

Guideline #01
SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES

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Introduction:

These guidelines are meant to help churches and professional staffs implement policies for Sabbatical leave. Sabbatical leave is beneficial, both to ministry professionals and to the churches they serve. Sabbatical leave can help church professionals refocus their vision and find renewed sense of call. Often, Sabbatical leave is needed to engage in a new or intensive continuing educational experience not made possible in a shorter time period. God calls us to honor Sabbath in a busy world, and in the busy church. Sabbatical leave can offer valuable refreshment and rejuvenation for those who labor continuously for God's people, new vision for continued service, and renewed compassion for the beloved children of God. Sabbatical leave can offer the congregation a time to reflect on their future, for members to exercise new gifts for service in the church, and for the church as a whole to renew its call as part of the priesthood of all believers.

Definition:

Sabbatical leave is a planned time of study and renewal by which one seeks personal and professional growth. It is an opportunity for an individual to disengage from regular and routine tasks so that the ministry may be viewed from a new perspective, and the soul renewed to serve refreshed. It is not a prolonged vacation. Through reflection, prayer, rest, study and travel, one finds the promise of God who sustains us through a period of reflection, leading to the renewal of energy upon the return to the permanent call.

Suggestions:

Churches and their professional staff (ordained clergy and Christian educators) are encouraged to determine suitable forms of leave that will benefit all involved, and not place too heavy a burden on the church. The most viable avenue of assuring a Sabbatical is to incorporate this important benefit in the Terms of Call. If not included in the initial terms, Sabbatical can be incorporated in an annual update to the Terms of Call. One method is for the Terms of Call to include a fixed amount each year that goes into a Sabbatical account and accumulates over a seven (7) year period to a realistic amount. It is therefore advisable to draft realistic budget details in order to support the amount to be included in the terms of call.

1. Eligibility: Sabbatical leave is a benefit offered at the discretion of the church, by the authority of the Session. For Teaching Elders and certified Christian Educators, when Sabbatical leave involves a change in the Terms of Call, it is subject to the approval of the congregation. Often in Sabbatical leave policies, full time staff may be eligible for Sabbatical leave after seven (7) years of service within that congregation. The Session may decide to give credit for previous full time service by the staff member at other positions.
2. The staff member should bring a proposal to the appropriate committee and/or the Session, providing ample time for the church's planning and budget considerations. The proposal should include details regarding plans, proposed arrangements for covering the staff member's congregational duties, and costs associated with the proposed leave.
3. Continuing Education money that has accrued for up to three (3) years may be used for the costs of Sabbatical.
4. The length of Sabbatical is ordinarily 12 weeks, but may be shorter or longer as mutually determined. The year it is taken, it typically includes continuing education time, so that the staff member's continuing education time *is* the Sabbatical time. It ordinarily does not include vacation time.

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5. Well before the leave begins, the staff member and the appropriate committee/Session should inform the congregation about the Sabbatical. If not included in the Terms of Call, an explanation of the policy and the accepted plans for the Sabbatical leave is appropriate. Grants from outside agencies or institutions may be available to support the Sabbatical leave, but are not widely available. The church may contact the Presbytery office for encouragement and support before and during the time of the leave. The Presbytery is a resource for helping with staffing issues, pulpit supply, and pastoral care.
6. Upon completion of the Sabbatical leave, at an acceptable time, the staff member should provide a report to the Session and/or the appropriate committee that offers an overview of the Sabbatical and its impact upon the person. It is prudent that a staff member remain in the position at least a year after sabbatical.
7. It is recommended that not more than one staff member take a Sabbatical per calendar year. In the event that two or more staff members are eligible during the same year, the staff members and appropriate committee or the Session should together determine an acceptable resolution.

Cost Considerations:

For the Church:

- a. The employee's salary and benefits continue during the sabbatical
- b. Funding for interim help may be necessary during the Sabbatical. The church should budget accordingly.

For the Employee:

A realistic budget is key to minimizing out of pocket expenses for the employee.