

Sabbatical Policy

Guidelines and Considerations

The Need For a Sabbatical Policy

Why a sabbatical policy?

Once a church has decided to implement proactive, healthy sabbaticals for their ministry staff, it is extremely useful to have a sabbatical policy. The following are reasons why this is beneficial:

1. Formulating a policy provides the opportunity for the ministry staff, eldership, board, leadership, etc. to proactively discuss what a sabbatical can be, and for what purposes it is beneficial.
2. A policy formulation process moves the discussion from personal opinions (staff and non-staff) surrounding sabbaticals, toward an educated, research-based process to draw conclusions regarding sabbatical principles and their implementation in the local church.
3. A policy helps facilitate a proactive culture of minister health, replacing countless hours of reactionary discussions regarding an individual minister's current "need", etc.
4. A policy can flush out details regarding frequency, length, finances, and accountability surrounding the sabbatical.
5. A policy can then be presented to the church with confidence, having been spiritually processed, thoroughly discussed, and concluded upon. Then when it is time for a minister to take a sabbatical, the church can have been previously "foretold", confidence in the process, and security that their spiritual leaders are not "in trouble." Those who may have questions or struggle with a sabbatical can then be directed to appropriate avenues to help resolve their questions.
6. A policy can greatly reduce the fear, shame, guilt, and hesitancy ministers and their families can feel in advocating for their own well-being. A policy's presence communicates that it is not a "personal" issue, but a principled one, rooted in Biblical

wisdom and carefully executed. This greatly enhances the minister's ability to receive what they should on a sabbatical, especially for those more "accused" or from "workaholic" type backgrounds.

7. A policy can be shared in an interview process to demonstrate the leadership's commitment to create an environment of health for their ministers and their families.
8. A policy can be revised as sabbaticals are practiced and wisdom is gained surrounding this practice.

Considerations for Formulating a Sabbatical Policy

A sabbatical policy should answer the following questions:

1. Who should get sabbaticals?
 - a. Lead minister only?
 - b. All ministry staff?
 - c. Non-paid ministry roles?
2. How often should a sabbatical be?
 - a. Every 5-7 years (trending toward 5 years according to "Sabbaticals" by Rusty Mckie¹)?
3. How long should the sabbatical be?
 - a. 1 to 6 months... 3 months being most common?
 - b. Sliding scale based on years of service, years between sabbaticals, ministry responsibility?
4. Should the church help fund sabbaticals?
 - a. A healthy sabbatical including travel, solitude, can quickly get expensive... should these costs be deferred by the church?
 - b. Scholarship / grant research?
5. When should the proposal be submitted?
 - a. How much time is desired to prepare congregation for time away?
 - b. Three months prior to a year recommended.
6. Who should approve your proposal?
 - a. Eldership? Board? Other staff?
 - b. Communication with regional family of churches?

¹ The primary resource for these considerations were found in "Sabbaticals: How to Take a Break From Ministry Before Ministry Breaks You" by Rusty McKie

7. Who should mentor the individuals receiving a sabbatical?
 - a. A sabbatical coach is highly recommended.
8. When and to whom will you give a post-sabbatical report?
 - a. Leadership group?
 - b. Board?
 - c. Congregation?
9. Should there be a commitment of post-sabbatical employment?
 - a. It is often recommended that an employee make a "soft" commitment to not leave the local congregation for a year following a sabbatical, God-willing.

Sample Policies

Note: These policies may have been amended since the printing of this document.

Chippewa Valley Church Sabbatical Policy

Sabbatical Leave

Creation date: 01/01/2016

General

The word "sabbatical" is derived from "Sabbath." Sabbath time is based on Genesis 2:1-4a in which God modeled and later required (Exodus 16:23) the setting aside of 1/7th of our time for rest.

Historically, in church and academia, professionals are given a sabbatical every seventh year. The purpose of this practice is for clergy to get a time of rest, recovery, renewal and reeducation in their field.

Purpose

A sabbatical is intended for the mutual benefit and growth of both the worker and the congregation. The timing for the sabbatical is an important consideration and must be determined in the light of and be compatible with the congregation's present needs and programming. Therefore, the exact timing and its funding must be approved by the church board of directors and leadership team.

Financial support of the church worker by the congregation during the sabbatical will include full salary and benefits with exception to car allowance.

Benefits of Sabbaticals

- For the church:
 - An experienced professional church worker who returns from sabbatical with renewed energy and zeal for the ministry.
 - An opportunity to develop congregational leadership.
 - An opportunity to show support and care for a beloved staff member and his/her family.
- For the congregational church leader
 - A needed break from long hours, high pressure, personal sacrifice, and the 24/7 nature of ministry.
 - A time for prayer, rest, study, decision-making, and travel.
 - A change of scenery which can help prevent burnout.
 - The opportunity to develop greater self-awareness and spiritual depth.
 - A time with family and friends, to renew and strengthen those relationships.

