

**St. Andrew Presbyterian Church
Denton, Texas
Sabbatical Leave Policy**

Introduction

Often upon completion of several years of ministry and service in the same setting, Ministers of the Word and Sacrament value time to refocus their vision, update professional skills, and find renewal in the sense of their Call. Just as the Sabbath day is a gift from God during a busy week of work, so the greater gift of a Sabbatical leave can offer valuable refreshment and rejuvenation for those who labor continuously for God's people.

Sabbatical leave is taken in partnership with a minister's congregation, and should offer a time of reflection for the congregation as well as for the minister. In addition to an enhanced sense of purpose and mission on the part of the minister upon the minister's return, benefits to the congregation often include a renewed appreciation of the minister, long-term retention of the minister following the minister's period of rest and renewal, and leadership development among laypersons and other staff while the minister is away.

Definitions

Ecclesiastical Definition:

A Sabbatical leave is a break and a change from a minister's everyday routine that includes a balance of reflection and prayer, rest, study, and travel. The purpose of a Sabbatical leave is to allow adequate time away from the minister's normal job responsibilities for personal and professional growth, spiritual renewal, and revitalization of vision and hope.

Human Resources Definition:

Sabbatical leave is a reward for past ministerial leadership and an incentive for further ministerial development. It is not an entitlement of employment and, therefore, is not cumulative, is not accrued, and has no cash value. Sabbatical leave is not payable upon termination of employment as severance.

Sabbatical leave is distinct from vacation and ordinary study leave. Vacation and ordinary study leave, accordingly, shall not be affected by Sabbatical leave. If recommended by the Personnel Committee and approved by session, however, vacation time and ordinary study leave may be combined with Sabbatical leave for Sabbatical purposes.

Eligibility

Eligibility for a Sabbatical leave ordinarily requires completion of at least six (6) consecutive years of employment. The minister should be in good standing with the congregation, having received positive work evaluations during the past year. There should be at least six (6) years between Sabbatical leaves. No more than one minister may be on Sabbatical leave during any one calendar year.

Although this policy refers specifically to Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, it may also apply to Certified Christian Educators or Commissioned Lay Pastors employed by the church.

Specific Considerations

The length of Sabbatical leave is ordinarily three (3) consecutive months. Accumulated study leave may be taken as an extension of a Sabbatical leave if the purpose is for specific study and professional growth. Although vacation time is qualitatively different from Sabbatical leave, vacation time may be taken as an extension of Sabbatical leave if the additional leave time is necessary for or substantially enhances the purpose of the Sabbatical (e.g., a formal course of study, the completion of a requirement for an advanced degree, the completion of a book). If recommended by the Personnel Committee and approved by the session, Sabbatical leave may be combined with study leave and/or vacation time for up to one (1) additional month.

During the period of the Sabbatical leave, the session shall provide full salary and benefits including housing allowance, pension benefits, medical benefits, and any book allowance. If deemed appropriate, and upon recommendation of the Personnel Committee and approval of the session, the minister's auto allowance may remain at the same level as that in effect in the year of the Sabbatical. In all cases, the session should ensure that funding for the Sabbatical leave plan is adequate.

Upon returning from Sabbatical leave, the minister is expected to remain in his or her position for at least one (1) year.

There should be intentional re-entry plans that allow the session/congregation and minister to share their different journeys during the Sabbatical leave. Examples of such plans might include a special debriefing with the session and an all church luncheon or dinner with time for sharing.

Procedures

Minister responsibilities include:

- Bringing before the session, upon recommendation of the Personnel Committee, the Sabbatical proposal at least six (6) months before the intended commencement of the Sabbatical leave, or far enough in advance to be covered by the church's budget and staffing plans. For purposes of session approval, the proposal may be in outline form.
- Securing the approval of the session for the Sabbatical proposal.
- Upon approval by session, submitting to session and to Grace Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, in writing, the Sabbatical timetable and detailed outline of plans.
- Assuring session of continued service to the church of at least one (1) year after return from the Sabbatical.
- Applying for any available grants.
- Working out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
- Bringing up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the session before departing on the Sabbatical leave.
- Upon return from the Sabbatical, preparing a written report on the Sabbatical experience for the session and for Grace Presbytery's Committee on Ministry.

Session responsibilities include:

- Receiving "for approval" the minister's proposal for a Sabbatical leave, as recommended by the Personnel Committee, at least six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
- Ensuring continued terms of call commitments (salary, housing allowance, pension benefits, medical benefits, and any book allowance) to the minister during an approved Sabbatical leave.
- Ensuring funding for the coverage of the minister's pastoral and pulpit responsibilities during an approved Sabbatical leave.
- Ensuring adequate funding for the Sabbatical leave plan.
- Communicating to the congregation the importance and value of the Sabbatical.

Appendix

Policy Approvals

Policy approved by session December 2018

Policy revision approved by session September 2020

Policy edit approved by session November 2021