

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

The Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky

In Genesis 2:2 we read these words: “And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day.” Sabbath rest is built into the fabric of creation. The fourth commandment states: “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” Sabbath is necessary for the well-being of community for it reminds persons who they are and who God is. Jesus invited his disciples, “Come and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). Amidst the constant demands of ministry, Jesus knew that need for sabbath time.

In faithfulness to the understanding of life in scripture, some congregations may choose to consider instituting a sabbatical program for their pastors and Christian educators. For those congregations who choose to begin such a program, the Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky and its Committee on Ministry recommends a three month sabbatical for its full-time ministers of word and sacrament and its educators after they have been engaged in a ministry for five or more years.

The purpose of sabbatical is to provide a time away from normal duties for rest and renewal, for sabbath time of deepening relationship with God and clarifying call. Since pastors/educators find renewal in different ways, each is encouraged to prayerfully discern the type of experience(s) that will renew his or her spirit and provide new life and creativity and energy to lead a congregation to greater faithfulness. Some will choose to engage in travel, others in artistic or cross-cultural endeavors, and still others in more traditional study and reflection.

The sabbatical also provides growth opportunities and new life for congregations. Under temporary leadership and especially as lay persons assume greater responsibility for worship, administration, and pastoral care, congregations discover anew their gifts and graces for ministry.

Following are guidelines for the establishment of a sabbatical program in a congregation.

Suggested Time Line:

At the time of call

- The congregation and pastor negotiate a sabbatical as part of the call. Ideally, the congregation should set aside some funds each year to fund a future sabbatical. The presbytery is willing to hold such funds in escrow for the congregation to be used for temporary leadership and related expenses incurred during the sabbatical.

For those already in pastoral positions in the presbytery

- The pastor and the Session negotiate ways of making a sabbatical part of the call package.
- Should a pastor desire to go on a sabbatical, and the Session and Personnel Committee of a congregation also desire a sabbatical for their pastor, the congregation must vote to approve that sabbatical as a part of the review and approval of the annual terms of call.

During the year prior to that projected for the sabbatical

- The pastor/educator prayerfully begins to explore the type of sabbatical leave that will meet his/her way of finding new energy and creativity.
- The session and pastor discuss sabbatical plans as they emerge and begin planning for pastoral coverage for the congregation.

Three to six months before the sabbatical

- The pastor/educator finalizes sabbatical plans and submits them to the session for approval and to the Committee on Ministry for information.
- The session develops plans for congregational leadership during the sabbatical.
- The session and pastor educate the congregation about the sabbatical.

After the return from sabbatical

- The pastor/educator shares with the session and congregation the experiences and insights of the sabbatical and submits a report to the session and COM describing the sabbatical experience and renewal.
- The congregation reflects on its learning during the sabbatical time.

Suggested contractual arrangement for a sabbatical

- The congregation will continue to pay salary, housing, major medical and pension during the sabbatical leave. Professional expenses such as travel, meals, etc are negotiable.
- Pastors/educators will apply continuing education and/or books allowances toward sabbatical costs.
- Pastors/educators will contribute two weeks of vacation and two weeks of study leave toward the sabbatical time. The remaining two weeks of vacation will provide for tending to family and other needs.
- Pastors/educators who participate in a sabbatical should do so with the intent to remain in the congregation for one year following the sabbatical.

Bibliography

Melissa Bane Sevier, Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals, Alban, 2002.

Richard Bullock and Richard Brueschoff, Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning, Alban.