

SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES

The Presbytery of the James recommends to churches that Teaching Elders and Certified Christian Educators (full time or part time) be granted a compensated Sabbatical Leave of up to three (3) months after the completion of six (6) continuous years in an individual congregation within the Presbytery of the James.

Guidelines

Sabbatical Leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of renewal through the Sabbath day and Sabbath year. The model for Sabbatical Leave is Jesus Christ, who took time to be in prayer away from his own community of disciples on the mountain, on the road, and out on the water. Sabbatical Leave is a time of "...holy leisure, leisure that is for holy things, leisure that makes the human more human by engaging the heart and broadening the vision and stretching the soul."¹ Sabbatical Leave is "...a time to receive, to be nurtured, to dig deeper into yourself, your relationship with God and your own roots and stories, so that you can be renewed, refreshed, and revitalized by the breath of God."²

Definition

The Sabbatical Leave for a Teaching Elder or Certified Christian Educator is qualitatively different from an academic sabbatical, study leave, or vacation. The Sabbatical Leave frees the Teaching Elder/Certified Educator from the ongoing pressures of deadlines, pastoral duties, and being constantly on call, and replaces that with a plan that encourages activities such as rest, travel, study, and reflection while allowing for the possibility of seizing the moment when opportunities not planned present themselves. A renewed and refreshed pastor would be expected to bring new energy and insight to the life of the congregation.

The Sabbatical Leave is also for the congregation. It is an opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the whole nature and meaning of ministry and the place of the congregation in that ministry; to renew and strengthen congregational lay leadership; and to continue to grow in faith through different perspectives and preaching styles which supply preachers may bring.

Establishment of Leave

We strongly encourage that a Sabbatical Leave be part of the initial Terms of Call for a Teaching Elder/Certified Educator beginning a ministry with a congregation in the Presbytery of the James. Making this provision well in advance will allow ample time for the Minister/Certified Educator to plan the time away from the church as well as for the congregation to set aside funds in the budget each year to cover expenses projected for the period of leave. In the event the Sabbatical Leave was not part of the initial Terms of Call, the Teaching Elder/Certified Educator and Session are urged to work together on a proposal for Sabbatical Leave, which would be a part of the subsequent Terms of Call to be approved by the congregation. The congregation should have at least six (6) months' notice prior to the beginning of the Sabbatical Leave.

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1. Joan Chittister, Wisdom Distilled From the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today. Harper San Francisco, 1991, p. 101.
 2. A. Richard Bullock, Sabbatical Planning for Clergy & Congregations. The Alban Institute, Inc, 1998, p. 5.