

Presbytery of Santa Fe
Sabbatical: A Plan for Ministry Renewal*
Policy and Guidelines for Ministers, Sessions, and Congregations

Introduction

Rest and renewal are part of God's plan for God's people and world. God's creative activity was not complete until God rested on the seventh day. God gave the Hebrew people freedom and a land and instructed them to observe Sabbath rest on the seventh day and the seventh year so they might keep and enjoy those good gifts. Sabbath observance keeps a day or year to refrain from ordinary activities and engage in activities that build and renew relationships with God, with others, and with self. Sabbatical is an extension of the Biblical concept of Sabbath. 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 for those involved in God's work in the world: pastors, sessions, and congregations.

Policy

Pastors are eligible for sabbatical after six years of continuous service with a particular congregation and sabbatical is usually taken in the seventh year of service. Upon completion of a sabbatical, a pastor ordinarily is expected to remain in his/her current position for one year or otherwise repay the salary and any professional expenses attributable to the leave. Sabbatical is for a maximum of three months. Session may, at its discretion, approve adding vacation time to a sabbatical.

Purpose

Sabbatical is a break and change from everyday routine and provides opportunity for a balance of prayer and reflection, rest, study, and travel for the pastor. It provides opportunity for sessions and congregations to set aside usual ways of doing things and to reflect on their ministry and mission.

Ordinarily sabbatical is *not* a time for advanced degree work (Th.M., D.Min., Ph.D., etc.) although some formal study may be one component of a well-balanced Sabbatical. Neither is sabbatical an extended vacation or a time for career advancement, career assessment, or seeking a new call.

As an expression of gratitude and affection, a session and congregation may choose to grant a sabbatical to a retiring pastor. The purposes of this sabbatical may be modified to include preparation for retirement in lieu of study, but would include prayer and reflection, rest, and possibly travel. In this case, the pastor would not be expected to remain for a full year following the sabbatical.

Process

1. Six months to 12 months before the proposed beginning of the sabbatical leave, the pastor will notify COM and the Session of his/her desire to take a sabbatical and present both with a written proposal for the leave. The proposal will include
 - a detailed description of the plan and goals to be achieved
 - a personal statement of the value of the sabbatical for the pastor
 - a pastoral statement of the value of the sabbatical for the congregation

- a plan for worship and pastoral coverage during the pastor's absence
- 2. Upon approval by the session, the pastor will forward the plan to the Commission on Ministry for review and recommendation.
- 3. The Session will immediately begin to make plans for the congregation during the Sabbatical period so that this might become an important time of growth for the leaders and members of the congregation.
- 4. COM will appoint a liaison, either committee member or the MWS who will be temporary moderator to work with the pastor, session, and congregation during the planning and following the Sabbatical as needed.
 - refine the proposal to include congregational goals and activities to renew and further mission and ministry
 - develop a plan for re-entry of the pastor and recommitting to ministry and mission together
- 5. At the completion of the sabbatical the pastor will present a written report to the session at its next regular meeting. The pastor shall forward this report to the Commission on Ministry. This report will be based on the plan and goals of the approved proposal and will also include unexpected occurrences and growth.

Funding

- The congregation is expected to continue the pastor's salary/housing allowance, pension/major medical benefits, vacation, and study leave, and at its discretion, part or all professional expenses at the same level as those in effect at the time of the sabbatical.
- The church shall provide for interim supply services during the period of the Clergy Renewal Leave.
- Churches need to accumulate funds over several years in most cases to fund this and are encouraged to set aside 3% of normal pastoral expenses each month in a sabbatical fund.
- Pastors may use accumulated continuing education funds during sabbatical.
- Potential sources for funding a Clergy Renewal Leave are:

The Louisville Institute: Pastoral Study Project, <https://louisville-institute.org/>

Lilly Endowment: Clergy Renewal Programs, <https://lillyendowment.org/>

Board of Pensions: Sabbath Sabbatical Support, <https://www.pensions.org/your-path-to-wholeness/assistance-program/receiving-assistance/sabbath-sabbatical-support-grants>

* This policy continues and modifies the action of the Presbytery on October 9, 2004, requiring Clergy Renewal Leave to be included in the terms of call for all new calls, beginning January 1, 2005. Presbytery encourages all churches to include a provision for sabbaticals in existing calls.