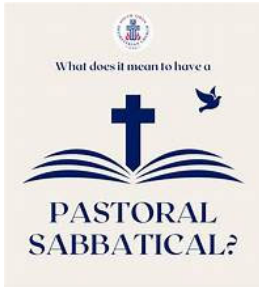
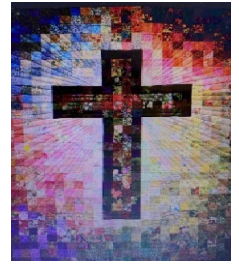




The Center Chronicles

September/October 2026



I stumbled upon this little parable of two woodcutters. It goes something like this:

Two wood cutters decided to hold a competition to see who could chop more wood in a day. The rules were simple. The next day they would chop wood from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and whoever chopped the most wood in that time was the winner.

The next day arrived and the men took their positions in the forest some distance from each other. At the stroke of 9:00, they started chopping away with all their might and speed. After about forty-five minutes of chopping, the first woodcutter heard the second suddenly stop, and he thought to himself, “He’s tired out already, I’ve got this in the bag!” He doubled down on his efforts to keep slogging away with the chopping.

For the rest of the day, the second woodcutter would stop chopping every hour, and the first would renew his efforts and try to pull ahead, even though he was exhausted. Needless to say, when the competition ended, the first woodcutter was certain that he had chopped more wood. But to his dismay, when they counted up all the wood blocks, it was obvious the second woodcutter had chopped more, by a significant margin.

“How could you chop more wood than me?” the first woodcutter asked, “I heard you stop every hour, and I didn’t stop all day!” The second replied, “The answer is fairly simple. While you were relentlessly slogging away, I was stopping to sharpen my axe.

From **September 21- October 21**, the Pastor will be taking time for a Sabbatical to hone and sharpen his spiritual axe. Though I took one to two week journeys to hike the Appalachian Trail for 15 years, this will be the first official Sabbatical I will take in my nearly 40 years of ordained ministry.

Some may wonder what a Sabbatical is. To begin with, the word sabbatical comes from Sabbath, which comes from the Hebrew word for “seventh.” Because work was forbidden, and rest was enjoined on the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11), thus, a Sabbatical refers to a time period for me as the pastor to rest and reflect on my ministry and discern what God will reveal for the future of my call.

It will be a time for me to evaluate how chunked, dull and nicked my spiritual blade is so that God can sharpen it to make it more effective for whatever work there is in the future. To do that, Deb and I will be taking a trip to Scotland to go back to the roots of Presbyterianism and to immerse ourselves in the land and culture of Deb’s family history. We hope to see sheep in the highlands and how they are taken care of and to be awed by God as we walk along the western coast of Cornwall, visit the fairy pools of the Cuillin Hills in the highlands, along with visiting

Stonehenge, Hadrian's wall, castles and cathedrals. We will look forward to worshipping in churches twice as old than our country and listening to the music of the celts. Pray for us because we will be doing all this by car where people drive on the wrong side of the road.

It will be an adventure of a lifetime for Deb and I as we ponder the words of Psalm 46 and practice Psalms 46: 10 where the Lord says, "Be Still, and know that I am God;...." It will also be an important time for the Session, Deacons and members of Center church to look at their own spiritual axes and evaluate how dull or sharp each has become in their own ministries. As Brent Lacy points out, "The church's job during a pastoral sabbatical is to function without the pastor. This is actually healthy for the congregation..." It is an opportunity for us to pray for one another.

While the pastor is away, the Ruling Elders and Deacons will have time to evaluate and reflect on how their specific ministries are going. They will be taking time to hone their ministry gifts as they address needs that will come up in the church. In short, they will be stepping up to carry on Center's pastoral responsibilities while the pastor is absent. There will be different pastors filling the pulpit during this time, so I encourage you to welcome and greet each of them.

The following is the preaching schedule during my Sabbatical.

