

## Guidelines for Sabbatical Leave

**Introduction:** Sabbatical leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year of 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. Although each person needs to take responsibility for their own development and well being, the PSNE, its COM, and each congregation and/or special ministry organization have a supportive role to play. This role means providing the encouragement, time, and financial support needed to ensure that this happens. The Commission on Ministry believes strongly that the continuous learning, growth, and renewal of all staff, full-time and part-time, is a critical factor in the successful fulfillment of the mission of the church. The guidelines that follow focus on the church professional's sabbatical. The principle of sabbatical, however, should be applied to all those who labor on behalf of Christ's mission in the world. .

**Definition of Sabbatical:** This is a time of rest, of a break or change from a normal routine, to meet one or more of the following objectives:

- 1) skills enhancement;
- 2) theological study, or
- 3) spiritual renewal.

**Duration:** The duration shall be 3 months, and may be extended to include vacation and study leave for that year.

Who qualifies? Full time church professionals. No sooner than completion of 6 years of service, nor sooner than 6 years after previous sabbatical. Sabbatical leave should be spelled out in any new or re-negotiated call.

**Preparing the church:** It is recommended that any church that has made a provision for a sabbatical leave, beginning at least six months prior to the start of the leave, fully inform and educate the congregation about the

leave, its rationale and foreseen benefits.

**Funding:** The church will be and continue to be responsible for all salary and benefits, except travel allowance (local mileage), during the sabbatical. While the church professional is on sabbatical leave, the employing church shall provide for payment of the expenses of whoever covers the duties of the person on leave. All costs to the church professional for the sabbatical leave shall be borne by the church professional, but they may apply their study allowances to these costs, acting pastoral services will be the responsibility of the employing church. If requested the Presbytery will assist, as able, in securing an acting pastor.

Recognizing that for many congregations sabbatical leave as described can be a financial burden, here are some suggestions:

- The Lilly Endowment offers funding 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. These are only available to those serving in congregational ministry settings

- Plan ahead by creating a special fund to which the church contributes over several years in anticipation of a sabbatical leave.

- The Board of Pensions offers Sabbatical Funds through their Emergency Grant Program.

**Judicatory review and approval:** A written plan of study for review by the session and the COM must be approved 6 months prior to beginning the sabbatical. The sabbatical plan should share the plans for sabbatical study, and recommendations from the Session of how pastoral duties will be covered during the leave.

**Post-sabbatical review:** At the completion of the sabbatical, the church professional must present to the next Session meeting a written summary of the leave experience, and ways they sense they are being called to include anything gained during sabbatical into their ministry going forward. Many congregations enjoy hearing about the sabbatical in a sermon upon return. The congregation, through the Session, also presents a report to the Pastor at the next Session meeting a written summary of their leave experience and

ways they sense they are being called to include anything gained into the life of the congregation. These reports are then forwarded to the COM. This is not meant to be a paternal process, but rather an opportunity to share the work of the Holy Spirit in this time.

***Post-sabbatical service:*** Following the sabbatical, the church professional is to serve that church for a period of at least 4 times the length of time away, e.g., 12 months after a three month leave, 16 months after a 4 month leave. If a pastor leaves within that time frame, the cash portion of the salary attributable to the sabbatical will be refunded to the church by the pastor.

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