Policy

Sabbaticals will be granted to any full-time and part-time ministry staff based on the following accrual rates:

Leave

- Sabbatical leave will be accrued by paid ministry staff at a rate of 1 week per 6 months of service with the CVC.
- Leave accrual will be capped at 7 years (total of 14 weeks), after which no additional leave will be accrued until leave is taken.

Salary & Sabbatical Funding

- Sabbatical funding will be accrued to cover expenses during leave. Funds will accumulate at a rate of \$250 per 6 months with the CVC.
- Funding accrual will be capped at 7 years (total of \$3500), after which no additional funding will be accrued until leave is taken.
- Ministry staff will continue with their regular pay during sabbatical leave.

Accrual will begin as of the first day of employment for ministry staff members. Couples will accrue leave and funding separately as individuals.

Staff members will continue to receive full salary and benefits. Car allowance is not paid during this time.

Payout Upon Termination of Employment

Payout of sabbatical funds for termination due to transfer or non-disciplinary reasons.

- Employee's that are transferred or terminated for non-disciplinary reasons will receive the accumulated sabbatical funds upon termination.

Payout of sabbatical funds for termination due to disciplinary actions

- Employee's that are terminated for disciplinary reasons will not receive the accumulated sabbatical funds upon termination.

Restrictions

Sabbatical leave will not be used for disciplinary measure. No ministry staff member will be placed on leave by the Congregational Leader or Board of Directors.

Vacation time and sabbatical leave will not be combined contiguously, i.e., a staff member cannot take five weeks sabbatical and then two weeks vacation time together.

Staff members cannot request sabbatical leave that has not been accrued.

Calvary Baptist Sabbatical Policy

Rationale

This sabbatical policy is established to both serve the needs of the pastor and the Body of Christ. Pastors will be able to maintain their physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual health for long-term ministry. The church will benefit from long-term relationships with healthy shepherds who are able to maintain their vision and vitality for ministry.

There are three (3) possible sabbatical goals. Sabbaticals may be granted by the Elders for any one or combination of these goals based on the need of the Pastor.

- Physical Refreshment
- Spiritual Reflection
- Ongoing Education

Scholarship money for continuing education may be available based on church finances and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Procedures

Sabbatical time is earned by full-time pastors at the following rates:

- Lead Pastor:
 - Six weeks paid time after 3 years
 - Six additional weeks after 5th year
 - Six additional weeks after 7th year
 - Maximum accrued time of 18 weeks
 - Sabbaticals may be used in 6-week increments.
 - No additional time is accrued until a minimum of 6 weeks has been used
- Other Full-Time Pastors:
 - Four weeks paid time after 3 years
 - Four additional weeks after 5th year
 - Four additional weeks after 7th year
 - Maximum accrued time of 12 weeks
 - Sabbaticals may be used in 4-week increments.
 - No additional time is accrued until a minimum of 4 weeks has been used

If a Pastor moves from Associate to Lead position, his accrual rate changes at the date of position change and is not retro-active.

Only one (1) Pastor can be on sabbatical at a time.

Application must be made to Elders for all sabbatical time, and should include its purpose and recommendations for coverage of duties during sabbatical.

Elders may suggest that a pastor take a sabbatical if need arises.

This policy may be adapted and/or amended at the discretion of the Elders.

Excerpt from Denver Church of Christ Sabbatical Policy

The church will afford the senior staff a sabbatical leave starting at the age of 40 years old. Administrative staff that meet the criteria will be considered on a case by case basis. Sabbatical leave of up to 1 month after each 5 years of full-time ministry to the Denver Church of Christ. Additionally, sabbatical will be considered every 5 years thereafter. Sabbatical time is intended to afford staff and the congregation time to reflect on our mutual ministry in Christ and live more fully to our call as Christ's church.

During the sabbatical, the church will continue to pay staff members their full salary, benefits and an adjusted Accountable Reimbursement Plan (ARP) to ensure recurring costs such as: phone, internet are covered during the Sabbatical period. The church will also cover reimbursements, at the discretion of the elders, for various needs during the Sabbatical, such as books, travel, etc. The church and leadership will be responsible to maintain the church's programs, worship, and each other.

