiction, isolation, bullying and suicide continue to be higher than average in those from the LGBTQ community is the lack of positive church messages regarding one's sexual orientation and gender identity. We want our church people of all ages to learn new ways to say: "We love you completely, as does God who accepts you

inclusive of your sexual orientation and gender identity.” Nancy’s cousin, Chuck, never heard anything like this as he grew up in his church.

Nancy started her present two-point call in October of 2008. For both congregations to grow in lay leadership, Pastor Nancy’s absence will become an opportunity for many to take on greater responsibility. Her Mutual Ministry Team has encouraged her to apply since 2015, meeting periodically to lend support. Members of both churches would like to grow in outreach to LGBTQ people. We have been experimenting with making our ministries more meaningful for people of all ages for the last two years, using cross-generational and home devotional materials from Rich Melheim’s Faith Inkubators Christian education programs.

We are excited for Nancy to have extended time away with her husband, Robert, and to learn how faith is formed in his Greek Orthodox religion. Spending weeks on Patmos will give Nancy and Robert the opportunity to attend worship many times during the week and on Sunday mornings. We hope that Nancy will immerse herself in this new culture and religion and let the Spirit teach her. We are excited to hear anecdotal stories about how the Greeks “do their faith” and how/if the Greeks she meets are reconciling faith with sexual orientation and gender identity. At first we wanted Nancy to include her sabbatical learnings into our book, but now, realize that would be too much like work! We want her to experience this time away without any specific end goal which is why we are writing our book before the sabbatical starts.

A3. The sabbatical will start on Wednesday night, April 4, 2018, when members of both churches will have a formal send-off for Nancy and Robert. It is fitting a project in how to grow lifelong faith that our send-off will occur on the night Messiah has its cross-generational weekly evening worship, supper, and education. Messiah’s Youth Ministry Team will coordinate this party. The event will also serve as a welcoming and commissioning time for office staff, preachers and parishoners who will have leadership roles while Pastor Nancy is gone. For the first time in their marriage, Nancy will be able to take part in her husband’s Greek Orthodox Holy Week and Easter on April 8 at Twelve Holy Apostles Church in Duluth, Minnesota.

On April 10 Pastor Nancy will drive to the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota (MSP) to begin her study of U.S. churches known for their leadership in LGBTQ inclusion and cross-generational ministry. Nancy will interview the pastor and lay leaders and take part in worship, education and service events. Nancy will first visit Pilgrim Lutheran Church. Under the leadership of Pastor Carol Tomer, Pilgrim has grown from less than ten children and youth involved fifteen years ago to what is now a vibrant place filled with young families who bring their many children to Sunday morning worship and midweek activities. Next to explore will be St. Michael’s Lutheran Church (Pastor Brad Froslee, his partner Bill and their young son); and University Lutheran Church of Hope (Rev. Jen Nagel and her partner, Rev. Jane McBride and their young daughters). While in the Twin Cities, Nancy will also take time to visit family and friends who live in the area.

On Monday, April 23 Robert and Nancy will fly to Athens, Greece. Nancy will meet with Professor Villy Tsakona who has agreed to work with her on some basic modern Greek language skills. Nancy started learning basic modern Greek in March through use of language cassette tapes. Nancy plans to interview Evangelia Vlami, the president of OLKE, a Greek organization that aims to combat discrimination and protect the human rights of LGBTQ people in Greece.

On Saturday, April 28, Robert and Nancy will travel to the Greek island of Patmos, selected because of its rich spiritual heritage, known as the home of John who wrote the New Testament book, Revelation. Nancy’s seminary professor Bob Smith and his wife Donna spent many summers on Patmos while Smith researched the book he wrote about Revelation. Donna

has given them several Patmos contacts. Nancy's half-Greek retired spouse speaks Greek and is excited for Nancy to experience the warm hospitality of his people. They want to hike on the goat paths that cover this small island and enjoy the beautiful beaches. They plan to get to know some local people which should be more likely as the tourist season has not yet begun. Of the approximately 3000 permanent residents on Patmos; 95% are Greek Orthodox.

Robert will stay on Patmos when Nancy is joined by her two best girlfriends, Jodi and Lynn. On May 17 these three will travel to the Greek islands of Lesbos and Mykonos (islands known for being extra welcoming to people who are LGBTQ.) Professor Costas Canakis who teaches at the University of the Aegean in Mytilene, Lesbos, is in email contact with Nancy. He plans to help the three women make some connections. In meetings with local people and priests, Nancy will explore how the role of tradition and ritual helps in lifelong faith formation with the Greek Orthodox people. Nancy also plans to ask how LGBTQ Greek Orthodox people are able to reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation/gender identity. As this may be an uncomfortable topic, she will exercise sensitivity in her inquiry. Jodi and Lynn are ready to take part in these informal discussions and will help film conversations.

