

The Presbytery of Redstone Sabbatical Leave Guidelines

Background and Rationale for Sabbatical Leave

The contemporary model for sabbatical leave comes from the university and college systems in which professors may be granted study leave usually after seven years of teaching. The theological roots for the idea of sabbatical, however, run deeper than the academic model and differ in their understanding of the Sabbath from the academic model.

The term sabbatical has its roots in the Hebrew cultural-religious concepts of Sabbath, or rest after seven days or years. Genesis 2:1-3 states that God rested from the work of creation after seven days. Both versions of the Ten Commandments describe the Sabbath as a day of reflection on the blessings of God for creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and release from the bondage of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Deuteronomy 15 describes a period after seven years in which release from several kinds of debt and labor are itemized. Finally, a cyclical fiftieth year jubilee (the year following seven times seven years) was celebrated. During the Jubilee, land was returned to its ancestral owners and slaves were freed from bondage.

Clearly, for a biblical perspective, sabbatical was a time of rest, renewal and recovery.

Sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period of time in which a pastor is granted leave away from his or her normal ministerial responsibilities in order to spend an extended period of time in rest, renewal, and recovery, through prayer, reflection and relaxation. Sabbatical leave is not vacation, nor is it continuing education. Sabbatical leave can be a needed break from the long hours, high pressure, personal sacrifice, and 24 hour a day, seven day a week nature of pastoral ministry.

Sabbatical leave can be a time of prayer, rest, study and travel, either at home or abroad. It can provide the needed change of scenery and pace that can help prevent burnout for the pastor of a congregation. Sabbatical leave can also be beneficial for the congregation in that the pastor may return from sabbatical leave with renewed energy and rediscovered zeal for ministry. It is also a time when congregations can refocus its energies around the leadership of the church and discover new energy from within.

Note on Terminology:

Certain terms have been used in this document to note a more inclusive group so as to simplify the document and to render it more readable. Terms have been chosen with the understanding that while the document is relevant to many situations the most common will be the church served by a solo pastor.

- **Pastor** should be understood to include ministers of the word and sacrament, commissioned lay pastors, and certified Christian educators.
- **Church** should be understood to also include other ministry settings.
- **Session** should be understood to indicate the appropriate governing board for a ministry setting, responsible for overseeing the work of the pastor.

Guidelines

Pastors, as defined above, may be eligible for sabbatical leave after seven years of service to an individual church. This policy may be included in the Terms of Call for all Presbytery of Redstone pastors.

The recommended length of the sabbatical leave is not less than 60 days or more than 90 days. Accrued vacation time and continuing education time may be attached to the sabbatical leave. Upon completion of the sabbatical leave, the incumbent pastor would ordinarily, continue serving the same congregation for one year beyond the conclusion of such leave. 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 sabbatical leave, the pastor shall present, in writing, to the Church session for their approval, a program (“The Plan”) of activity for the sabbatical leave approximately six (6) months prior to the proposed beginning of the sabbatical leave. It is suggested that planning for the event should begin in sufficient enough time ahead of the sabbatical so that the pastor and congregation are fully prepared for the time apart as well as the return of the pastor. This program of activity and meditation should include a detailed description of the plan, including the expectation of the pastor and the congregation.

Upon approval by the session, the plan shall be forwarded to the Committee on Ministry for their review and recommendation. The church’s plan for pastoral services during the period of the sabbatical leave will be included. It is expected that the COM will have been involved in that conversation from the beginning.

A Covenant Agreement will be signed between the session, the pastor and the Committee on Ministry. For educators, the covenant will be between the educator, pastor/head of staff, the session, and the COM.

At the completion of the sabbatical leave, the pastor should present to the session a written report of the sabbatical experience. The session shall also present to the pastor a written report of the congregation's experience during the sabbatical time. These reports will also be sent to the Committee on Ministry.

Support

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 pastor, session and congregation to recognize the long-term benefits they as a church will reap from granting sabbaticals. For example, pastors who have the opportunity to examine issues of professional growth and development as pastors within an existing pastorate are more likely to stay more years in a particular call.

Providing a sabbatical conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the calling church. It also offers an incentive to pastors to commit to and think in terms of longer years of service in a particular church. The session should communicate to the congregation the importance and value to the church of a sabbatical.

The employing church will continue the terms of call commitments at the same level as those in effect at the time of the sabbatical leave.

The employing church will contract for substitute pastoral services during the period of the sabbatical leave and **should not** rely on week to week pulpit supply. At the same time, they should not rely on a supply pastor to carry on the work of the session, since that should be a part of the sabbatical plan to strengthen the session during the time apart. For the few occasions when the planned substitute pastoral services are unavailable, a pulpit supply list is available from the Presbytery.

In thinking ahead toward the possibility of a sabbatical, pastors and churches are encouraged to set aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of sabbatical leave. Churches that would have financial problems in providing for the sabbatical leave should consult with the Presbytery regarding application for a Sabbatical Support Grant.

The following are potential sources for funding a sabbatical leave:

Sabbath Sabbatical Support Grants – The Board of Pensions has a program that allows small churches to receive a stipend of \$3,000 to use towards a sabbatical for pastors. More information can be found on their website at www.pensions.org.

The Lilly Foundation Clergy Renewal Program provides grants of up to \$45,000 of which \$15,000 may be applied to congregational expenses associated with the leave. For more information contact the program website at www.clergyrenewal.org or write to:

Lilly Endowment
Religion Division
2801 N. Meridian Street
P.O. Box 88068
Indianapolis, IN 46208
Phone (317) 916-7302

Re-Entry

Upon re-entry, it is strongly suggested that the pastor 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 concepts of mission between pastor and congregation.
- Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on part of pastor 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 pastor's sabbatical leave but also as the congregation's sabbatical leave.

GUIDELINES FOR A COVENANT AGREEMENT FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE

Policy Statement

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Committee on Ministry Responsibilities

1. Review the sabbatical timetable and usage plan as submitted by the pastor.
2. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session or pastor relative to the sabbatical.
3. Determine who will moderate the session in the pastor's absence.
4. Provide support and information, including a pulpit supply list.

Pastor Responsibilities

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the session – at least in outline form – approximately six months before the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
2. The pastor and session will work together to approve the proposal for the sabbatical and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
3. Assure the session of intent to continue service to the church following the conclusion of the sabbatical. While a time of Sabbath sometimes brings an understanding that a pastor's ministry should be concluded in that place, the commitment to at least one year allows the congregation to work through the end of a relationship gradually and in a healthy way.
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. Present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the session and the Committee on Ministry upon return.
7. Sign a Covenant Agreement with the Session.

Session Responsibilities

1. Receive “for approval” the pastor’s proposal for a sabbatical, approximately six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical. Affirm with the pastor the value to each of a time of sabbatical and begin the planning process several years in advance of the proposed date.
2. Continue terms of call commitments to the pastor during sabbatical leave from the inception of the planning.
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 pastor upon return. This review should be received by the session within a reasonable amount of time after the pastor’s return.
5. Sign a Covenant Agreement with the pastor.

Signed:

_____	, Pastor	_____	, Date
_____	, Clerk of Session	_____	, Date
_____	, COM Moderator	_____	, Date