

GUIDELINES FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE

Presbytery of Boston

Committee on Ministry

The continuous learning, growth and renewal of all ministerial staff is critical in the fulfillment of the mission of the congregation. Far too many of our clergy are experiencing burnout and/or exhaustion. Creativity is being lessened. New directions in ministry become hurdles to cross rather than exciting opportunities for growth in Christ's kingdom. Sabbaticals are one way of addressing this problem. The Presbytery (Committee on Ministry), the pastor and the local church are partners in a sabbatical program. Each has a role to play but central to each is encouragement and financial support.

What is a sabbatical? Definitions vary but generally include a time to increase the skills of the church professional, theological study or spiritual renewal. The content of the sabbatical is the decision of the church professional, with the concurrence of the session and the Presbytery. It may be a time for reading, for traveling, for study in an institution, or for development of a skill long desired—or any combination of the above. A sabbatical is not necessarily limited to improving pastoral functioning. It is a time for renewal which may best occur by resting. We encourage the pastor to think about getting away for at least part of the time.

A sabbatical is usually taken after the completion of six years of service, and every six years thereafter. It is best negotiated at the time of the call, but can be added to the call upon renegotiation. If a sabbatical was not part of the original call and the church professional is considering a sabbatical, allow at least 12-24 months discussion time before renegotiation of the contract to include sabbatical provisions.

Sabbaticals for church professionals are typically three, four or six months which may be extended by using vacation time and accrued study leave. (No additional study leave time is given during a sabbatical leave year. The sabbatical IS the study leave.) Sabbatical leave time does not accrue. Credit for time served toward a sabbatical in one position does not transfer to a new position unless specifically granted as a benefit in the initial contract.

The church professional who takes a sabbatical is expected to return to service for a minimum of one year following the sabbatical.

PLANNING THE SABBATICAL

To be eligible for a sabbatical leave, the pastor shall present, in writing, to the session for their approval, a program or plan of activity, for the sabbatical leave at least six months prior to the proposed beginning of the sabbatical leave. This program of activity and meditation shall include a detailed description of the plan, travel plans and

location of study, the goals to be achieved and the expected end product, together with a personal statement as to why this sabbatical would be valuable for both the pastor and the church. Included in this plan should be the detailed description of the church's plan for pastoral coverage during the sabbatical.

Upon approval by the session, the plan shall be forwarded to the Boston Presbytery Committee on Ministry for its review and recommendation.

At the completion of the sabbatical, the pastor should present to the next regular meeting of the session a written report of activities and findings. This report should be forwarded to the Committee of Ministry immediately following the session meeting when it is presented. A report to the entire congregation should also be made in a timely fashion.

GETTING STARTED

If the congregation and/or pastor has not previously taken a sabbatical, at least two years lead time is necessary to prepare the congregation stressing the biblical, theological, and renewal context for the sabbatical. The pastor should begin by gathering information about the types of sabbaticals s/he is interested in. A pastor/session planning committee working together has been found to be helpful. The first determination should be the length of the sabbatical.

Funding concerns and possible dates should be raised at least two years in advance. The dates chosen are the joint decision of the session and the pastor (in consultation with the pastor's family). Approximately one year before the sabbatical a "Who Does What" list should be developed and shared frequently with the congregation. At the three month mark a decision should be made about whether a sabbatical interim (or temporary pulpit supply) is desired and that person should be found. If one person is not available to fill the temporary vacancy, pulpit supply plans should be in place as well as emergency coverage and plans for hospital visitation and home visits of the sick.

FOR THE CONGREGATION

The church is responsible for salary and benefits during the church professional's sabbatical (but not travel costs) as well as costs for temporary pastoral leadership. Financial concerns often limit a congregation's enthusiasm for their pastor's sabbatical. These are legitimate considerations. However, many volunteers have been found to cover sabbatical leave. Some interims (temporary pulpit supply) are interested in only short term commitments and will make considerable financial allowances to enable colleagues to experience leaves.

Churches are encouraged to plan ahead by creating a special sabbatical leave fund and contributing to it as a part of each year's budget. Some churches have found it

helpful to budget a sabbatical amount of \$300-\$500 yearly and let the funds accrue until the sabbatical year. The church may want to give the pastor on sabbatical leave a gift to help defray costs of the sabbatical.

FINANCIAL PLANNING

The Lilly Endowment offers funding up to a total of \$30,000 under their National Clergy Renewal Program. More information and application materials can be requested from Lilly Endowment, Inc., 2801 North Meridian Street, P.O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, IN 46208-0068.

The Louisville Institute offers study grants for pastor leaders ranging from \$4,000 to \$12,000 depending on the length of the leave. For an application packet contact Study Grants for Pastoral Leaders, The Louisville Institute, 1044 Alta Vista Road, Louisville, KY 40205-1798. Phone: 502-895-3411, ext. 251. E mail: <mailto:into@louisville-institute.org>

FOR THE FAMILY

Planning a sabbatical involves the pastor's family as well as the congregation. Because of commitments of some pastors' spouses or small children at home, many pastors prefer to take their sabbatical at home. If this is the case, it is recommended that the pastor spend at least some time on retreat or traveling. Whatever the decision, the family needs to be involved in the sabbatical planning.

RESOURCE BOOK

The book Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning by Richard Bullock and Richard Brueshoff available from Alban is a useful resource. It can be ordered by [www. Alban.org](http://www.Alban.org)

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