

March 5, 2015

Does Your Church Have a Sabbatical Leave Policy?

By [Charles Arn](#)

The role of pastor is extremely stressful. In effect he/she is never off duty. This long-term stress takes a toll emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Churches that want to keep their pastor for many years must provide him/her with a season of rest. I recommend that *all full-time pastors and staff receive a three-month paid sabbatical every six or seven years.*

The Battle Wounded ...

Consider the following statistics[\[1\]](#):

- 23% of pastors have been fired or pressured to resign at least once in their careers.
- 25% of pastors don't know where to turn when they have a family or personal issue.
- 45% of pastors say that they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence.
- 56% of pastors' spouses say that they have no close friends.
- 70% don't have any close friends.
- 75% report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.
- 80% say they have insufficient time with their spouse.
- 80% believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively.
- 90% work more than 50 hours a week.
- 94% feel under pressure to have a perfect family.
- 1,500 pastors leave the ministry each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure.

Time for Some R & R ...

Universities and colleges have given professors sabbaticals for many years. Originally modeled on the biblical cycle of work and rest, professors receive a sabbatical for research, writing, travel, and rest every seven years.

Many churches today find that by providing a regular sabbatical for their pastors, they are able to keep them for a longer period of time. And, as I mentioned in an [earlier article](#) here, there is a direct relationship between pastoral longevity and church growth.

Two Examples ...

A number of books, articles, and examples are available to help you avoid re-inventing the wheel in developing a policy. Google: "[pastoral sabbatical policy](#)" and you will find over 3,700 hits. Here are two examples of churches' sabbatical policies:

Example #1

Personal development leave is for professional growth that will benefit our church.

- Leave accrues at 1.5 weeks per year of service.

- A pastor must serve a minimum of 2 years before scheduling a study leave.
- All personal development leave must be scheduled and approved by the church Council. The Administrative Committee will make a recommendation based upon a review of all the pastor's schedules and the purpose of the leave with the assurance that all ministries will be properly carried on.
- A pastor will serve a minimum of 6 months following the use of any personal development leave.
- Accrued personal development leave is forfeited when a pastor resigns. The church Council may waive this in the case of a tendered resignation.

Example #2

Sabbatical leave may be granted to full-time pastoral staff members for the pursuit of activities as approved by the Council of Elders. The following stipulations and requirements will apply:

- Sabbaticals may be approved for six months at the culmination of each seven years of full-time ministry at the Church. Each staff member may apply vacation time earned to extend his/her leave to a maximum of one month.
- Full salary and benefits will be paid during the leave.
- A detailed proposal for use of a sabbatical leave will be presented to the Council of Elders at the time of application for leave. Applications should be presented six months prior to expected leave. The council has the right to deny leave for sabbaticals it feels does not meet its approval.
- The intent of sabbatical leave is to further the ministry of our church.
- Upon returning, the staff member taking a sabbatical leave will give a report to the Council of Elders on what was achieved during the leave.

Conclusion

Each year your church should put aside an amount equivalent to one-twelfth of the pastor's annual salary to cover the salary during the sabbatical leave. The seventh year of a pastor's tenure is often one of mental and spiritual fatigue. By allowing the pastor to take a three-month sabbatical at this time the pastor's life will be re-energized which will have a positive impact on the church's ministry, as well.

[i] <http://pastoralcareinc.com/WhyPastoralCare/Statistics.php>;

<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2049.htm>.

<https://pastors.com/church-sabbatical-leave-policy/>