

Policy on Pastoral Sabbatical Leave (2016)

Adopted Effective 9 October 2009 Revised 1

January 2013

Revised 1 January 2016

Rationale for Sabbatical Leave

Sabbatical Leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal and education. 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.

In this context, Sabbatical Leave for Teaching Elders (ministers) is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. Sabbatical Leave follows precedents in the academic community and among a growing number of private sector groups. This "extended time" is qualitatively different from "vacation" or "days off" in that it provides an opportunity for the individual to strategically disengage from regular and normal tasks so that ministry and mission may be viewed from a new perspective because of a planned time of specific focus and opportunity for learning.

Definitions

In this document the phrase "Teaching Elder" and the word "pastor" and the word "minister" are meant to include full-time Teaching Elders who serve as pastors and associate pastors to a church, and other Teaching Elders who are serving in fulltime positions of validated ministry. The word "Session" is meant to include governing bodies in churches that are called by other names such as "parish council" or "parish board." The word "Session" is also meant to include other governing bodies and judicatories that have the same relationship to a person serving in other validated ministries as a session has to a pastor.

Presbytery Policy

The Presbytery of East Iowa affirms as its own practice and recommends to the sessions of churches within its bounds that all full-time Teaching Elders who have served in their present positions for six (6) continuous years receive a compensated Sabbatical Leave. The recommended length of the Sabbatical Leave is at least four (4) weeks and normally not to exceed twelve (12) weeks. It is recommended that this Sabbatical Leave be built into the Call Process for both pastors currently serving churches in the presbytery as well as new pastors coming into the presbytery. This can be accomplished by stating in the call or contract that the session will grant the minister a sabbatical leave in accordance with the provision of the presbytery policy on sabbaticals titled, "Sabbatical Leave Policy for East Iowa Presbytery and

Congregations within its Bounds.” Upon completion of the Sabbatical Leave, the incumbent minister would normally continue serving the same congregation for a period of at least one year following the completion of the Sabbatical Leave plus accrued vacation time. Specific approval must be given by the session and MCC if the individual does not wish to abide by this requirement. In addition, congregations may limit Sabbatical Leave to one staff person per year, in multiple staff situations. Additional time may be negotiated by combining the sabbatical period with accrued study leave and/or unused vacation. There may be situations where it would be appropriate to grant a Sabbatical Leave to a minister who has less than (6) years of continuous service.

Sessions may wish to extend the provisions of this policy to other full-time professionals who are required to have special education and skills for their positions in the church, such as Commissioned Ruling Elders, Certified Christian Educators and Directors of Music.

Policy Rationale

A sabbatical will enable the minister to be renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A sabbatical enables a minister to return to the responsibilities of the parish with new energy, spiritual vision and effectiveness.

Planning for Sabbatical Leave

Eligibility and Approval Process

To be eligible for a Sabbatical Leave, the minister shall present, in writing, to the church session for their approval, a program (the “Proposal”) of activity for the Sabbatical Leave and the Sabbatical timetable at least six (6) months prior to the proposed beginning of the Sabbatical Leave. This program of activity and meditation shall include a detailed description of the Proposal, the goals to be achieved and the expected end-product(s), together with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical Leave would be valuable for both the minister and the church. The Proposal should also contain a statement that the Sabbatical will be taken in accordance with the provisions of this policy titled, “Policy on Pastoral Sabbatical Leave (2016)”

Prior to final approval by the Session, the Proposal and timetable shall be forwarded to MCC for review and recommendation. Included in this Proposal will be the church’s plan for ministerial services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave.

At the completion of the Sabbatical Leave, the minister should present to the next regular meeting of the church Session, a written report of activities and findings. A copy of this report also will be sent to the MCC immediately following the Session meeting when it is presented.

Funding

The employing church will continue the minister's salaries, pension, major medical, disability and death benefits, book allowance, vacation and, at the direction of the Session, auto and continuing education allowances at the same level as those in effect at the time of the Sabbatical Leave.