The three will return to Patmos by May 26th to join Robert and Patmos residents in an all-night Greek Orthodox Pentecost celebration which continues until Monday, May 28th. On Wednesday, May 30th these four will travel to Athens and fly from Athens to MSP. Time will be spent in the MSP area for follow-up discussions with leaders of the three churches Nancy interviewed and for visiting family and friends.

On Sunday, June 3rd, Robert and Nancy will journey to Grand Marais, Michigan for two weeks of resting, beach walking and continuing a daily faith ritual. This will be the best time for Nancy to reflect, write and integrate the gifts of the rich experiences in Greece and the U.S. as they have no family or friends in Grand Marais. Nancy will start writing a cross-generational, LGBTQ-friendly devotional booklet that will be completed once she returns to work. Sunday, June 17, Robert and Nancy will drive to Hendricks, MN, where Nancy's mother lives. For these last two weeks, Robert and Nancy will enjoy time with family and friends. This all leads to Thursday, July 5, when Nancy resumes her pastoral duties. One welcome home party will be Sunday night, July 8 at Messiah. First Lutheran will host a potluck after July 15 worship. Nancy plans to have stories, photos and video to share at both events.

The sabbatical will be formally over by early July, but Nancy has requested funds to attend family Bible camp with her mother, niece Melissa and Melissa's two children, August 5-10. This cross-generational opportunity to attend a gay-friendly Bible camp will help Nancy be able to recommend family camp to others for years to come.

A4. Turning sixty in June of 2018, I plan to work full-time in ministry until 2023. Both churches and I look forward to my staying on for at least one year, if not more, after returning from the sabbatical. I will benefit from the learning and also from this opportunity to have a slower life pace. I pray to return with a new way of living less tied to a too-full to-do list. The congregations benefit from the sabbatical through education and conversation leading up to the time away and working with other pastors, leaders and each other while I am gone. The collaborative effort of having members from both congregations contribute to the book *You Are a Beloved Child of God* came out of the process of writing this proposal. Being able to share the book with people, especially in Greece, will be interesting. I am finding that progressive American Christians discuss being LGBTQ more openly than some Greek Orthodox leaders do and look forward to learning more about what is behind their views.

Robert and I plan to have a daily faith ritual on the days we are together on sabbatical. As we experience this and as I interview others on how they “do faith” daily, I hope to return more able to inspire people of all ages to practice some sort of daily faith ritual. We want to be life-long partners as this is a second marriage for both of us. I put work before my marriage too often. I pray to return with a new vision of how to do justice to both our marriage and work!

A-5 As a member of Messiah Lutheran I (Mary Trettin) am honored to write a letter of support for Pastor Nancy. We came to know about Pastor Nancy and Messiah Lutheran in 2011 through recommendation of friends who live in the community where Messiah is located. While we had choices for ELCA churches in our own community, we have chosen to be a part of Messiah (a 12-mile drive rather than a two block walk from our home). Pastor Nancy has a far reaching effect on our whole region. She exemplifies invitation to participate in church life and community, regardless of background. While one may think she has already “arrived” at her goals, we as congregation members know that the time spent studying LGBTQ welcome and generational issues will benefit us all. The gathering of stories for the book *You Are A Beloved Child of God* will be a gift to anyone who will use it whether First or Messiah members, community members or anyone seeking to grow as “People of all ages, sexual orientations and gender identities forming faith in a loving God.” Recently my husband and I went on a much needed vacation. Before leaving Pastor Nancy delivered to us a 5-day devotional booklet which she wrote to prompt conversations that addressed our work lives and our lives with family and community. It was a reminder of her personal care for church members and a reminder that we all need time away from daily routines and work challenges to be refreshed and renewed. We are not alone in experiencing her personal care. In a recent evaluation of Pastor Nancy it was clear she works well with all ages and works hard to encourage intergenerational understanding. For all she gives to First and Messiah and the community, we want her to come back to us refreshed and renewed and ready to lead us to an even greater depth of understanding.

A6. An ordained pastor and a team of lay people will lead ministry while Pastor Nancy is away. Plus, a cross-generational ministry expert, Amy Kippon, will be a guest teacher with us in June. Pastor Ron Hanson will assume pastoral duties at Messiah Lutheran. Pastor Neal Milam will assume pastoral duties at First Lutheran in Port Wing. The Mutual Ministry Committee plans to create a Sabbatical Brochure similar to the one described in Bullock and Bruesehoff’s *Clergy Renewal, The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* book.