Staff must share plans regarding intention to take sabbatical leave with the Elder's and Lead Evangelist at least one year prior to the anticipated leave to afford adequate time to plan and budget appropriately. Unless otherwise agreed before the sabbatical, staff must continue service to the church for at least one year upon return from sabbatical. If not, the staff would be expected to reimburse the church for salary, benefits, and expenses incurred during the leave. Reimbursement will be prorated based on the number of months of service after their return from sabbatical. Sabbatical leave must be used while employed by the church and cannot be accrued and/or combined with future sabbatical or exchanged for pay upon leaving the church.

ICOC Elders Guidelines for Sabbatical/Renewal Leave

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20:8-11

The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.

Leviticus 25:1-5

Definition

A sabbatical or renewal leave (hereafter "sabbatical") is a time of release from normal duties to devote time to intentional spiritual, emotional and mental renewal, refreshment and study; it is not a vacation or personal leave. The sabbatical may take different forms (see 'Types of Sabbatical / Renewal Leaves' below). The intent of the sabbatical is to enhance the personal ministry of the minister and to further the ministry objectives of the church. Sabbatical leaves are granted upon approval by the [official board of the church].

General Principles and Considerations

The concept of a sabbatical leave is deeply and indisputably rooted in Scripture. The word "sabbatical" is derived from the Old Testament idea of "Sabbath," a Hebrew word meaning "rest." Historically in academia (and in churches), the professionals were given a Sabbath (sabbatical) every seventh year. The observation was that academic professors and ministers were so worn out after six years of teaching and leading that they needed a year of rest, recovery, renewal, and reeducation for their field of endeavor. The assumptions were that it benefited the institution (re-energized, renewed and strengthened service and leadership). It is based on Genesis 2:1-4 in which God modeled and later required (Exodus 20:8-11) the setting

aside of one-seventh of our time for restoration.² Among the Israelites, God instituted the sabbath year (Leviticus 25:1-5), where on every seventh year, the children of Israel were to refrain from farming the land and let the earth rest. Both the Israelites and the land benefited from the sabbath rest.

Ministers desperately need to recreate and restore what has been worn down by day-to-day encounters with reality. Nourishing one's body, mind and spirit, and regaining perspective requires a change of pace and place, perhaps in the form of a pilgrimage. Jesus provides an excellent example to follow. He actively nourished His whole person, body, mind and spirit – in prayer, in teaching, in travel, in time alone, in rest and in the caring for people. Through the way He lived, the apostles who walked and worked with Him learned from Him and benefited as well. That is what sabbatical is about – an extended pilgrimage away from the “normal” activities of life in the exercising of the roles, functions and responsibilities of the ministry vocation and a pilgrimage into other activities which renew, restore, rebuild and rejuvenate the whole person, body, mind and spirit. A significant change of life and living for an extended period of time ultimately benefits the person, his/her family and the ministry.

Sabbatical / renewal leave typically includes time for prayer, meditation, reading, writing, resting, reflection, fasting or other diet management, traveling, visiting new places and engaging in new experiences and experiencing different cultures. The best sabbaticals usually are more open-ended than rigid, allowing for the surprises, and possible new direction, that may come. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in His ministry. David tended sheep and learned valuable lessons about God's care and provision. After being struck down on the road to Damascus, Paul disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years, and emerged with a new vision. Sabbatical is a time to rest, receive, be nurtured and reflect on your relationship with God and your own story, so that the worker can be renewed, refreshed and revitalized by the breath of God.

Renewal provides opportunities for the heart to sing, but Sabbath rest has become a lost concept in modern life. Current technology and multi-tasking have inhibited the ability to balance periods of work and rest. Many faithful people feel that they must work ever longer and harder even though this is contrary not only to the wisdom of biblical teachings but to all we know about learning, productivity and creativity. For peak performance, all humans need a good rhythm of work/rest. God's people today need to re-learn the importance of Sabbath.

² See also Exodus 23:12, 31:15, 34:21, 35:2; Leviticus 23:3; Deuteronomy 5:13

Sabbath is a central biblical concept. God rested from the work of creation; God also commands that very creation periodically to stop working and rest.

Biblical illustrations

Jesus' own life and ministry reflect a deep understanding and appreciation for the rhythms of life. The demands upon Him were so great that His own ministry was punctuated with times of withdrawal for prayer and spiritual solitude. He often withdrew from the crowds, for renewal and to seek a quiet place to pray:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Matthew 14:22-23

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. Mark 6:46

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:15-16

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6:12

Jesus did not limit these periods of withdrawal to Himself. Mark recalls Jesus telling His disciples to "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" because "so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat." [Mark 6:31] If Jesus needed to distance Himself on occasion from the press and clamor of the crowd to find peace and renewal of calling and purpose, how much more do modern ministers need that!

