

Sabbatical Leave Policy for Ministers: FAQ's

Why do we need a sabbatical policy for our presbytery?

Many Terms of Call for clergy entering New Covenant Presbytery contain clauses providing for Sabbatical. This policy provides consistency and guidance for local churches.

Is the sabbatical policy mandatory?

This policy is recommended but is not a requirement; however, we foresee occasions when there will be either increased demand for including a sabbatical on the part of pastors or the proposal of sabbatical by Pastoral Nominating Committees to recruit a candidate.

Why do clergy and educators need more time off?

The stress and pressure faced by church professionals is well documented. The time offered by Sabbath rest is not the same as "vacation" where one does not completely disengage from the parish. Sabbatical provides the type of time and space required for spiritual renewal and healing.

How are we going to pay for this?

This is a key part of the policy. Clergy and congregations are encouraged to find creative ways to fund the sabbatical. There also are ample grants for which church professionals and congregations may apply to support financially both the church and the individual during the sabbatical.

How will this policy affect smaller churches?

We believe that smaller membership churches will benefit immensely from this policy. We covenant to work with these congregations to secure temporary leadership at little to no cost.

So what will my church "get" out of this?

Sabbaticals are meant to increase long-term pastorates, which in turn, are proven to strengthen congregations. It only makes sense that church professionals, who have been reinvigorated for ministry, are going to be more effective!

Guidelines for Sabbatical Leave The Presbytery of New Covenant

Rationale for Sabbatical Leave in the Presbytery of New Covenant:

The Presbytery of New Covenant has adopted a new vision for 2010: ***Growing congregations that passionately engage their community to make disciples.***

The skills and training that clergy received in seminary and routine continuing education events may not fully equip pastors for the major components to this vision (congregational growth, community engagement, and disciple-making). Furthermore, the implementation of this vision on the local level will make additional demands of pastors that are beyond the ordinary requirements of parish ministry.

The Presbytery of New Covenant, therefore, has adopted Guidelines for Sabbatical Leave to be considered for all installed Pastors and Associate Pastors.

Introduction to Sabbatical Leave:

Someone has compared the life of a minister with that of a taxi leaving an airport. It is so loaded down with passengers and suitcases and the other items that the car has a hard time even moving and is strained to the point breaking, yet the taxi may be only a few years old. So it is with clergy. They bear the burdens, the anguish, the pain, and hurt of their parishioners 24-7. That is 24 hours, seven days a week. As a result, many, if not all, experience to one degree or another symptoms of emotional collapse, stress related illnesses, and "burnout" adversely affecting the minister's personal, family, and parish life, and greatly diminishing his or her effectiveness and well-being. For too long, this situation has been accepted, even tolerated as an inevitable part of the job.

A viable solution to the peculiar stresses and strains the clergy encounter is the Sabbath Leave, sometimes referred to as a Sabbatical. This solution has its roots in Scripture and in church tradition.

Sabbatical Leave Defined:

Sabbatical Leave for pastors and church educators is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. Sabbatical Leave follows precedents in the academic community and among a growing number of private sector groups. This "extended time" is qualitatively different from "vacation" or "days off." It is an opportunity for the individual to strategically disengage from regular and normal tasks so that ministry and mission may be viewed from a new perspective because of a planned time of focus.

Sabbatical Leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal. It is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and changed activity and an occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.

Sabbatical Leave is recommended for all full-time pastors and educators serving churches, who have served in their present position for six (6) continuous years. The recommended length of the Sabbatical Leave is three (3) months. Accrued vacation time and study leave may be attached to the Sabbatical Leave. It is further recommended that this Sabbatical Leave be built into the Call Process. Upon completion of the Sabbatical Leave, the incumbent pastor/educator would normally continue serving the same congregation for a period of at least four times the length of the Sabbatical Leave plus accrued vacation time. In addition, Congregations may limit Sabbatical Leave to one staff person per year, in multiple staff situations.

Planning for Sabbatical Leave:

To be eligible for a Sabbatical Leave, the pastor/educator shall present, in writing, to the Church session for their approval, a program ("The Plan") of activity for the Sabbatical Leave at least six

(6) months prior to the proposed beginning of the Sabbatical Leave. This program of activity and meditation shall include a detailed description of the plan, the goals to be achieved and the expected end-product(s), together with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical Leave would be valuable for both the pastor/educator and the church.

Upon approval by the Session in the year prior to the Sabbatical Leave, the Plan shall be forwarded to the churches Committee on Ministry for their review and recommendation. Included in this Plan will be the church's plan for pastoral/educator services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave.

At the completion of the Sabbatical Leave, the pastor/educator should present to the next regular meeting of the church Session, a written report of activities and findings. This report also will be sent to the Committee on Ministry immediately following up the Session meeting when it is presented.

Funding:

The employing church will continue the pastor/educator salaries, pension/major' medical benefits, book allowance, and, at the direction of the Session, auto and continuing education allowances at the same level as those in effect at the time of the Sabbatical Leave.

The employing church will also contract for substitute pastor/educator services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave. Although on the face of it, the Sabbatical Leave may seem like yet another financial burden for the local congregation to bear, it is crucial for Session and congregation to recognize the long-term benefits they as a church will reap from granting Sabbaticals. For example, ministers/educators who have the opportunity to examine issues of professional growth and development as ministers within an existing pastorate are more likely to stay more years in a particular call. The sabbatical provision conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the calling church. It also offers an incentive to both ministers and educators to commit to and think in terms of longer years of service in a particular church.

Clergy, churches, and presbytery are encouraged to set aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of Sabbatical Leave. Those churches that would have financial problems in providing for the Sabbatical Leave could consult with their Presbytery. In addition, those churches that could not secure lay leadership within their own congregations might consider using elders trained as Lay Pastors or Associate Pastors who might be willing to preach one Sunday without honorarium, etc.

NOTE: The Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program housed at Louisville Seminary, provides study grants for pastoral leaders. Contact Rev. David J. Wood at 1044 Alta Vista Rd., Louisville, KY 40205-1798. Their email address is info@louisville-institute.org. The website for the Louisville Institute is <http://louisville-institute.org/index.asp> and the website for the Lilly Endowment is <http://www.clergyrenewal.org/>

Re-Entry Into Ministry:

Upon re-entry, it is strongly suggested that the clergy share with the entire congregation the details of the leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit. The re-entry process provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the benefits that resulted from the Sabbath Leave. Such expected benefits as:

- Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized
- New understandings of the concepts of mission between clergy and congregation
- Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on part of clergy and congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of God's people.

The ideal result would be for the congregation to see this period of time not just as the clergy's Sabbath Leave but as the congregation's Sabbath Leave.

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