

A Guide to Parental Leave

Navigating Maternity and Parental Leave with Pastors and Churches

When a pastor prepares to welcome a new child into their home, it can be an exciting time both for their family and for the church. Children are a blessing both to parents and to congregations.

Of course, churches and pastors also have an employer-employee relationship. As employees, under Canadian law, pastors are entitled to Maternity and/or Parental leave. These leaves provide employees (including both mothers and fathers) with authorized time off that coincides with the birth or adoption of a child. The leaves have been designed to allow employees to recover from childbirth and to bond with and care for their newborn or adopted children, without fear of a negative impact on their employment status or any opportunities with the church.

This document will use “Parental Leave” to refer to any combination of Pregnancy, Maternity and Parental leaves. (See the section [Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources](#) for more information).

This document is intended to equip churches and pastors for a pastoral Parental Leave. It provides recommendations and offers questions that churches and pastors should discuss together as well as pointing to federal and provincial documents and resources. It also provides a guide to developing a Parental Leave Agreement document and recommendations about Interim Pastoral ministry during a Parental Leave.

Churches may approach parental leaves differently depending on their size, location (remote, rural, or urban), financial resources, whether they have a parsonage, and whether they have a solo pastor or a pastoral team. For this reason, some of the following may not apply in every context and there may be other issues to consider that are relevant and important for the church’s particular situation.

This document is designed to supplement the information found in the “[Building Sound HR Practices](#)” workbook. Please refer to that document for additional helpful information. The Church Life and Leadership Team is also able to assist you in this process.

Steps for Churches, Pastors, and Interim Pastors

The following lists contain topics for pastors, churches, and interim pastors to consider. Each item points to one or more sections of this document where the topic is discussed more fully.

FOR CHURCHES:

1. Review Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources
 - [*Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources*](#)
2. Consider developing a Parental Leave Policy before receiving notice of an upcoming parental leave
 - [*Considerations for the Church: Developing a Parental Leave Policy*](#)
3. Receive notice from the pastor about an upcoming parental leave
 - [*Considerations for the Church: Responding to Notice of Parental Leave*](#)
4. Work with the pastor to develop a Parental Leave Agreement
 - [*Developing a Parental Leave Agreement*](#)
5. Prepare for church life during pregnancy
 - [*Considerations for Churches: Church Life During Pregnancy*](#)
6. Complete and submit a Record of Employment
 - [*Considerations for Churches: Record of Employment*](#)
7. Arrange for interim ministry and develop an Interim Ministry Agreement
 - [*Considerations for Interim Ministry: Developing an Interim Ministry Agreement*](#)
8. Lead well during parental leave
 - [*Considerations for Churches: Church Life During Parental Leave*](#)
9. Finish parental leave well
 - [*Considerations for Churches: Church Life After Parental Leave*](#)

FOR PASTORS:

1. Review Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources
 - [*Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources*](#)
2. Decide when and how to tell the church about your upcoming parental leave
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Giving Notice of Parental Leave*](#)
3. Decide on the length of your leave, including anticipated start and end dates
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Length and Timing of Parental Leave*](#)
4. Work with the Church to develop a Parental Leave Agreement
 - [*Developing a Parental Leave Agreement*](#)
5. Prepare for Ministry During Pregnancy
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Ministry During Pregnancy*](#)
6. Apply for Employment Insurance Benefits
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Employment Insurance Benefits During Parental Leave*](#)
7. Take Parental Leave Well
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Church Life During Parental Leave*](#)
8. Return to Active Ministry
 - [*Considerations for Pastors: Returning to Active Ministry after Parental Leave*](#)

FOR INTERIM PASTORS:

1. Enter discussions with a church about interim ministry during a parental leave
 - [*Considerations for Interim Ministry: Developing an Interim Ministry Agreement*](#)
2. Minister effectively during Parental Leave
 - [*Considerations for Interim Ministry: Interim Ministry During Parental Leave*](#)

Canadian and Provincial Standards and Resources

In Canada, Maternity and Parental leaves are governed by both federal and provincial law. This can cause some confusion because federal law refers to Maternity leave and Parental leave, while some provinces/territories may refer to Pregnancy leave, Maternity leave and Parental leave. “Pregnancy Leave” and “Maternity leave” generally refer to leave that can be taken by an employee who is pregnant or has recently given birth (or has recently experienced a loss from miscarriage or stillbirth). “Parental leave” refers to a leave that can be taken by a new parent, including mothers, fathers, and adoptive parents. When these leaves are combined, Canadian employees may be entitled to take up to 18 months of unpaid¹, job-protected leave. It is important to access the employment standards for the applicable province/territory to understand the different leave options.

