

Rationale for 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 other items that the car has a hard time even moving and is strained to the point of 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 a day, 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.

Definitions

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 in Salem Presbytery, 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

Eligible Program Activity and Judicial Review

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 Salem Presbytery’s 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 discretion 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, because the sabbatical provision conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the calling church and also offers an incentive to both ministers and educators to commit to and think in terms of longer term 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 Presbytery. In addition, those churches who could not secure lay leadership within their own congregation might consider using elders trained as Lay Pastors or Associate Pastors who might be willing to preach one Sunday without honorarium, etc.

Re-Entry

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 Sabbatical Leave. Such expected benefits as:

- Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized
- New understandings of the concept of mission as shared mission between clergy and congregation
- Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on part of the clergy and congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of the Kingdom

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

SABBATICAL LEAVE POLICY FOR PARISH MINISTERS AND EDUCATORS IN SALEM PRESBYTERY

Policy Statement

The Presbytery of Salem recommends to the sessions of its churches that Ministers of the Word and Sacrament Educators be granted a compensated sabbatical of at least three (3) months after six (6) years of service to an individual church.

Rationale

A sabbatical will enable the minister/educator to be renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A sabbatical enables a minister/educator to return to the responsibilities of the parish with new energy, spiritual vision and effectiveness.

Committee on Ministry Responsibilities

1. Review the sabbatical time table and usage plan as submitted by the minister.
2. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session or minister relative to the sabbatical.
3. Determine who will moderate the session in the minister's absence.

Minister Responsibilities

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the session—at least in outline form—a minimum of six months before the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
2. Secure the approval of the session for the sabbatical proposal and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
3. Assure the session of continued service to the church for at least one full year from the conclusion of the sabbatical.
4. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the session before departing on a sabbatical.
5. Submit to Committee on Ministry in writing the sabbatical timetable and outline of plans.
6. Upon return, present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the session and the Committee on Ministry.

Session Responsibilities

1. Receive for approval the minister's proposal for a sabbatical, at least six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
2. Continue terms of call commitments to the minister during sabbatical leave.
3. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the church of a sabbatical.
4. Request a written overview of the sabbatical from the minister upon return.

Additional Responsibilities/Information

If agreed upon by session and the minister, the sabbatical might be combined with study leave for extended study.

A SABBATICAL LEAVE POLICY FOR THE EXEMPT STAFF OF SALEM PRESBYTERY

Policy: The Presbytery may grant Sabbatical Leave to the General Presbyter and full-time Associate Presbyters. Sabbaticals shall be for no more than three months with pay, but vacation time may be added if necessary for the sabbatical leave designed. The Leave will be for professional development and related to the life of the Presbytery. Only one presbytery program staff person may be on sabbatical leave at any given time.

Eligibility: The General Presbyter and full-time Associate Presbyters must have been employed with the Presbytery for a minimum of six (6) consecutive years and not interrupted by prolonged personal paid leave or leave of absence. A report on learning in relation to agreed goals must be reviewed with the Personnel Function Group and the General Presbyter (when applicable, as with the Associate Presbyters) within one month after the completion of the leave.

Study Plan: A detailed written plan of study with clearly identified goals and expected end-products must be approved by the Committee On Ministry and the Personnel Function Group long enough in advance so that budget and staffing needs may be met during the time the Exempt Staff person is on Sabbatical Leave.

Recommendations:

1. That Salem Presbytery approve the Sabbatical Leave Policy outlined for Ministers and Educators serving churches in Salem Presbytery and strongly encourage member churches to adopt it for their ministers and educators.
2. That the Sabbatical Leave Policy be presented to all Pastor Nominating Committee and commended to them for inclusion in the Terms of Call.
3. That Salem Presbytery approve the Sabbatical Leave Policy outlined for Exempt Staff of Salem Presbytery.