

# **COVER SHEET**

## **PROPOSAL FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE**

Submitted to John Mosbo, Dean of the Faculty,  
and the Faculty Development Committee

March 19, 2003

Dr. Christopher P. Gilbert  
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

Years of full-time service at Gustavus: currently in 12th year (since fall 1991)

Prior sabbatical leave: academic year 1997-98

Period of leave requested: **January and Spring 2005**

I am requesting a sabbatical leave for January and Spring Semester 2005, to complete a book manuscript that assesses how congregational life influences the political opinions and behaviors of religious Americans. The proposed work would fall under the category "scholarly and artistic activities," therefore this proposal will address the six points listed under that category in the Faculty Handbook.

I will be writing this book with my regular collaborator, Dr. Paul Djupe, assistant professor at Denison University. Paul's role in this project is discussed in the narrative to follow.

I. Description of proposed project and activities  
and  
Relation of proposed work to previous research

The working title of this manuscript is *Seeds upon the Ground: Social Networks and Political Influence in Congregational Life*. The data for this study come from the 1998-2001 National Science Foundation grant that Paul Djupe and I used to conduct national surveys of 2,500 clergy and 60 congregations (1,600 total respondents) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church. Our surveys are unique in collecting information about clergy political activities inside and outside the congregation, and being able to match clergy reports with the perceptions and political opinions of their congregants. Prior surveys have asked clergy and congregants about one another, but either did not collect this information simultaneously from both, or collected such information in a single church case study.

As political scientists, we focus on individual attitudes and behaviors -- what people think about political issues and how they act in the political realm. My specific subfield is known as contextual analysis, which means essentially that in trying to understand the opinions and actions of individuals, I systematically seek to characterize the surroundings (or social contexts) in which these individuals live. Standard surveys of U.S. citizens collect detailed information about personal characteristics (religious affiliation, occupation, location of residence, etc.) but rarely inquire about what is going on in a person's immediate environment that might offer political signals or influence. A contextual analysis seeks to know more: what kind of church does an individual attend, what does the clergyperson think about politics, what are the views of fellow churchgoers; what opportunities for political discussion and information arise in the workplace; in what kind of neighborhood does the individual reside, and how do her neighbors vote?

Using congregations as the sampling unit, we have detailed information about church members in 60 such places. We know what their pastors report preaching about, whether the church has sponsored voter registration drives, how often members attend, where members are likely to meet their most frequent political discussion partners, and whether political information is ever present in their church lives. We also have detailed personal characteristics and a full range of respondent political opinions on major issues, as well as voting histories at local and national levels.

The main theoretical point we seek to demonstrate is that congregational life often has a strong influence on the agendas (what political issues people perceive as important) and the behaviors (whether and how people vote, what groups they join, what causes they support) of congregation members. We have found through our study of the full clergy sample that ELCA and Episcopal ministers frequently introduce political themes into their sermons, and they are interested in politics as citizens apart from their roles as spiritual leaders. But our sample clergy also report that their congregants tend to hold far different political viewpoints and to miss many of the political signals clergy are sending.

The disconnection between clergy reports and congregational responses motivates our present line of inquiry. Our proposed book will focus on how congregation members receive and process the myriad bits of political information they receive inside and outside church walls. We conceive this web of information as a social network, and we investigate the degree to which the congregation-based social network affects the political activities of church members. Chapters will likely focus on topics such as what congregation members hear about politics within their churches (from formal and informal sources), whether congregation members develop a similar outlook on political issues (and the degree to which the church shapes such outlooks), and how congregational life alters the beliefs and actions that church members would otherwise hold and pursue.

In the first book produced with this data, *The Prophetic Pulpit: Clergy, Churches and Communities in American Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming June 2003), we documented ELCA and Episcopal clergy political opinions and actions, developing a theory of clergy political roles that incorporated clergy perceptions of congregation member reactions to potential or actual clergy political activities. This book did not directly include information collected from congregation members. Since the spring of 2001 we have begun to analyze the congregational data in more detail, a process similar to the one we followed for the clergy book. The clergy book began as a series of conference papers (12 in all from November 1998 through April 2001) written separately or jointly by Paul Djupe and myself (and sometimes including Gustavus undergraduates who participated in the project). Even with this base of analysis, Paul and I had considerable work to do in finalizing the book manuscript.

