

**Sabbatical Leave Policy
For Ministers and Certified Educators
in the Presbytery of East Tennessee**

Sabbatical--Definition

The word "sabbatical" comes from the Hebrew word "Shabbat" (Sabbath), meaning "cease" and "rest," but in the Biblical understanding it means more than just a day off. It is a day consecrated to God, when God's people cease to do ordinary labor, but instead rest, worship, and enjoy God's creation. In the academic life, sabbaticals are extended Sabbaths, times apart from ordinary duties for the purpose of further education and research in one's field. In recent years many churches have begun to grant periodic sabbatical leave to pastors and other professional workers. They find that by granting a few months away from the demands of parish life, these church professionals may fill their spiritual/emotional/ intellectual "bucket" and thus return with renewed energy, creativity, vision and enthusiasm in the ministry. Granting sabbaticals is an investment in the quality of ministry, as well as in the length of time a minister will stay in a particular congregation. By committing ourselves to supporting on-going and serious spiritual reflection, learning, and renewal on the part of its professionals, the church takes steps toward its own faithfulness and growth.

Sabbatical--Recommendations

The Presbytery of East Tennessee recommends that the sessions of its churches grant paid sabbaticals of at least three (3) months to its Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators during every 7th consecutive year of service to that particular church, and that time spent on sabbatical not be counted against annual vacation leave.

Toward that desired end, the Presbytery requires that, at the end of every four (4) year cycle of service to the church (ordinarily in years 4, 11, 18, etc), church professionals and sessions discuss a possible sabbatical, taking the needs of the professional and the church into consideration. A member of Presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) will be made available to any session needing education in regard to the consideration or planning of a sabbatical.

A session-level discussion of a possible sabbatical shall begin immediately for any church professional who already has over six (6) consecutive years of service in his/her church, if no sabbatical has been granted in that period of service.

Should the session approve a sabbatical for its church professional, the Presbytery recommends that the following steps be taken:

1. That the church professional provide to the session, at least 6 months prior to the sabbatical, a rough draft of her/his sabbatical plan for feedback and approval, including personal goals, benefits for the church professional and the church, travel, activities, anticipated expenses and funding, and provision for leadership of the congregation during the sabbatical, and that the final plan be reviewed and approved by COM.
2. That the church professional and the session meet soon after the completion of the sabbatical, and share together their different experiences during the sabbatical, along with lessons learned and insights gained, and submit a written summary of that discussion to COM.
3. That the church professional serve the same church at least one (1) year after the end of the sabbatical unless extenuating circumstances arise, so that the church shares fully in all the gain that has come as a result of the sabbatical.

Sabbatical--Rationale

We are concerned about the high rate of burnout among our church professionals, and wish to address this problem in a practical way. Roy Oswald, Senior Consultant of the Alban Institute, an ecumenical think-tank for the mainstream church, says that studies now identify the ordained ministry as the #1 burnout profession in the country(+). The primary cause of burnout among church professionals is, according to Oswald, "compassion fatigue."

We have also learned from Roy Oswald about the positive effects of long-term pastorates on congregations(++), and wish to do something practical that would encourage pastors to stay longer at their respective churches.

We believe, along with the Alban Institute, that the granting of periodic sabbaticals will provide the necessary rest, renewal and refreshment needed to help stem the tide of burnout among our church professionals and encourage them to stay longer in their respective churches.(++)

There is Biblical precedent for the granting of a sabbatical every seventh year in Leviticus 25:1-7, the text commanding Hebrew farmers to let their land lie fallow every seventh year, setting up a multi-year rhythm in human life consisting of six years of production followed by one year of rest.

This Biblically-based tradition of granting sabbaticals is one that has been maintained over the years in the academic world, and a practice that is growing in the business community and in the church.

Many universities and colleges throughout the country continue the long-standing tradition, dating back to when the academic world was part of the church, that grants professors an opportunity every seventh year to become students again and refresh their callings.

The popular press is reporting that large American corporations, such as Intel, Apple, McDonald's and Nike, have begun to grant sabbaticals to their executives after 4-7 years of service, and have found that these sabbaticals give these executives greater vision and make them more productive. Some companies even use sabbaticals now as an incentive to attract and retain good employees.

A growing number of churches and church governing bodies, including a number of other PCUSA Presbyteries, are beginning to develop formal sabbatical leave policies.

A number of churches in our own Presbytery have granted sabbaticals in the past decade, and the pastors and their churches have benefited from them.

Sabbatical—Funding

Churches may object that they do not have enough money to grant sabbatical leave to their pastors and church professionals.

We encourage congregations to make budget provisions for a sabbatical fund, contributing a certain amount to the fund each year until there is enough in the fund to finance a sabbatical.

Outside funding is also available to churches and their clergy through two competitive grant programs: the National Clergy Renewal Grant (through the Lilly Endowment) and the Sabbatical Grants for Pastoral Leaders Program (through the Louisville Institute, also funded by Lilly, and headquartered at Louisville Seminary).

Of the two grants, the National Clergy Renewal Grant is by far the most generous. This grant offers up to \$30,000 to churches who want to offer their clergy a sabbatical. Up to \$10,000 of this grant may be used by the congregation both to provide for pastoral services in the pastor's absence and to fund congregational renewal events. The remainder of the grant may be used to pay all expenses of the pastor

and his/her family to attend various renewal events, and even to pay the federal and/or state taxes that accrue because of the grant. Over 100 of these grants are awarded annually to churches of all denominations, and the annual deadline for applying is in July of each year.

The Louisville Institute offers three different levels of grants for varying lengths of sabbaticals: \$6,000 for six (6) weeks; \$8,000 for eight (8) weeks; and \$12,000 for twelve (12) weeks. Forty (40) of these grants are awarded each year, and the deadline for applying for these grants every year is in September of each year.

Sabbatical--Staffing

Many retired pastors, commissioned lay pastors and other lay leaders in the area, or in the local congregation, are available to serve a church on a short-term basis during a three-month sabbatical.

Footnotes:

(+) Quoted by the Rev. David Webb of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in the Florida-Bahamas Synod sabbatical leave policy statement, after hearing Roy Oswald speak these words at the September 2000 Alban workshop "Transforming Leadership."

(++) Roy Oswald, "Why You Should Give Your Pastor A Sabbatical," (Video), Alban Institute, 2001.

(+++) A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehof, Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide To Sabbatical Planning (Alban Institute: 2000), p. 49.

Approved by the Presbytery of East Tennessee
September 17, 2002