Churches are provincially regulated employers, so the applicable provincial law determines the minimum standards for providing an employee with job-protected maternity and parental leave. The federal *Employment Insurance Act* provides employees with employment insurance benefits that partially replace lost income during maternity and parental leave. In tandem, the provincial legislation (granting of time off) and the federal legislation (replacement of income) provide employees with partially paid leave for maternity and parental leave. The federal *Canada Labour Code* does not apply to churches as it applies only to federally regulated employers such as airlines and banks. The provincial employment legislation generally addresses issues such as:

- The duration of the maternity / parental leave
- When the leave can commence
- How much notice is required prior to commencing the leave
- How much notice is required when returning from the leave
- Issues related to sharing the leave between two parents

Provincial human rights legislation protects employees who are pregnant from being discriminated against as a result of their pregnancy or accessing parental leave. This same legislation also ensures that employees who have adverse health impacts due to the pregnancy are accommodated, up to the point of undue hardship. Each province has a human rights commission or tribunal that ensures human rights legislation is enforced. You can access federal and provincial standards and resources online.

Employment Insurance Benefits:

- Canadian Employment Insurance Benefits for Maternity and Parental leave: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-maternity-parental.html>
- Quebec Parental Insurance Plan: <https://www.rqap.gouv.qc.ca/en>

¹ Parents may apply for Employment Insurance maternity and parental benefits

Provincial Employment Standards:

- Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/pregnancy-and-parental-leave>
- Quebec: <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/labour-standards-quebec.pdf>

Human Rights:

- Ontario: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/part-ii-%E2%80%93-interpretation-and-application/pregnancy>
- Quebec: <https://www.cdpdj.qc.ca/en/your-obligations/prohibited-grounds/pregnancy>

Considerations for Churches

DEVELOPING A PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

It is beneficial for a church to develop a Parental Leave Policy before receiving notice of an upcoming parental leave. Although each parental leave situation will be different, a basic policy might include some or all of the following:

- Minimum notice required before a pastor embarks on parental leave
- Pension and Benefits during parental leave
- Supplemental payments to “top-up”
- Parsonage use during parental leave
- Requirement for Parental Leave Agreement
- Requirement for Interim Ministry Agreement

The “[Developing a Parental Leave Agreement](#)” section of this document is also applicable when developing a Parental Leave Policy.

RESPONDING TO NOTICE OF PARENTAL LEAVE

When a pastor gives notice that they intend to take a parental leave, it begins a process that will involve significant conversations, leadership decisions, and administrative work. Each church will need to decide based on their structure whether this process will be led by a leadership board (ex. Elders board), a personnel team, or another designated group of people. The designated group should read through this document carefully and should work with the pastor to prepare for the upcoming parental leave.

CHURCH LIFE DURING PASTORAL PREGNANCY

During pregnancy, a pastor's ministry may continue with very few changes. In some circumstances, however, accommodations or even a leave of absence may be necessary. Human rights legislation in each province and territory allows pregnant employees to request a modification of their job functions or a leave of absence during pregnancy due to medical reasons. The request for medical accommodation may require a note from a health care practitioner of her choice. Accommodations might be as simple as providing a stool for the pastor to use on Sunday mornings. The pastor and her health care practitioner will be the best person to identify any needs she may have.

RECORD OF EMPLOYMENT

By law, employers are required to issue a Record of Employment (ROE) within 5 days of the pastor's last paid day. Please treat this as an urgent matter. If the ROE is late, benefits will be delayed, which could cause hardship. If you submit the ROE electronically, you no longer need to print a paper copy for the employee. Ensure that the pastor is aware that the church will be submitting its ROE to Service Canada electronically. Box 16 of the ROE requests a reason for interruption in the employee's earnings. Look for the option for "Maternity or parental leave."

CHURCH LIFE DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

During parental leave, the pastor may be participating fully in the life of the church (including ministry roles) or may take significant time away from the congregation. Churches should ensure that roles, boundaries, and expectations are discussed during the development of the Parental Leave Agreement.

