



## **Sabbatical Leave Guidelines The Presbytery of Lake Erie**

Sabbatical leave for teaching elders is a planned time of renewal for ministry and mission.

The opportunity for such a leave will allow one to find new perspectives on ministry and to provide time for reflection and spiritual renewal. This 'extended time' is qualitatively different from 'vacation' or 'days off.' It is 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. Sabbatical leave is an extension of the biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal. 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.

### Recommendation:

The Presbytery of Lake Erie encourages Sessions to consider providing a compensated sabbatical leave after seven years of service to an individual church, or to a multi-point charge.

### Varieties of Sabbatical Leaves:

Discussion concerning a sabbatical time would include consideration of the primary focus of the sabbatical. Sabbatical could focus on a range of renewal opportunities, including:

- Study on a particular topic
- Travel
- Writing
- Renewal and reflection

Of course, these general themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive but there is benefit in mutually determining in advance the focus of the sabbatical time.

### Additional Considerations:

Sabbatical time is best discussed in any new or renegotiated call. This is not to be interpreted as mandatory expectation of a sabbatical, but rather, when appropriate, to provide clarity of intention for the pastor and the congregation. Sabbaticals must be approved by the Session and voted on by the congregation as a change in terms of call.

The time spent during a sabbatical should be mutually negotiated and agreed upon by the pastor and the Session. The course of study shall clearly relate to the profession and spiritual development of the pastor and the long term goals and needs of the congregation.

Written notice to take a sabbatical and a written plan outlining the sabbatical shall be given to the Session for approval and to the Presbytery's Commission on Ministry for review. Discussion of a sabbatical time would normally be initiated one year prior to the sabbatical. The plan would include:

1. Benefits to the pastor.
2. Benefits to the church.
3. Goals and objectives of the sabbatical.
4. Details regarding coverage of professional duties while on leave.

Ordinarily sabbatical leaves shall be granted no sooner than the completion of seven years of active service in one location, and ordinarily not sooner than seven years from a previous leave. There can be some latitude dependent on personal and congregational circumstances.

Sabbaticals are not cumulative.

Sabbatical leaves shall normally be no longer than three months.

The normal study leave timed that is due in the sabbatical year shall be a part of the sabbatical leave time, not in addition to it. An exception to this may be negotiated.

Vacation time is not normally considered as part of the sabbatical, though it may be part of the conversation.

Ordinarily sabbatical leave shall not be terminal leave. If the pastor chooses to leave the congregation within a period of one year following the sabbatical, consideration of financial reimbursement to the church must be discussed at the time of separation.

During sabbatical leave all salary and benefits, except travel allowance, shall continue to be paid by the church.

All costs to the pastor for the sabbatical leave shall normally be the responsibility of the pastor. However, study leave allowances may be applied to these costs when and if vouchered.

The church shall provide for payment of the expenses of whoever covers the duties of the person on leave.

#### Responsibilities:

##### **The Commission on Ministry:**

1. Encourage churches to offer sabbatical leave for pastors.
2. Review the sabbatical time table and plan as submitted by the pastor and Session.
3. Serve as mediator in any concerns of Session or pastor relative to the sabbatical.
4. Determine who will moderate Session in the pastor's absence.
5. Review the written summary of experience upon completion of the leave.

##### **The Session:**

1. Receive for approval the pastor's proposal for a sabbatical. Ideally the details should be finalized six months in advance of the sabbatical.
2. Communicate to the congregation the importance, purpose and value of the leave.
3. Continue terms of call commitments to the pastor during the sabbatical leave.
4. Arrange for the congregational vote on the proposed sabbatical either at a stated or called meeting of the congregation.
5. Contract for pastoral services during the pastor's sabbatical. This will be done in consultation with the Commission on Ministry.
6. Request a written overview of the sabbatical from the pastor upon return.

##### **The Pastor:**

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the Session – at least in outline form – a year in advance of the intended sabbatical.
2. Secure the approval of Session and work out necessary pastoral coverage.
3. Assure the Session of continued service to the church for at least one full year from the conclusion of the sabbatical.
4. Assure that all responsibilities are up to date prior to the leave.
5. Along with Session, submit to the Commission on Ministry the sabbatical outline and time table.
6. When leave is completed, submit to the Session, the congregation, and Commission on Ministry an overview of the experience.

Sabbatical guidelines

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