



Sabbatical Policy
Committee on Ministry
Presbytery of Baltimore
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The Committee on Ministry recognizes the significant pressures that are placed upon clergy, their need for continuing education, and the benefit of renewal that sabbaticals provide. We encourage all sessions to enact a policy for sabbaticals for their pastors and other professional staff and a sample policy is attached.

Sabbatical leave is a gift from the congregation of a significant amount of time away from ministry responsibilities to be used for both professional growth and personal renewal, over and above the normal study leave. It is intended to sharpen the recipient's skills and renew his or her enthusiasm so that both the person taking the sabbatical and the congregation are enriched by the experience. We firmly believe that clergy who are provided a sabbatical have a solemn and ethical responsibility to use this time not only for personal renewal, but to use it in ways that will benefit the congregation granting the sabbatical.

A period of sabbatical leave offers several benefits for the church:

- Established routines can be broken and new styles of worship and administration explored.
- The leadership of laypersons and other staff can be allowed to develop.
- A new appreciation of the both the pastor and the role of pastor may be found.
- The break may provide the rest a pastor needs to continue her/her work at the church for a longer period of time.
- A sabbatical policy is a recruiting tool for Pastor Nominating Committees.

When a church writes a sabbatical leave policy, the philosophy behind the sabbatical should be agreed upon. Some view sabbatical leave as an extended time of spiritual rest and renewal. Others view it as an extended time for formal professional training. Expectations on how the time away is to be used should be agreed upon by the personnel committee, the session, and the ministers and other eligible professionals well in advance of the leave.

Normally, sabbaticals should be not less than three months and not longer than six months.

Both pastors and sessions are strongly encouraged to consult with the Executive Presbyter or Committee on Ministry when considering a sabbatical. The sabbatical itself and sabbatical plans **MUST BE APPROVED** by the Committee on Ministry, since the sabbatical is included in Terms of Call.

Many churches wonder how they will survive during a sabbatical period. In our experience, they do very well. Depending on the size of the church, a session may choose to hire a part or full time temporary supply pastor to carry on the duties. We encourage a part-time relationship in most circumstances – a pastor who can preach most Sundays, provide pastoral care, and moderate the session. We think it healthy and renewing if the session and the congregation pick

up other ongoing ministerial duties during this period so as to re-invigorate their own ministries. All too often congregations rely on the pastor – especially one who has been present for a long time – to take over ministries when the congregation and lay leadership would benefit from leading those ministries. If a church finds it difficult to pay for pastoral services when the pastor is away on sabbatical leave, we recommend consulting with the Executive Presbyter or the Committee on Ministry for suggestions for how to fill the needs of the congregation at minimum cost.

Sabbatical leave should not be used as a “time out” when conflicts exist between the minister and his/her congregation. In our experience, the issues do not go away because the participants spend time apart, and, in some cases, the conflict escalates when the sabbatical is over. Conflicts or tensions between pastors and congregations should be addressed by using the resources of the Presbytery or by counseling rather than by postponing those issues with a sabbatical.

Sabbatical leave may not be used as terminal leave. If the minister chooses to leave the congregation within a period of one year following the end of the sabbatical, the session may require that a portion of the salary attributable to the sabbatical be repaid. We believe it is a violation of trust for a clergy person to use a sabbatical as a time to search for a new position and, further, when a minister leaves a position within one year of a sabbatical, the congregation is likely to assume that the minister did indeed use the sabbatical for that purpose, whether or not the assumption is true. This sours congregations and sessions on the concept of the sabbatical and may make it impossible for subsequent ministers in that church to be granted sabbaticals.

In 2007 the Board of Pensions began to make available \$3000 sabbatical stipends to ministers serving churches less than 200 members.

Sample Church Sabbatical Policy

1. A minister* shall be eligible to take a sabbatical leave after serving seven years in his or her position at _____ Presbyterian Church and ministers who are granted such time are expected to return to the church for at least one year after the sabbatical.
2. The sabbatical period may be from three to six months in length.
3. A sabbatical includes that year's continuing education time. The combination of sabbatical leave and continuing education is limited to six months in one year.
4. Full compensation shall be paid during the sabbatical leave and payments will be made for vouchered expenses.
5. Sessions will arrange to supply the pulpit and to provide for the handling of any emergencies that may require the services of a pastor, according to the procedures that are normally followed when the minister is on vacation.
6. Ministers who take a sabbatical should plan to schedule vacation and/or other continuing education more than two months before or after the sabbatical.
7. The minister will receive his or her full vacation benefit for the year, in addition to the sabbatical.
8. Sabbaticals will ordinarily accommodate church scheduling needs.
9. The session will include funds in the operating budget to be set aside over a number of years to pay for additional staff support during the sabbatical. This does not preclude the session from securing sources of funding outside of the operating fund, if needed.
10. Continuing Education funds due the minister may be used for educational expenses incurred during the Sabbatical. The church may provide additional funds for educational (as opposed to renewal) events in which the minister participates during the sabbatical.
11. A minister seeking a sabbatical shall request such from the Personnel Committee at least six months in advance. Upon the approval of the Personnel Committee and Session, a Sabbatical Committee shall be formed consisting of the minister's liaison on the Personnel Committee, one elder, and a representative of either the worship or education committees.
12. Three months prior to the sabbatical the minister shall submit to the Sabbatical Committee a detailed plan for study and renewal which must also be approved by the Personnel Committee and shared with the Session and Congregation.
13. Upon return, the minister shall report to the congregation on his or her time away.
14. *For churches with larger ministerial and/or professional staffs:*
15. Only one sabbatical may be granted to the ministerial/professional staff within an 18-month period.
16. The church shall provide adequate staff support for the remaining clergy, similar to that available when the church has a vacant position.

*We encourage churches to include all professional staff members as part of this policy.