

5. Our congregation has done a lot in the years since Chad came to us as pastor. We discovered the sources of tensions among us and made necessary adjustments, defined our core values and general mission, and initiated a new worship service that would welcome people who were being “left out” in the community surrounding us.

We have responded to natural disasters. Hurricane Harvey, two additional flood events, and a pandemic. We opened our doors and hearts to people asking for shelter, fed them, clothed them, sent out rescuers for folks stranded by rising waters, took in laundry, helped with removing all the muck left behind, and served as a food bank distribution point in the weeks afterward.

And now, a pandemic. Harris County has been in the high risk “red zone” for the entire duration, and we have wanted to be cooperative and helpful members of the larger community. Community needs never went away, so we found ways to continue serving – especially in providing needed food. We devised new ways to “visit” isolated people. And we spent a lot of time defining how we could partially reopen in-person services while still keeping people reasonably safe, and we have done that.

We are tired, depleted even, and we could use a rest. Our pastor certainly could as well. Because of his many personal sacrifices of time and energy, we want his promised Sabbatical to be a particularly special time for him. Since our financial resources have taken a major hit through it all, this grant would be a way for that to happen.

We would benefit from time to reflect on and celebrate our journey. Being so busy, we haven’t had much time for such things. Then we could begin to think about where we should serve next, as our part in building the Kingdom of God on earth. Because we are serious about that.

6. During the first half of the renewal period, we want to rest, to reflect, and to truly appreciate what we have come through. When we took in people displaced by rising waters, we had no idea how we would feed them. So, we put out a call to our members, asking those who could get to the church to bring whatever breakfast foods they could spare, no matter how small. Some of the offerings came in two eggs or a few pieces of bread at a time. At breakfast time the next morning, we had a full breakfast to offer everyone. It felt like a miracle, and some of us were reminded of the story of Jesus and the loaves and fishes. Surely God was helping us.

There must be other stories of God's help through so much more than breakfast. While resting, we would benefit from being able to see that more clearly and to celebrate it. We are planning for a sermon series on God's deliverance, using the book of Esther as the Biblical basis and including our experiences. At the same time, our small groups will take up a study of Esther. We will use God Behind the Scenes: The Book of Esther, Wayne K. Barkhuzar for congregational and small group study. The preaching will be done by our Associate Pastor, so there will be no additional cost for that. Grant money would allow us to purchase the book for everyone.

In the second part of the renewal period our intention is to discern where God is calling us next. Before establishing our new worship service, some of our members spent an entire year in discernment to better understand what kind of worship service we should offer. The results of that process were amazing, having brought in numerous new folks who formerly couldn't find a church where they felt truly welcome.

We would like to expand and deepen our discernment process by trying out new (to us) practices and by involving more people in the process. To do this, we would call in local experts to preach on Sunday morning and to facilitate learning new practices in a workshop setting at another time. We would like to have one or more catered congregational meals, to encourage wide participation in the discernment process and to refresh our congregational bonds. The grant would allow us to have top notch people come help us, and would pay a caterer.