In the pastor's absence, the church is responsible for caring for its members, programs and ministries, community, and worship life. Parental leave can last anywhere from 3 months to 18 months and this is a considerable amount of time for any church to be without a pastor. For that reason, churches are encouraged to seek an interim pastor who can minister during the parental leave. Given that the pastor will be returning to active ministry following the leave, the church should covenant not to use this time to make unilateral decisions that they have not been willing or able to make together with the pastor. Good communication between the pastor on leave, the interim pastor, and the church leadership will benefit everyone involved.

CHURCH LIFE AFTER PARENTAL LEAVE

Near the end of the parental leave, the personnel team (or other designated group) should meet with the pastor to confirm the end date of the leave, along with any other administrative details. It will also be valuable for the pastor on leave to meet with the interim pastor and the church leadership to advise the returning pastor of any significant needs, concerns, upcoming dates, etc.

Returning to work after a parental leave is a significant transition for both the congregation and the pastor. The congregation will probably be saying goodbye to an interim pastor who has been with them for some time. It may be helpful to provide opportunities for the congregation to debrief their experiences during the parental leave.

Considerations for Pastors:

GIVING NOTICE OF PARENTAL LEAVE

Pastors who intend to take parental leave are required to notify their employer. Given that the church will probably need to arrange for interim ministry, pastors are encouraged to notify the church at least 3 months before they anticipate beginning the leave.

Depending on the context, the pastor may want to notify the leadership team first before announcing it to the congregation. Some churches may need to be reminded or encouraged that taking parental leave does not mean that you are resigning or leaving the church. Some churches may need additional support as they begin the process of navigating the parental leave.

LENGTH AND TIMING OF PARENTAL LEAVE

Each pastor is responsible for determining the length and timing of the parental leave.

Some pregnant pastors will choose to begin their leave several weeks before their estimated due date. Other pastors (potentially fathers or adoptive parents) might choose not to begin their leave until after the birth of the child or the date the child is placed in their care. It may be appropriate to consult your medical practitioner while making this choice.

It is also important to decide on the length of time for the leave prior to the start of the leave. If the pastor and spouse are both employed by the church, they should also decide whether one or both will take parental leave. There is no minimum standard for length of leave, and a pastor who is entitled to both Maternity and Parental leave might take up to 18 months of leave. Pastors may find that taking less than 6 months does not allow them enough time to recover fully and bond with their child. (Many infants do not sleep through the night until after 6 months of age). Conversely, some pastors may find that taking 18 months poses significant challenges for the church and for their own ministry. This decision should be made with prayer and discernment.

MINISTRY DURING PREGNANCY

Pregnancy can be physically, mentally, and emotionally draining. That means that pastoral self-care becomes especially important. Pregnancy and parental leave can actually become an opportunity to model self-care, healthy boundaries, priorities, and family relationships.

During pregnancy, a pastor's ministry may continue with very few changes. In some circumstances, however, the pastor (and church) may need to adjust duties and expectations as the pregnancy progresses. Human rights legislation in each province and territory allows pregnant employees to request a modification of their job functions or a leave of absence during pregnancy due to medical reasons. The request for medical accommodation may require a note from a health care practitioner of her choice. Accommodations might be as simple as providing a stool for the pastor to use on Sunday mornings. The pastor and her health care practitioner will be the best person to identify any needs she may have.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

During Parental leave, the pastor may be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) maternity and parental benefits.

The Province of Quebec is responsible for providing maternity, paternity, parental and adoption benefits to its residents. Parents may be eligible for either 40 or 50 weeks of benefits. Information can be found here: <https://www.rqap.gouv.qc.ca/en>

Canadian EI offers maternity and parental benefits. Maternity benefits last for 15 weeks and are available to employees who are pregnant or have recently given birth. Although maternity leave may last up to 17 weeks, employment insurance benefits will only be paid for 15 weeks. EI Parental Leave Benefit can be collected by natural and adoptive parents caring for a newborn or adopted child. There are two options to select from. The difference is the length of the parental leaves. Standard parental benefits last for up to 35 weeks at 55% of insurable earnings; extended parental benefits last for up to 61 weeks at 33% of insurable earnings. This applies if EI premiums have been paid for at least 420 insured hours in the past 52 weeks before the leave commences. Information on parental leave options can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/ei-improvements/parental-choice.html>

Applications are to be made 4 weeks before the start of the leave; late applications may result in a loss of benefits. Applications can be made earlier than 4 weeks before the start of the leave, and pregnancy benefits can begin up to 12 weeks before the expected due date or actual birth. Applications can be submitted at a Service Canada Office or online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-maternity-parental.html>

CHURCH LIFE DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

During parental leave, a pastor leaves their official position for a time, but with the intention of returning to their pastoral role. Taking parental leave does not necessarily mean leaving the church (stopping participation in the life of the church) during that time. It is important for a pastor to consider how they will leave their position well when they are not leaving permanently.

