

SALEM PRESBYTERY
Sabbatical Policy

Sabbatical Leave is expected as part of the Terms of Call for all installed pastors and Certified Christian educators serving churches in Salem Presbytery, who have served in their present position for six (6) continuous years. A congregation unable to provide this leave shall consult with the Commission on Ministry concerning the impediments to doing so.

The recommended length of the Sabbatical Leave for a full-time call is three (3) months. A sabbatical does not take the place of vacation and study leave. However, accrued vacation time and study leave may be attached to the Sabbatical Leave as an extension of the sabbatical leave should the parties agree. 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.

Sabbatical Leave

The Commission on Ministry takes seriously the responsibility of the Presbytery to nurture healthy pastors, healthy congregations and healthy pastoral relationships. Therefore, a viable solution to the peculiar stresses and strains clergy and congregations encounter is the Sabbath Leave, sometimes referred to as a Sabbatical. This solution has its roots in Scripture and in church tradition.

Clergy bear the burdens, the anguish, the pain, and hurt of their parishioners 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 their effectiveness and well-being. For too long, this situation has been accepted, even tolerated as an inevitable part of the job.

An extended time of rest and renewal, may result in refreshment and rejuvenation, bringing vitality and energy to both the pastor/educator and the congregation!

Explanation of Sabbatical Leave

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 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. Unlike the academic model, there is no expectation of an end product other than renewed health.

Planning for Sabbatical Leave

Recommended Process

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 and the expected benefits, together with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical Leave would be valuable for both the pastor/educator and the church. The pastor/educator is encouraged to consult with the COM for support and encouragement while developing a plan.

Upon approval by the Session in the year prior to the Sabbatical Leave, the Plan shall be forwarded to the Salem Presbytery's Commission on Ministry for their review. 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 benefits and discoveries. This report also will be sent to the Commission 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 auto and continuing education allowances at least 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.

While 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.

Pastor/Educator and congregations 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 or leadership problems in providing for the Sabbatical Leave shall consult with the Commission on Ministry for help in identifying the impediments and exploring reasonable options or solutions

Re-Entry

Upon re-entry, the clergy/educator should share with the entire congregation the details of the Leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit.

Such expected benefits include:

1. Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized
2. New understandings of the concept of mission as shared mission between clergy and congregation
3. 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.

Responsibilities

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 four times the length 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 Commission 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 Commission 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. Review the proposal and determine whether it is to be approved.
3. Continue terms of call commitments to the minister during sabbatical leave.
4. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the church of a sabbatical.
5. Request a written overview of the sabbatical from the minister upon return.

Commission on Ministry Responsibilities

1. Consult with the pastor/educator as a plan is developed.
2. Review the sabbatical timetable and usage plan as submitted by the minister.
3. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session or minister relative to the sabbatical.
4. Approve, as needed, any plans of the session for coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities during the Sabbatical leave.
5. Confirm who will moderate the session in the minister's absence.