CENTRAL FLORIDA PRESBYTERY

SABBATICAL LEAVE

**9/11/2018**

# Introduction

Often on completion of years of ministry and service, pastors**[[1]](#footnote-1)** need time to refocus their vision, update professional skills and find renewal of their sense of call. During their period of ministry and service, pastors endure many of the burdens, the anguish, the pain and hurt of their parishioners. As a result, many experience symptoms of emotional collapse, stress, related illnesses and “burnout”, all of which diminish their effectiveness and jeopardize their well being. A Sabbatical offers an opportunity for a change-of-pace. Sabbatical Leave is not a vacation, nor is it only continuing education. It offers a means for a pastor to move away from normal responsibilities for refreshment, intellectual growth and personal development. It provides a pastor with an opportunity for a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. Sabbatical Leave follows precedent in the academic community and among a growing number of private sector groups. This “extended time” is qualitatively different from “vacation” or “days off”. It will enable the pastor to be renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A Sabbatical enables a pastor to return to the responsibilities of the parish with new energy, spiritual vision, and effectiveness.

Just as the Sabbath Day is a gift from God during a busy week, so the gift of a Sabbatical leave can offer refreshment and rejuvenation for those who labor continuously for God’s people.

The following guidelines are provided for those congregations in Central Florida Presbytery offering Sabbatical Leave. Those Church Sessions should include a policy in their operations manual or personnel policies to reflect these guidelines.

# SABBATICAL LEAVE

Central Florida Presbytery recommends to the sessions of its congregations that all full time pastors may be offered the opportunity to take a compensated Sabbatical after six (6) years of service to an individual congregation~~.~~ Pastors who anticipate requesting consideration for years of service to a previous congregation shall do so as part of negotiating terms of call or contract.

The recommended length of a Sabbatical is three (3) months.

A Sabbatical does not interrupt Terms of Call. (See “Funding, below.) Upon returning home from Sabbatical leave, the pastor shallremain in his/her position for at least one (1) year or otherwise forfeit the salary provided during the period of the sabbatical.

## PLANNING

# Eligible Program Activity and Review

To be eligible for a Sabbatical Leave, the pastor shall present, in writing, to the Session for their approval, a program (“the Plan”) of activity for the Sabbatical Leave, ordinarily at least nine (9) months prior to the proposed beginning of the Sabbatical Leave. This shall include a detailed description of the Plan, the goals to be achieved, and the expected outcomes, together with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical Leave would be valuable for both the pastor and the congregation.

Upon approval by the Session in the year prior to the Sabbatical Leave, the Plan shall be forwarded to Central Florida Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry for their review and recommendation. Included in this Plan will be the Session’s plan for pastoral services during the period of the Sabbatical leave.

At the completion of Sabbatical leave, the pastor should present to the next regular meeting of the Session a written report of activities and findings. This report also will be sent to the Committee on Ministry following presentation to the Session.

# Funding

The employing congregation will continue the pastor’s salary, pension/major medical benefits, book allowance, and, at the discretion of the Session, auto and continuing education allowances at the same level as those in effect at the beginning of the Sabbatical Leave.

The employing congregation will also contract for substitute pastor services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave. (Note: COM is responsible for identifying moderators for session and the congregation during the sabbatical.) Although, on the face of it, the Sabbatical Leave may seem like another financial burden for the local congregation to bear, it is crucial for Session and congregation to recognize the long term benefits they, as a congregation, will reap from granting Sabbaticals. For example, pastors who have the opportunity to examine issues for professional growth and development as pastors within an existing pastorate are more likely to stay more years in a particular call, because the sabbatical provision conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the congregation and also offers an incentive to pastors to commit to and think in terms of longer term service in a particular congregation.

Pastors, congregations, and presbytery are encouraged to set aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of Sabbatical Leave. Those congregations that would have financial problems in providing for the Sabbatical Leave could consult with the Presbytery. In addition, those congregations who could not secure lay leadership within their own congregations, might consider using elders trained as Commissioned Pastors or Associate Pastors who might be willing to preach one Sunday without honorarium, etc.

Funding is available through the Genevieve Lange Scholarship Fund for support of the planned Sabbatical for aspects of the plan that are educational in nature, on application to the Lange Scholarship committee. The application form is available on the Presbytery’s web site.

Funds are also available from other sources, such as by application to the Board of Pensions. Please refer to the following information on the Board of Pensions web site ([www.pensions.org](http://www.pensions.org)):

* PTS-624: The Assistance Program — Sabbath Sabbatical Support Grants. <http://www.pensions.org/AvailableResources/BenefitsOverviews/Documents/pts-624.pdf#search=sabbatical>
* ARH-006: Sabbath Sabbatical Support Grant Program Application. Use this form to apply for a Sabbath Sabbatical Support Grant: <http://www.pensions.org/AvailableResources/Forms/Documents/arh-006.pdf>

Contact the Executive Presbyter for more information.

# Re-Entry

Upon re-entry, it is strongly suggested that the pastor share with the entire congregation the details of the Leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit. The re-entry process provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the benefits that resulted from the Sabbatical Leave. Such expected benefits as:

* Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized
* New understandings of the concept of mission as shared mission between pastorand congregation.
* Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on the part of pastorand congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of the Kingdom.

The ideal result would be for the congregation to see this period of time not just as the pastor’sSabbatical Leave, but also as the congregation’s Sabbatical Leave.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

# Pastor

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the session nine (9) months before the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
2. Secure the approval of the session for the sabbatical proposal and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
3. Assure the session of the intent to continue service to the congregation for at least one (1) full year from the conclusion of the Sabbatical.
4. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the session before departing on a Sabbatical.
5. Submit to Committee on Ministry, in writing, the sabbatical timetable and outline of plans.
6. Upon return, present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the session and the Committee on Ministry.

# Session

1. Receive the pastor’s proposal for a Sabbatical, at least nine (9) months in advance of the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
2. Review the proposal and determine whether to approve it.
3. Continue terms of call or contract commitments to the pastor during Sabbatical Leave.
4. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the congregation of a Sabbatical.
5. Request a written overview of the Sabbatical from the pastor upon return.

# Committee on Ministry

1. Review and approve the sabbatical time table and usage plan as submitted by the pastor.
2. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session or pastor relative to the Sabbatical.
3. Determine who will moderate the session in the pastor’s absence.
4. Approve, as needed, any plans of the session for the coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities during the Sabbatical leave.

# Additional Responsibilities/Information

If agreed upon the by the session and the pastor, the Sabbatical might be combined with the study leave for extended study.

1. Throughout this document, “pastor” refers to (1) a called pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor, (2) a pastor in a contracted temporary pastoral relationship, or (3) a commissioned pastor serving in any pastoral role. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)