

SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES

The Presbytery of the James recommends that churches grant ministers of the Word and Sacrament (both installed and serving in covenant relationships) and certified Christian educators (CCE) (full-time or part-time) Sabbatical Leave with full pay and benefits of up to three (3) months following the completion of six (6) continuous years of employment with that church.

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

Sabbatical Leave for a minister/CCE is qualitatively different from an academic sabbatical, study leave, or vacation. The Sabbatical Leave frees the minister/CCE 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 minister/CCE is expected to bring new energy and insight to the life of the congregation.

Sabbatical Leave is also for the congregation. It is an opportunity for the congregation to reflect on the nature and meaning of ministry and its place in that ministry, to renew and strengthen congregational lay leadership, and to continue growing in faith by virtue of the different perspectives and preaching styles supply preachers may bring.

Establishment of Leave

The presbytery strongly encourages PNCs and Personnel Committees to include provisions for Sabbatical Leave in a minister's initial Terms of Call or Covenant Agreement, and in the CCE's original employment contract. This provides the minister/CCE ample time to plan and prepare for this season. It also gives timely notice to the congregation, so that they might begin putting aside funds each year to cover expenses during the sabbatical.

1. Ministers whose terms of call do not include a provision for sabbatical are encouraged to develop, in cooperation with their Session, a Sabbatical Leave proposal, which the congregation would vote on when it next approves changes to the Minister's terms of call.

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, 1998), p. 5.

2. Ministers in Covenant Relationships are encouraged with their Session to incorporate this policy in their Covenant Agreements.
3. CCEs whose current employment contracts do not include a provision for Sabbatical Leave are encouraged to develop a proposal with their head of staff and Personnel Committee for approval by Session.

Expectations

Sessions shall:

1. Ensure that PNCs and Personnel Committees are aware of this policy and its recommendations
2. Provide the congregation at least six (6) months' notice of the beginning of a scheduled sabbatical
3. In coordination with the minister/CCE, develop a ministry plan for the sabbatical period, including congregational goals for that period and post-sabbatical opportunities for the minister/CCE to share the fruit of their sabbatical

Congregations shall:

1. Respect the purpose and the spirit of the sabbatical by refraining from communication with the minister/CCE during the sabbatical period
2. Under the Session's guidance, support and pursue the ministry goals developed for the sabbatical period

Minister/CCE: As fully as presbytery supports the practice of Sabbatical Leave, it also fully acknowledges that a primary goal of sabbatical is to refresh and strengthen the minister or educator *for continuing service to the Church*. Accordingly, all persons taking sabbatical leave shall:

1. Remove their PIF/CV/resume from circulation no later than six months prior to the beginning of the sabbatical
2. Upon their return:
 - a. In good faith, intend to continue their service with the host congregation for a period of at least four times the length of the sabbatical – e.g., if a Minister/ CCE takes a sabbatical for 3 months, they are expected to serve their congregation for at least 12 months following their return. The specific terms and dates shall be included in the minister's terms of call/covenant agreement or the CCE's employment contract.
 - b. Share with the congregation, in a timely manner, the fruits of their sabbatical.

Approved: Stated Meeting of the POJ June 16, 2020