Some pastors will want to remain part of the congregation and perhaps take on volunteer roles during their parental leave. Others may choose to take time away from the congregation and take this opportunity to visit other churches for worship. The church may also have hopes and requests for the pastor during their leave. During the process of developing a Parental Leave Agreement with the church it will be important to discuss these issues and for the pastor to communicate their choices clearly to the church leadership.

During parental leave it is important both for the pastor on leave to support the role of the interim pastor and for the interim pastor to support the role of the pastor on leave. Good communication between the pastor on leave, the interim pastor, and the church leadership will benefit everyone involved.

It is valuable for the pastor on leave to remember that parental leave can be a positive experience for the church, the pastor, and the pastor's family. Parental leave provides an opportunity for pastors to model healthy self-care and supportive parenting. It also allows pastors to model life as a faithful follower and congregant.

RETURNING TO ACTIVE MINISTRY AFTER PARENTAL LEAVE

Near the end of the parental leave, the pastor should meet with the personnel team (or other designated group) to confirm the end date of the leave, along with any other administrative details. The pastor should also inform the church of any accommodations required, as this may also extend the contract for the interim pastor or guide the steps to take. It will also be valuable for the pastor on leave to meet with the interim pastor and the church leadership to gather feedback and information about any significant needs, concerns, upcoming dates, etc.

Developing a Parental Leave Agreement

It is beneficial for the church and the pastor to develop a Parental Leave Agreement after the pastor gives notice of an upcoming parental leave. Although each parental leave situation will be different, a basic agreement should include elements about Human Resources and elements about Roles, Boundaries, and Expectations.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Parental Leave Agreement should include human resources elements including the timing and length of the leave, details about benefits and pensions, details about the parsonage (if applicable), and supplemental financial compensation.

The following elements may be used as a starting place as the church and pastor develop the Parental Leave Agreement:

- Timing and Length of Leave:
 - When is the expected last day of work and/or last paid day before beginning leave?
 - What is the expected length of leave? Indicate whether the pastor must take the leave all at once or whether it can be split up. If the employee wishes to extend or shorten the expected length of leave, indicate how many weeks' written notice is needed.
 - What is the expected return to work date?
 - Will the pastor be taking any medical leave before the parental leave begins?
 - List number of unused vacation days available. Indicate how these days can be used (e.g., prior to leave, carried forward after return).
 - List number of unused study leave days available. Indicate how these days can be used (e.g., prior to leave, carried forward after return).
 - List number of unused sick days available. Indicate how these days can be used (e.g., prior to leave, carried forward after return).
- Benefits and Pensions
 - Check your provincial/territorial legislation about the employee's right to participate in benefit plans. In some provinces/territories, the employer must continue to pay its share of the premiums for any of these plans that were offered before the leave, unless the employee tells the employer in writing that the employee will not continue to pay their own share of the premiums.
 - Will the pastor on leave continue to participate in the Canadian Baptist Benefits plan (or other Employer-Sponsored Benefit Plan)?
 - Will the pastor on leave continue to participate in the Canadian Baptist Pension plan (or other Employer-Sponsored Pension Plan)?
 - Decide how the employee should pay their portion of the benefits/pension premiums (as applicable).
- Supplemental Financial Compensation and Parsonage Use
 - See below for additional details about Supplemental Financial Compensation and Parsonage Use.
 - If the pastor lives in a parsonage, indicate how this will be handled during leave.
 - Indicate whether and how the church will supplement the pastor-on-leave's employment insurance benefits.