The Need for Renewal/Sabbatical

Life-long continuing education for ministry leaders is important for sustained ministry vitality. Sabbatical time for ministry staff invites participation in the rhythm established in creation, a rhythm of creativity and work, followed by restoration and renewal. In the pattern of our Lord's life, we see intense activity and contact with people alternating with time apart, time to listen and to be replenished. Ministry sabbatical time is necessary for the ongoing growth, nourishment and renewal of those who are ordained to lead the people of God and the congregations they serve.

Sabbatical allows space and time for the renewal of vision and hope, through the gift of rest from regular work schedules; it is a gift the congregation can give to the minister in recognition of faithful ministry over an extended period of time. The daily pressures of ministry can obscure the vocation that is the foundation of the profession; sabbatical leave allows ministers the opportunity to listen to the call of the living God and to discern direction for ministry. With careful planning and good communication, ministry sabbatical may be a source of newness for the whole congregation; the time is an opportunity for the minister to be made new, then to preach, teach, and minister from that newness in Christ.

The Purpose

The fundamental purpose of a ministry sabbatical is to allow rededication to the vocation. Therefore, sabbaticals should provide opportunities for reflection and renewal toward the end of being re-grounded in the life of God who calls us to servant leadership. Continuing education can and often should be part of sabbaticals. The vocation of ministry requires certain skills and capacities appropriate to the particular situation in which a minister serves. As needed and appropriate, the sabbatical may enable the minister to deepen and enhance existing vocational skills or to acquire new ones.

The normal expectation would be that sabbatical / renewal leave would be agreed upon only with a commitment to a mutually agreed period of continuing service.

Eligibility

A minister becomes eligible for a Sabbatical / Renewal leave when:

1. The minister has served at least [x]³ full years as an ordained minister
2. The minister has served at least [x-2] years continuously in the congregation granting the leave
3. There has been a minimum of [x] years since the previous leave
4. A Sabbatical / Renewal Leave will be limited to [y⁴] months
5. The minister has followed the steps outlined in "Guidelines for Implementation of Sabbatical / Renewal Leave"

All ministers fulfilling the conditions indicated above, are eligible for consideration for a sabbatical / renewal leave. There may be situations in which a minister may be eligible, yet a leave cannot be granted.

Types of Sabbatical / Renewal Leaves

A sabbatical leave may include one or more or a combination of the types of leaves listed below.

1. **Study Leave** – a study leave is taken to focus on a particular learning goal such as completion of a defined academic course/program, seminar or study. The purpose must be defined in advance and reporting should be provided by the minister regarding the progress and results of the study. The length of the leave may range from a few weeks to several months or a full year.
2. **Rest and Spiritual Renewal Leave** – Spiritual renewal and rest should be a component of every type of leave, however at times a leave may be necessary for this purpose alone. If there has been an extended or particularly intense time of pouring him/herself out for the church, the minister may need an extended time to replenish spiritual resources through prayer and reflection. This may include time at a retreat center including reading, rest, maintaining spiritual disciplines and worship and journaling. There must be clear goals set for the purpose of the leave and accountability established through formal reporting of outcomes at the conclusion of the leave.

³ Typically 6 or 7 years. Consider Genesis 1, for the rest after 6 days of creation, or Deuteronomy 15 with the cancellation of debts after 7 years.

⁴ Typically 3 to 6 months. The length of the leave may vary according to the need which it is intended to meet and the objectives which it proposes to fulfill (e.g., educational courses of study)

3. **Service Leave** – On occasion a minister may have specific expertise or interests that may be needed by a sister church or organization on a short-term basis. A church may decide to release a minister for a time to fill this need. Examples may include overseas service or service to a local church agency or institution. This may include interim teaching, administrative support, return to countries previously served or helping to start a new ministry. The length of this type of leave varies depending on the situation, however, it should be defined in advance.
4. **Special Assignment** – This type of leave may include a special assignment to write children’s ministry curricula or other materials, to visit other churches/ministries, or to assist in the development of a local service ministry. This type of leave is typically a short period, usually a month or less in duration.
5. **Pastoral Exchange** – This type of leave involves a short-term exchange with another minister in a different setting. This may be an international exchange including exchange of homes and jobs while retaining current salary. This may also include an exchange within North America with a minister of a different cultural congregation. Typically this type of leave would be two to six months, however it may be longer depending on the situation. The duration should be defined in advance.

Note: in situations where travel is required, especially to the developing world, insurance may be impacted. The individual taking the sabbatical must discuss any potential concerns regarding coverage with the administrative staff of the church or the insurance brokers.

