

CLASSIS LAKE ERIE SABBATICAL POLICY

Continuing education and spiritual growth opportunities are necessary for the personal and professional development of pastors, and a pastor's involvement in such activities is important for the spiritual growth of the congregation. This is particularly true as the church ministers to a dramatically changed and changing world. Pastors ministering to the church and community in today's world need to be intentional about their own spiritual and intellectual growth. Yearly conferences, retreats, and seminars are helpful for refreshment and for maintaining skills for ministry; however, extended periods away from regular ministerial duties provide opportunity for concentrated study, intellectual reflection and stimulation, spiritual renewal and prayer, and improvement of skills.

The term sabbatical is used here to represent an extended period of leave from normal ministerial duties. The term often represents a six month leave upon the completion of six years of service. We believe, however, that shorter leaves may be advantageous to the church and pastor. We would encourage churches and pastors to consider three months leave after three years of service.

It is important to recognize the value of a pastoral sabbatical for a congregation. The pastor grows spiritually and intellectually and returns with new approaches to specific congregational needs and with new and fresh enthusiasm for the work of the church. Churches benefit from the development of lay leaders, from a renewed sense of ownership of the ministries of the church, and from the opportunity to hear and interact with guest preachers.

The Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Committee of Classis Lake Erie will provide consultation as well as copies of sabbatical leave policies and sabbatical proposals adopted by individual churches.

Eligibility:

A pastor who has completed three or more years of continuous service in the same congregation is encouraged to apply for a sabbatical. Such leaves must be granted at the discretion of the church council and are given with full compensation and benefits. The length of a sabbatical leave is normally given in the ratio of one month leave for each year of service. It is recommended that provision for sabbatical leaves be included in the congregation's call to the minister and in the church budget.

Application:

Application for a sabbatical leave shall be made by the pastor to the church council for approval. The council may bring the request to the congregation for an advisory vote. Application should be made in sufficient time before the sabbatical is to begin to provide the congregation ample time to make suitable arrangements for covering pastoral duties and responsibilities.

A sabbatical leave is provided for the purpose of renewal and refreshment, exposure to new ideas and intellectual reflection, the improving of ministerial skills, and the deepening of one's spiritual life and prayer. It is provided for the mutual benefit of the congregation and pastor. An application by the pastor shall include a clear statement of purpose of the project to be pursued, the benefits that this sabbatical will provide for the personal and professional development of the minister, the benefits provided for the congregation, an outline of the anticipated use of sabbatical time, and any other information deemed necessary by the council and pastor. After the sabbatical the pastor shall provide a reflective report of the experience to the council and congregation.

Financial Assistance:

A sabbatical may not be used to accept paid employment except for occasional preaching assignments. The pastor is permitted to receive financial assistance (e.g. fellowships, grants, scholarships) for the purposes approved in the leave request without prejudice to congregational compensation. If the council and pastor wish to apply for sabbatical financial assistance from Classis Lake Erie, such application shall be submitted to the Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Committee of classis at least six months in advance of the time the costs are to be incurred. This application should include information about the nature, purpose, length, and cost of the sabbatical so that the committee is better able to evaluate the priority of requests.

Classis Lake Erie has established the **Sabbatical Financial Assistance Fund** to assist churches within classis to provide continuing education/sabbatical leaves for their pastors. This fund is to be used to pay a percentage of the incremental, above salary expenses incurred by any church whose pastor has been given sabbatical leave. The fund is financed through an annual ministry share administered through the Classis Lake Erie budget process.

This fund will pay up to 75% of the incremental expenses of a church less than 50 families, 50% of the incremental expenses of a church 50-99 families, and 25% of the incremental expenses of a church above 100 families. Incremental costs able to be paid by the sabbatical assistance fund include:

- (1) pulpit supply: preaching and travel,
- (2) a substitute pastor: either a retired person, a seminary intern, or another suggestion by the local church.
- (3) the services of a paid lay person: included in the job description might be visiting and calling, counseling and pastoral work, worship leadership and liturgical preparation, outreach and evangelism, increased secretarial work, administration and coordination of activities, etc.,
- (4) housing: the difference between the pastor's housing allowance or the financial reimbursement received by renting the parsonage and the cost of housing on the sabbatical can be submitted (not to exceed \$400 a month).

In the event that monies in the fund are not sufficient to support the expenses expected to be incurred, the administering committee may pro rate the available funds among the applications or seek to defer one or more applications to a subsequent year. Deferred applications will be given priority in subsequent years. Normally, priority will be given to applications of pastors who have had the longest tenure without sabbatical leave.

This fund will be administered by the Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Committee of Classis Lake Erie. This committee may be consulted for assistance in writing a sabbatical proposal, in thinking about ways to cover pastoral duties during a sabbatical, in helping to apply for classical assistance, etc.