- If there is a possibility that the pastor on leave will be asked to fulfill any pastoral duties (e.g., preaching, weddings, funerals, baptisms, communion, baby dedications), indicate whether there will be any financial compensation.
- Considerations if the pastor and spouse are both employed by the church
 - Will both employees take leave? Will the leaves overlap?
- Seniority, Length of Service and Sabbaticals
 - In most provinces/territories, employees continue to earn credits toward length of employment, length of service, and seniority during periods of leave. This means (for example) that parental leave should not change an employee's eligibility for increases in salary or the number of vacation weeks that are based on length of service.
 - If your church has a Sabbatical Policy, indicate whether the parental leave will change the timing of future sabbaticals.

ROLES, BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Prior to the pastor going on leave, it is important to clarify expectations of the pastor and of the church while on leave. This will help to mitigate potential conflict, disappointment, and frustration. It is recommended the church and pastor discuss the following questions well before the pastor goes on leave.

1. What role(s) does the pastor on leave maintain?
2. Will the pastor on leave remain on the board/council? If so, what role will the pastor on leave have on the board? Will the pastor on leave attend meetings and carry out the work of the board? Will the pastor on leave attend meetings only to listen and provide input regarding church direction? How often will the pastor on leave attend meetings?
3. What is the relationship between the pastor on leave and congregation during the leave? Will the pastor remain active in church life? Will the pastor continue to worship in the congregation? Will the pastor serve on committees?
4. What is the relationship between the pastor on leave and the interim pastor? To what level of involvement will the pastor on leave have with the interim pastor?
5. What is the relationship between the pastor on leave and the pastoral staff?
6. Will the pastor on leave be expected to fulfill any duties (e.g. preaching, prepare a special service, wedding, funeral, child dedication, baptism, communion)? If so, will there be compensation?
7. Where will the interim pastor work? Will the pastor on leave share resources (office, computer, books, etc.)? Will the pastor on leave be required to remove all items from their office while on leave?

Considerations for Interim Ministry

INTERIM MINISTRY DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

Parental leave can last anywhere from 3 months to 18 months and this is a considerable amount of time for any church to be without a pastor. For that reason, Churches are encouraged to seek an interim pastor who can minister during the parental leave. CBOQ can often make suggestions of names of qualified ministers who are known to be willing, able and available to engage in interim ministry for a limited length of time.

The role of the interim pastor during a parental leave differs in significant ways from traditional interim ministry because the pastor on leave will be returning to active ministry in the church. In many cases, the pastor on leave will continue to worship and perhaps volunteer as a member of the congregation.

During the parental leave, the interim pastor and the church leadership are responsible for caring for the members, programs and ministries, community, and worship life of the congregation. The interim pastor supports the church as they continue the mission and vision as established jointly by the congregation, the pastor on leave, and the church leadership. Given that the pastor will be returning to active ministry following the leave, the church should covenant not to use this time to make unilateral decisions that they have not been willing or able to make together with the pastor. Good communication between the pastor on leave, the interim pastor, and the church leadership will benefit everyone involved.

The interim minister should also be made aware of the agreement made between the church and the pastor on leave as it pertains to roles, boundaries, and expectations. For example, the interim pastor should be informed whether the pastor on leave will take part in church leadership meetings (and in what capacity).

Interim ministry during parental leave may be different depending on the church's staff, leadership team, and resources. A multi-staff church where an associate pastor is taking parental leave may have different needs than a church where a solo-pastor is taking a leave. The situation may be different again for churches with ministry couples (either when one or both parents are on staff). The recommendations in the following section may need to be adapted to fit the church's particular context.

DEVELOPING AN INTERIM MINISTRY AGREEMENT

Sample employment agreements and other helpful information can be found in CBOQ's "*A Guide to Interim Ministry*" and "*Building Sound HR Practices: A Workbook for Your Church*" documents, available here: [Personnel – Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec](#)

A written agreement should be drawn up which sets out:

1. The duration of the arrangement
 - This may be equal the length of the parental leave, or it may allow for overlap between the pastor on leave and the interim pastor.
2. The specific ministry expectations
 - Number of days or hours per week
 - Types of services to be provided and ministries to be involved in
 - Preaching and Bible Study expectation
 - Visitation expectations
 - Other expectations
3. The accommodation arrangements
 - Hotel, Apartment, Room & Board, other
4. The compensation arrangements
 - The compensation should be negotiated between interim pastor and church. For part-time arrangements, CBOQ recommends between \$200-\$300 per day.
 - Ensure employment status clarification (i.e. employee/employer or contract worker)
 - Expenses – travel and other related expenses
 - Vacation – if the agreement is for twelve months or more, or vacation pay if less