Our NSF grant unfortunately did not include support for a sabbatical, but Paul and I have been able to coordinate our sabbatical plans to expedite completion of this latest manuscript. Paul's pre-tenure leave at Denison is currently slated for spring 2004, but for a variety of reasons including my plans, Paul is likely to move this to fall 2004. Our personal collaborative write-rewrite style seems to work best with Paul starting most things and Chris finishing them. Hence Paul's sabbatical task in fall 2004 is to pull together the existing conference papers (see timeline below) into chapters, following an outline we continue to develop for our book prospectus (to be sent this summer, see timeline below). My tasks will be to assist with the data analysis and conference papers from now through the end of 2004, and to work full time to revise and polish the manuscript by the end of the spring in 2005. The book should thus be published in early 2006.

*Activities - timeline and location.* See section II on preparation leading up to the leave for 1996-97 plans and further details on the groundwork.

*April 2001 through April 2004:* preparation of conference papers that follow the outline of the proposed book manuscript. The sixth such paper will be presented in April, 2003 at the Midwest Political Science Association annual meeting in Chicago. We are revising at least one of these papers for publication in a scholarly journal (we pursued this same strategy for the clergy book, publishing one chapter in 2001 as a journal article).

*Spring and Summer 2003:* completion of book prospectus, submission to publishers. We are publishing our clergy book with Rowman & Littlefield; preliminary editorial reports were very positive for the clergy book, and R&L is very interested in the congregations book (R&L publishes a series in religion and politics). We would like to pursue academic presses as well (Cambridge and Princeton have been most receptive to books like ours using approaches like ours), although we have been very pleased with the attention given our clergy book by R&L. We anticipate having

a publishing contract by late 2003 or early 2004.

*Summer and Fall 2004:* Paul Djupe's sabbatical from Denison, working on the first revisions of existing chapters and new analysis for other chapters (we will not have every chapter pre-written as a conference paper). Chris Gilbert to assist in this effort (my summer 2004 research work), which will also include final revisions to any journal article submissions.

*January and Spring 2005 (proposed sabbatical duration):* Chris Gilbert to finish the book - finalizing empirical analysis, revisions of each chapter, overhaul of opening chapter, submission to publisher and oversight of copyediting revisions and page proofs. I would anticipate having all of this completed before I resume teaching in September, 2005.

*Also January and Spring 2005:* the clergy and congregation data must be submitted to a public data archive, one of the requirements when public funds are used for a social science project such as this. Paul and Chris will work together on preparing a full codebook and supporting materials, and on reconfiguring the data to address confidentiality concerns (given our approach, there is enough detail in our existing data for interested parties to identify specific clergy and congregations; although doing so would be an arduous task, we must protect our respondents' confidentiality to the fullest extent possible). We anticipate archiving our data with one or both of two archives: the American Religion Data Archive ([www.arda.org](http://www.arda.org)) and/or the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research ([www.umich.edu/~icpsr](http://www.umich.edu/~icpsr)).

*Location:* Paul Djupe will remain at Denison for his sabbatical. I intend to seek a position at one of several research centers where religion and politics are studied. One likely candidate is the Henry Institute, Calvin College; I have collaborated with the Henry Institute's director on other projects and the institute has space for visiting scholars, plus regular colloquia that would be valuable for presenting and discussing our theories and findings. Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan) would also be reasonably close to Denison (outside Columbus, Ohio) to get together with Paul when necessary.

The rest of my time will be spent off campus. I spent my 1997-98 sabbatical on campus, serving as head resident in Rundstrom Hall and using campus facilities. That worked out well, despite the March 1998 tornado that halted the end phase of my work briefly. But I would like to spend time away for this sabbatical.

## *II. Preparation leading up to sabbatical*

The previous section has described our congregational data, which has been complete and available for analysis for almost three years now. Other materials required for this project are already in use for related conference papers; relevant published materials are readily available either at academic libraries, on the internet, or in my personal collection. The Calvin College library (should I relocate there) has a very good collection in religion and politics as well.

The other necessary preparation would consist of my grasp of the literature in religion and political behavior, and of the quantitative methods required to analyze the data, which would be the professional norm in my discipline. My previous preparation dating to graduate school, and my scholarly publication record to date (three books, two journal articles, several invited book chapters) suggests I know what I am doing in these areas.

