

Writing a Sabbatical Policy

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Every church should have a sabbatical policy. The concept of sabbatical is rooted in Scripture. Every hard-working pastor who's been at a church for a few years comes to the point where they need a sabbatical. Even secular businesses are beginning to see the need for sabbaticals. However, many churches have not thought through the reasons why a sabbatical is necessary, or the parameters of a good sabbatical for the sake of the pastor and the church.

PastorServe looked at the sabbatical policies of several churches and offers the following Sabbatical Policy as a template for you to use in your church. Feel free to alter it to fit your situation. But if you do alter it, I encourage you to make it more gracious and more generous than it already is!

Sabbatical Policy

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sabbatical is rooted in the biblical concept of "Sabbath" which God modeled (Genesis 2:1-4a) and commanded (Exodus 20:8-11). In Leviticus 25:1-7, the Lord says that after the sixth year the people were not supposed to sow the fields or harvest a crop. The land was allowed to rest, and therefore, so were the people.

Sabbaticals have often been used in church and academia to provide a time of rest, recovery, renewal and re-education for the individual staff member. Many businesses are now providing paid sabbaticals for employees. (See Appendix for articles) We believe that our clergy and pastoral staff should model God's design for Sabbath rest. We believe that a time of sabbatical is important both in the sharpening and renewal of the pastor and for the health and strength of the Church.

Purpose

The sabbatical is for the pursuit of activities approved by the governing council of the church. The intent of a sabbatical is to further the ministry objectives of the church, to enhance the personal ministry of the staff member, and to provide for physical, spiritual and relational renewal and refreshment. (It is understood that not all three intents will necessarily be fulfilled equally.)

POLICY

Eligibility

A sabbatical may be granted to full-time members of the pastoral staff, whether they are ordained clergy or un-ordained pastoral staff members.

A sabbatical may be approved after the completion of the first seven years of full-time ministry at the church and every fifth year thereafter. Fellowship or internship years are not counted as part of the total years of service.

Application

The Senior Pastor and his council will work together to determine a timeframe best suitable for the sabbatical. When the sabbatical involves a staff member, the staff member will work out the sabbatical details with his or her supervising pastor. A detailed sabbatical plan will be presented to the council at the time application for a sabbatical is made. Such a plan should be presented at least six months prior to the proposed sabbatical.

The sabbatical plan should include:

- a description of the desired sabbatical activities
- a statement of how these activities will benefit the staff member and/ or the church
- the dates selected for the sabbatical
- a budget outlining sabbatical costs for things like: travel, classes, retreats , counseling etc..
- how the pastor's ministry will be carried out during the sabbatical.

Approval of a sabbatical plan is at the discretion of the church council.

Timing

A sabbatical may be approved for three or more months. Paid sabbatical time is in addition to paid vacation time for the year in which the sabbatical is taken.

It is preferred that the weeks be taken consecutively in order to maximize the possibility for refreshment or concentrated study. If possible, the sabbatical should be scheduled at a time that will minimize the disruptive effect on the normal operation of the church (i.e. summer may be preferable).

Unless approved by the council, no two staff members shall take a sabbatical within 6 months of each other. If staff member's sabbatical plans conflict, priority shall be given to the most senior staff member in terms of length of service.

Financial Agreement

During the sabbatical, regular salary and full benefits will be paid. Reimbursable expenses will be determined on the basis of a sabbatical budget approved by the church council. The amount requested should not exceed budgeted professional expenses plus an additional "sabbatical allowance" not to exceed \$5,000. Some of this may be taxable. This will be determined upon review of your plan, budget, and actual expenses. Taxable expenses will be reported through payroll.

Reports

Upon returning, the pastor will make a written or oral report to the church council recapping how the time was spent and what was learned.

Employee and Church Agreement About Employment

The employee who chooses to take a Sabbatical leave under this policy agrees to the following terms.

- Because the Sabbatical leave is unlike an ordinary paid vacation in that its purpose is expressly for the future benefit of the employing church as well as for the present and future benefit of the employee, the employee agrees that as far as it depends on him or her, he or she will continue in his or her full-time service to the church for at least one year from the date of his or her return from Sabbatical leave.

The church agrees to the following terms.

- The church agrees that it will not in any way seek a replacement for an employee during his Sabbatical leave.
- The church agrees that it will honor the leave of the employee and agrees not to contact him with church business except in case of emergency.

Addendum –Sabbatical Policy

Personal renewal might include time of both individual renewal of the spiritual life (e.g. retreat, time of solitude), and family renewal with a focus on the marriage relationship (if applicable).

Professional growth might include a topic or goal of interest that will give opportunity for growth and learning with some concentrated energy.

Here are some examples of sabbatical activities that have been found to be helpful:

1. Cross-cultural experiences. This may involve a short-term missions experience.
2. Marriage enrichment activities with a trained counselor.
3. Engaging in an extensive physical examination.
4. Studying a topic of interest. This may be an area of interest only to the individual, like taking an art class, learning to play an instrument or learning to parasail. It also may be something that will benefit the congregation, like learning about church history or an in depth study of a book of the Bible. It may take the form of a seminary continuing education course, extensive reading, program planning, or writing for publication.
5. Times of extended solitude.
6. Visiting other churches and interacting with people in a similar role.
7. Visiting family members, mentors, or former colleagues.
8. Resting, relaxing, and exercising.
9. Keeping a journal.

This list is by no means considered to be exhaustive.

Appendix

Should companies offer sabbaticals? by [Fortune Editors](#), JANUARY 3, 2011, 6:31 PM ED.

Workplaces for Sabbaticals

[Why Paid Sabbaticals Are Good For Employees And Employers](#), Here's what the company learned.

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