September 27-	Rev. Dr. Don McKim
October 4-	Rev. Chad Lane
October 11-	Rev. Carl Grosse
October 18-	Rev. John Rogers



Global Week of Prayer @ Portofino Rock Prayer Chapel, September 6-13

This year, as was last year, individual churches are taking particular days. Center Church was given **Saturday, September 12**. Andria Davisson has been and continues to encourage people to sign up. She will have a sign up sheet at

church on August 30 for those who can sign up for the two hour prayer spots that remain. Right now, I know there are open spots from midnight to 4am and a couple of opportunities during the afternoon. Andria will be leading the group prayer time from 6-7am/pm. We encourage you to become part of this prayer effort. Portofino Prayer Chapel is located to the right as you go up to Tellico Plains High School.



The Lord's Supper will be celebrated September 6

We will be celebrating the Lord's Supper by intinction which means all believers are invited to come to the altar to break bread and dip it in a cup of juice. Both elements represent the Body of Christ broken for us and the blood of Christ which was shed for us. We have been practicing this form of communion since Covid in 2021.



Church Softball Team sign up

An invitation is going out to anyone who would like to play on the Church's softball team. We are joining with the Tabernacle church and are going to call ourselves the **Presbycostals** ball team. The roster is limited to 20 players, so sign up now. The cost to play is \$15. They play every Thursday evening.



Monthly Stated Session Meeting

On Thursday, **September 17 at 6pm**, the Elders will meet for their monthly stated meeting.



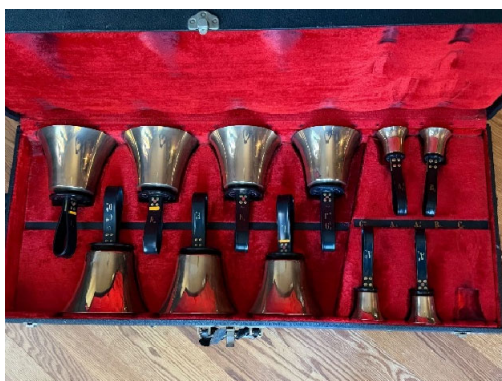
Elementary Youth meets on Sunday

Elementary youth meets on Sundays from 4:30- 5:30pm. We meet in the downstairs Sunday school room below the sanctuary. There will be no youth meeting on Sept. 6 during the Labor Day holidays.



Children's Bell Choir meets every other Wednesday

Children's bell choir has decided to meet every other Wednesday for practice which goes from 5:30- 6:30pm. In September, they will meet on Sept. 2, 16, and 30th.



Schulmerich hand bells for Kids and Adults

The children are doing an amazing job learning to read their musical notes and their sense of rhythm and timing. One thing that has also become noticeable is how adult parents are learning to play as well. Therefore, I will propose to Session to plant musical seed that Center Church invest in a set of brass handbells. A used set (two octaves) can cost up to \$7000. The set pictured here is one octave that can be purchased for \$2800. We will explore our fund raising options and will hopefully begin a "hand bell drive" sometime in the future.



Christmas Choir Practice is just around the corner

Sandi is going through her music and is listening to new music for the Christmas cantata. My hunch is she will start having Choir practice in October. So anyone who loves to sing, be ready to gather when she calls the choir together.



The Center Haunted School House will be open in October

October will be a time to prepare the haunted schoolhouse for another of fun fear, and fundraising. It is the main fundraising event to purchase food totes for over one hundred needy families in the area during the Christmas season. Regina and Keri will keep everyone updated.



More than likely, you may have experienced or you know of someone who has experienced the painful experience of divorce. Steve Grissom was a person who went through those pains and desperately searched for support systems outside of church that could help him work through the struggles of feeling like a failure as a family man and father. He faced incredible financial challenges along with anger and forgiveness issues. He needed help to understand how to deal with loneliness and lost friendships because of the divorce. But he couldn't find exactly what he needed. So, God used his skills to create the Divorce Care support ministry. As mentioned on their web page, Divorce Care is a **"13-week, video-based support group where you'll find practical guidance for managing difficult emotions, making wise decisions, and taking meaningful steps toward hope and healing."**

Since there is no Divorce Care program in Monroe County, a member of Center Church feels God's leading to establish a support program at the church for our community. Over the past 10 weeks and for the next three weeks, we will complete preparations to hopefully offer this program for individuals who have experienced the pains of divorce so that they can experience healing and hope in their lives. Each participant will receive a workbook to help them address matters they are maybe facing in their now divorced lives. The first support group will be led by the pastor who will equip others who can continue to the program in the future.