The employing church will also contract for substitute ministerial services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave. Although, on the face of it, the Sabbatical Leave may seem like yet another financial burden for the local congregation to bear, it is crucial for Sessions and congregations to recognize the long-term benefits they as a church will reap from granting Sabbaticals. For example, ministers who have the opportunity to examine issues of professional growth and development as ministers within an existing position are more likely to stay more years in a particular call. The sabbatical provision conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the calling church. It also offers an incentive to ministers to commit to and think in terms of longer years of service in a particular church.

Clergy, and sessions, are encouraged to set aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of Sabbatical Leave. In this regard pastors and sessions may wish to consider providing in the terms of call or contract that pastors may accumulate Continuing Education money over more than one year to help defer expenses of a Sabbatical. Those churches that would have financial problems in providing for the Sabbatical Leave may consult with the Presbytery. In addition, those churches that cannot secure Ruling Elder leadership within their own congregations might consider using Ruling Elders who have graduated from the commission lay pastor curriculum or Teaching Elders serving as Associate Pastors who might be willing to preach one Sunday without honorarium, etc.

NOTE: The Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program housed at Louisville Seminary, provides study grants for ministerial leaders. Also, the Board of Pensions has a financial aid program for pastors titled "The Assistance Program – Sabbath Sabbatical Support Grant" available for those who qualify. Information on the program is on the Board of Pensions Web site, www.pensions.org.

Return to Regular Service

Upon return to regular service, it is strongly suggested that the minister share with the entire congregation or other appropriate parties the details of the leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit. The return process provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the benefits that resulted from the Sabbatical Leave.

Expected benefits may include:

- Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized.

- Discerning new understandings of the concepts of mission between clergy and congregation.
- Reaffirming the call to ministry on part of minister and congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of God's people.

The ideal result would be for the congregation to see this period of time not just as the individual's Sabbatical Leave but also as the congregation's Sabbath Leave.

Summary of Responsibilities

Ministers and Congregations Commission (MCC) Responsibilities

1. Review the Sabbatical timetable and Proposal as submitted by the minister and provide appropriate feedback to the Session and minister.
2. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session, or minister relative to the Sabbatical.
3. Determine who will moderate the Session in the minister's absence.
4. Assist with identifying pastoral and pulpit coverage.

Minister Responsibilities

1. Present the Sabbatical Proposal to the Session in the detail specified under the above section titled, "Eligibility and Approval Process" a minimum of six months before the intended commencement of the sabbatical. There may be circumstances when a shorter period would be permissible. However, there should always be sufficient time for full consideration of the proposal.
2. Secure the approval of the Session for the Sabbatical Proposal and work out the necessary coverage of ministerial and pulpit responsibilities.
3. Assure the Session of continued service to the church for at least one full year from the conclusion of the Sabbatical.
4. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the Session before departing on a Sabbatical.
5. Submit to MCC in writing the Sabbatical Proposal and timetable.
6. Upon return, present a written and verbal report on the results of the Sabbatical Leave in relation to knowledge acquired, agreed upon goals and renewal to the Session and a written report to the MCC. This should be accomplished within the first month after return.

Session Responsibilities

1. Receive for approval the minister's Proposal for a Sabbatical, at least six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the Sabbatical. Any action on the Proposal should refer specifically to the Proposal and recorded in the Session minutes. The resolution should also state that the Sabbatical will be taken in accordance with the provisions of this policy titled, "Sabbatical Leave Policy for East Iowa Presbytery and Congregations within Its Bounds." There may be circumstances when a shorter period would be permissible. However, there should always be sufficient time for full consideration of the Proposal.
2. Continue terms of call commitments to the minister-during Sabbatical Leave.
3. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the church of a Sabbatical.
4. Request a written overview of the Sabbatical from the minister upon return.

Additional Responsibilities/Information

If agreed upon by Session and the minister, the Sabbatical might be combined with study leave for extended graduate study.