*Completion of other research.* At this point in time, other research projects I have been pursuing are either concluded or have been set aside. I had collected interviews and other relevant information in 2001 and 2002 for a book on the governorship of Jesse Ventura; for several reasons that project has been put off until the research described here is concluded.

### *III. Expected outcomes and future activities related to the sabbatical*

The primary outcome will be publication of a book, as outlined above. The data collected as part of this project are also going to be utilized frequently in the political science methods course (POL 200), which I teach each semester. Two students have already used the congregations data to prepare their political science thesis projects; conducting and presenting empirical research makes our students more competitive for graduate school and the data are rich enough to be useful for several more years.

My primary future activity beyond the projects for this sabbatical will focus on obtaining another major grant to pursue more empirical research in this field of inquiry. No survey captures all of the information a researcher might want. Our survey was limited by time constraints (at 11 dense pages, it was a long survey but still left out some questions we would have liked to ask), procedural choices (most social scientists prefer telephone or face to face interviews; we used mail surveys), and breadth of denominational coverage. Paul and I know that a better survey could be constructed, and our connections with researchers in public opinion survey centers should allow us to develop a better survey for a broader cross-section of American religion in the near future. Successful publication of the congregations book, combined with our previous book and articles in top journals, position us well to secure another grant soon. This field of inquiry will be our primary research focus into the foreseeable future.

### *IV. Value of project to individual and academic community*

As noted above, the academic community in political science will benefit from a careful empirical study of how congregations shape the political beliefs and actions of their members. Religion's influence on U.S. politics remains a somewhat neglected topic in mainstream political science journals, and our published work will continue to correct that problem. Moreover, the field of religion and politics is interdisciplinary in nature, and our work will be of interest to scholars across the social sciences and in religious studies as well. My first book was a narrowly focused work in political behavior, and yet it was reviewed favorably in an interdisciplinary religion journal and a sociology journal. The new book will find a similarly diverse audience.

Having a sabbatical leave to complete this project is also quite important to me personally. I have worked hard since the last sabbatical to oversee survey construction, data collection, and completion of the clergy book. Given my roles on and off campus -- teacher and advisor, department chair and mentor to new faculty, participant in faculty governance, political analyst for state and national media sources -- it has been difficult (to say the least) to find time and focus for large-scale projects. While it is normal in political science to continue analyzing data from years past, I do feel it necessary to bring this clergy-congregation project to an end sooner rather than later. Gustavus and other institutions have sabbatical leave programs because we recognize the value to a faculty member's professional future in having a periodic opportunity to set aside that level of campus community involvement, in order to engage in the kind of careful, reflective work that simply cannot be juggled effectively with teaching, advising, and committee responsibilities. I know that following my first sabbatical, I returned to teaching with a deeper understanding and renewed passion for the study of politics.

I can't imagine not coming back similarly recharged in the fall of 2005.

*V. Plans for public presentation of leave results*

After my first sabbatical I presented my findings at a Faculty Shop Talk and to church audiences through my participation in the Partners in Education program. Articles about our clergy research have already been published in Lutheran and Episcopal news outlets, and the Star Tribune plans an article coinciding with publication of the clergy book this summer. All of these news outlets will be interested in the congregations book, and I would certainly anticipate another Faculty Shop Talk or Faculty Forum presentation.

*PREVIOUS SABBATICAL ACHIEVEMENTS*

As noted in passing above, I received a sabbatical leave for academic year 1997-98, my seventh year at Gustavus. In this time I compiled the numerous conference papers authored or co-authored with collaborators and produced the book *Religious Institutions and Minor Parties in the United States* (published early 1999 by Praeger Publishers). The conference papers produced for that book were not as complete as those that will exist for this proposed project. More time was necessary for data collection and analysis. Results from this first sabbatical were shared at a Faculty Shop Talk and in other forums, in addition to being incorporated into three courses I teach (POL 200, Analyzing Politics; POL 325, Religion and Politics in America, and POL 244, Special Topic Course on Third Parties in America). Since Paul Djupe served as my sabbatical replacement in the political science department, we were also able to write and secure our NSF grant during this time frame.

*Supporting materials:*

- letter from Dr. Don Ostrom, representing the Political Science Department, in support of this sabbatical proposal
- additional materials (e.g. conference papers related to this proposal) available upon request