

DEVELOPING A SABBATICAL POLICY

Options to Consider

After reviewing a variety of sabbatical policies from Christian Reformed 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 ideas 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
 - Classis

3. Activities While on Sabbatical

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

Note: sabbatical not intended to supplement vacation time or to be seen as “free time”

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
- 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 2 – 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 Council “x” months prior to the sabbatical (Six months is fairly typical)
- Plan must be submitted to Council 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 into Synodical Fund for offsetting 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

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