A7 Nancy will keep a record of her experiences on a blog created by one of her parishoners. She will write devotional reflection stories and questions for people of all age groups based upon her learnings. We are glad she has July and August to complete the devotional project so she can start the writing on sabbatical but feel no pressure to come home with a finished project.

A8 Both congregations approved of Pastor Nancy’s writing a sabbatical proposal in early 2015. When she realized she did not have as broad of congregational awareness as she would like, she decided to delay the application process. Congregation members have been asking, “When are you going on sabbatical?” Messiah Lutheran Church council met on January 31, 2017 and passed this motion: “We fully support Pastor Nancy applying for the Lilly Clergy Renewal Grant. We are excited for her to learn, travel and return to us rested and ready to share. The Mutual Ministry team and others will work with Nancy in the planning, execution and follow-up of the sabbatical.” First Lutheran Church council met on January 19, 2017, and passed a similar motion: “We fully support Pastor Nancy in taking the three-month sabbatical and will work with her in the planning, the leaving and the re-entry.” CHRISM (the group which represents both

Messiah and First Lutheran Churches) met on January 12, 2017 and made a recommendation that “Pastor Nancy submit the sabbatical proposal by April 21. Should she be awarded this grant, we fully support her taking the three-month sabbatical.” The sabbatical proposal in draft form was included in both church annual reports and noted at Messiah’s February 5 and First Lutheran’s February 19, 2017 annual meetings.

B1 Messiah was founded in 1973. First was founded in 1895. Pastor Nancy is in her ninth year at Messiah and First. Messiah added an elevator in 2011 and celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2013.

B2 Messiah has 403 baptized members with an average weekly worship attendance of 103 (66 on Sunday morns, 37 on Wednesday nights). First Lutheran has 69 members with an average worship attendance of 21 on Sunday mornings. As pastor of a two-point parish, Nancy spends 22.5% of her time at First Lutheran and 77.5% of her time at Messiah Lutheran.

B3 Former pastors at Messiah Lutheran Church include Rev. Curt Rohland (Interim, 2007-2008); Rev. Jerry Lamb (1998-2007); Rev. Don West (1997-1998) Rev. James Kasperson (1986-1997); and Rev. Ron Hanson (1973-1985). First Lutheran pastors include: Rev. Curt Rohland (Interim, 2007-2008); Rev. Ron Becklund (2005-2007); Rev. Richard Bouton (2003-2005); Rev. Don West (2002-2003); and Rev. Jim Kasperson (1993-2002).

B4 Church ministries include Heaven’s Helping Hands-a group who serves those in need in our community and abroad, Vacation Bible School, Wednesday night supper, worship and education during school year, Bible studies, quilting ministry, choir during the school year, coloring, monthly lunches, and dartball which has become cross-generational. Before becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation, Messiah hosted periodic LGBTQ-friendly worship services, starting in November, 2011. Both churches host community learning events on topics such as: understanding Islam, immigration, aging, and The Gender Revolution.

C1 Nancy is a 1979 graduate of Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, receiving a double major in psychology & social work. Nancy graduated from Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA in 1983 with a master’s degree in counseling and guidance. Nancy received a master’s degree of divinity from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS), Berkeley, CA in 2003.

C2 Nancy was ordained on April 26, 2004, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with a call to serve the two-point parish of Bethlehem Lutheran in Newfolden, MN and Nazareth Lutheran Church in Holt, MN from April, 2004 until September 2008. Nancy was called to serve this current two-point parish of Messiah Lutheran Church in Washburn, WI and First Lutheran Church in Port Wing, WI, in October of 2008 to present.

C3 Nancy has written numerous articles, booklets and books including: *The Magic of a Running Partner* (1990); *Create Work You Love* (1994); *From Pain to Joy* (1998); *How to Survive and Thrive Your First Year of Seminary* (2001); and *How to Survive and Thrive Your First Year of College* (2001). Nancy is the founding chapter leader of Washburn PFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) which started in April of 2009. She has performed several same gender weddings and leads worship monthly at two nursing homes.

Nancy’s first full-time job was that of youth minister at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lindstrom, MN from 1983-1987. After spending the summer working on a cruise ship based in Valdez, AK, Nancy moved to Honolulu, HI where she worked as a career counselor for ten years. She started PLTS in 1999 and has worked as an ordained minister since April of 2004.

C-4 Nancy Hanson is employed full-time as pastor of Messiah and First Lutheran Churches. She is not serving through bi-vocational employment.