

# DEVELOPING A SABBATICAL POLICY

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## *Options to Consider*

After reviewing a variety of sabbatical policies from various churches, the following suggestions are offered to churches who are considering adopting a policy for their pastor. Under each heading are a number of points. The idea is not to use all of the options listed but to create a customized policy by choosing from them.

A full-time pastor serves in a unique position. The demands of pastoral ministry are great and despite vacation time and occasional continuing education, a pastor is often physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained. – Covenant CRC, Grand Rapids, MI

### 1. DEFINITION OF SABBATICAL

- Extended leave for the purpose of continuing education
- Period of rest after seven years – Hebrew cultural-religious concept
- Period of time for professional development and spiritual renewal
- Opportunity to lie fallow for revitalization of the body, mind, and soul

### 2. PURPOSE OR RATIONALE

- **Benefits**
  - Renewed commitment to the church
  - Enhanced job performance
  - Staying current with professional developments
  - Opportunity to pursue an area of theological interest
  - Replenished energy stores
  - Renewed emotional health
  - Increased spiritual vitality
  - Acquirement of new skills
  - Rediscovered zeal for ministry
  - Personal growth and refreshment
  - Increased effectiveness in ministry
  - Improvement in one or more competencies
  - Rekindled sense of God's calling
  - Nurture of the body and soul
- **Beneficiaries**
  - Pastor
  - Pastor's family
  - Congregation
  - Council / Board

### 3. ACTIVITIES ON SABBATICAL

- Teaching
- Writing
- Working on a special project
- Reflection
- Continuing education
- Personal refreshment
- Academic courses
- Spiritual retreat
- Receiving pastoral care
- Ministry related travel

### 4. ELIGIBILITY

- Full time ordained pastors
- Ministry associates
- Full time non-ordained ministry staff
- Pastor must have continuously served the congregation for “x” years. (Most common time frame is 5 years.)
- Pastor is encouraged to consider applying for a sabbatical on a regular basis.

### 5. TERMS

- May be taken after “x” years of continuous service . (Most common time frame is 5 years.)
- First full year after sabbatical becomes year 1 of the next “x” years of service
- Following initial sabbatical, subsequent ones may be taken after “x” years of additional service
- For a period up to “x” months (Usual range is 3 – 6 months)
- To be taken all at once
- Maybe taken in segments
- In multi-staff setting, only one pastor may take a sabbatical during a given year
- Separate and distinct from continuing education and vacation time
- Pastor completely released from all duties during sabbatical
- Normally taken away from where church is located
- Sabbatical time may/may not be accumulated
- Pastor will/will not receive continuing education time during year sabbatical is taken
- Pastor will/will not receive full vacation time during year sabbatical is taken

### 6. CONDITIONS

- Plan must be submitted to the Board “x” months prior to the sabbatical (Six months is fairly typical)
- Plan must be submitted to the Board before budget has been determined for fiscal year in which sabbatical is to be taken
- Plan must include: project proposal, time and work schedule, reporting schedule, budget, and description of benefits to both pastor and congregation
- Course of study must lead/doesn't need to lead to an academic degree
- Pastor provides additional “x” years of service after sabbatical (most common time frame is 2 years)

## 7. DUTIES OF COUNCIL

- Find replacements or an interim pastor for the time of sabbatical
- Decide on visiting and/or pastoral care needed by congregation
- Check with classis for possible funds to offset expenses incurred by pulpit replacement or interim pastors
- Determine that sabbatical plan will benefit both pastor and congregation
- Monitor pastor's activities during sabbatical
- Encourage pastor to consider shortfalls or gaps in his/her pastoral skill set to address during sabbatical
- Ensure pastor is not contacted by congregants for ministry needs during sabbatical

## 8. FINANCIAL

- Pastor receives full salary and benefits during sabbatical (Most common choice)
- Pastor receives "x%" of his/her salary and benefits during sabbatical
- Pastor is/is not reimbursed for tuition, living expenses, lodging and travel expenses incurred during sabbatical
- Special offering is taken to help offset pastor's expenses during sabbatical
- Amount budgeted for continuing education for year in which sabbatical is taken will/will not go towards pastor's expenses during sabbatical
- Pastor encouraged to search out grants/donations/funds for expenses for sabbatical
- Pastor may/may not earn income in addition to regular salary during sabbatical
- Pastor may request grant from church's sabbatical fund for up to "x" dollars for expenses incurred during sabbatical
- Sabbatical not granted unless budget has sufficient funds

## 9. REPORTING

- Pastor sends monthly reports to Council/congregation during sabbatical
- Pastor submits written report to Council within "x" months of returning after sabbatical (Most common time frame is 2 months)
- Pastor gives oral report to the congregation within "x" months of returning after the sabbatical (Most common time frame is 2 months)
- Final evaluation of benefits received by congregation is conducted one year after end of sabbatical
- Upon return, pastor and Council consider best course to be followed as pastor re-enters life of congregation—allowing evaluation of pastor's responsibilities, new opportunities, and adjustments to pastor's job description

# SABBATICAL LEAVE CONTRACT

[Name of church] agrees to provide [Pastor's name and position], with a sabbatical leave of [duration] beginning [date].

During the sabbatical, the [Name of church] agrees to pay the [Name of the pastor] his or her [full salary and benefits – change as necessary].

In the pastor's absence, the church covenants with integrity to care for its members, programs, and worship life. Further, the church covenants not to use this time to accomplish or decide alone what it has not been willing or able to do together. The church expects the pastor will also use this time to reflect on their mutual ministry in Christ and how together they can continue to grow more fully into their call under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Upon the pastor's return, the church will invite him or her to share an overview of activities and insights from the sabbatical.

The Church expects that the pastor will continue in his or her role for a minimum of [two years – change as required] after the completion of the sabbatical.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Church Board or equivalent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Church Clerk

Signed in [town], [Province], \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.