Additional Considerations

1. **What are the potential benefits to the church?** A church is a body that requires the contribution of all members. At times, ministry staff roles may be seen as not only leadership and equipping roles, but also for completing much of the work required for effective ministry. Having a staff member away provides opportunity for others in the church to step up to use their gifts. A planned leave is a healthier alternative for the church than a forced time away due to burnout or health concerns. In addition, the larger church may benefit from ministers who are available for short-term assignments. The exchange of ideas, gifts and resources can strengthen the witness of the church of Jesus Christ.

2. **Sabbatical Costs?** The church continues to pay the full salary of the individual taking the leave. In situations where the leave may be longer in duration, the church may determine to pay only a portion of the salary if extended past the agreement. Depending on the type of leave, such a service or exchange leave, there may be ministry costs which the church may agree to cover.
3. **Will programs be affected?** By ensuring that adequate preparation is made and alternative leadership is in place well in advance of the sabbatical, there should be minimum disruption to ongoing programs. This further supports the need to apply for a sabbatical leave well in advance of the intended start date.
4. **Will attendance be affected if the senior 'preaching' minister takes a sabbatical?** Having regular 'preaching' ministers provides sustained and consistent ministry, however a church may also benefit from contributions of other preachers, from inside and outside of the church. Many churches may find that this provides further opportunity for others to develop their speaking gifts. A church may also consider hiring an interim minister to provide continuity during the leave.
5. **Will the minister come back?** Typically the minister will come back refreshed, renewed and eager to continue his/her ministry within the church. Depending on the situation, there may be an expectation built into the sabbatical agreement that the minister will agree to serve a pre-determined amount of time after the leave, for example, one (1) year. Ministers who take periodic leaves typically stay longer in their congregations. On occasion, a minister may determine during a leave that a permanent change is needed. There is little advantage to the church to insist a minister fulfill the obligation of a pre-defined term if his/her enthusiasm for the ministry is gone.
6. **What should a congregation do?** Discuss and determine what your approach will be to sabbatical leaves before a minister asks for one, recognizing and anticipating the benefits the church will see from a well-planned approach. A policy should be developed defining parameters around frequency, length, costs, etc., to provide a framework for sabbatical requests. There should be some flexibility built into the policy to allow for different types of leaves and the specific requests. Upon receipt of a proposal for a leave, the details should be negotiated with the minister and a written

agreement drafted. A checklist should be completed to ensure all relevant details and tasks have been completed.

7. **What should a minister do?** Talk with the official board or leadership team about the church's sabbatical leave policy. Determine when you may consider taking advantage of the policy, keeping in mind the opportunities that may be available for different types of leaves. It is best to begin thinking about this a year in advance or longer if your church has not previously offered sabbatical leaves. Seek counsel from colleagues and others about effective ways to use a leave. Develop a proposal to present to the appropriate leadership team. It is wise to have a sabbatical mentor or mentoring team established to provide guidance prior to and during the sabbatical.

Resources for Further Study

Sabbatical Resources

- ***Leading on Empty*** by Wayne Cordeiro
- ***Clergy Renewal*** by A. Richard Bullock, Richard J. Bruesehoff
- ***Sabbaticals*** by Rusty McKie
- ***Journeying Toward Renewal*** by Melissa Bane Sevier
- http://media.focusonthefamily.com/pastoral/pdf/PAS_Sabbaticals.pdf
- <https://crosspointministry.com>
- <http://leadercareonline.com/>
- www.soulshepherding.org
- <http://www.lifeandleadership.com/ministry-resources/self-care-for-church-leaders.html>

Spiritual Retreat Resources

- ***Silence and Solitude*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- ***Sacred Rhythms*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- ***Invitation to Retreat*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- www.transformingcenter.org

Sabbath Resources

- ***Emotionally Healthy Church*** by Peter Scazzero
- ***Zeal Without Burnout*** by Christopher Ash and Alistair Begg
- ***Sabbath Keeping*** by Lynne Baab
- ***The Sabbath*** by Abraham Joshua Heschel
- ***Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*** by Marva J. Dawn
- ***Daily Office*** by Peter Scazzero
- ***Sabbath as Resistance*** by Walter Brueggemann

- ***Sabbath*** by Wayne Muller
- ***Receiving the Day*** by Dorothy C. Bass
- ***The Listening Life*** by Adam McHugh
- ***Clergy Burnout*** by Fred Lehr
- ***Leading the Congregation (Caring for Yourself While Serving the People)*** by Roger Heuser and Norman Shawchuck
- ***Subversive Sabbath*** by AJ Swoboda
- ***Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*** by Ruth Haley Barton
- ***Your Life in Rhythm*** by Bruce Miller