

CLERGY CONTINUING EDUCATION
AND
SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES
Presbytery of Western Reserve

I. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines for clergy continuing education and sabbatical leave planning are based on several assumptions:

1. That the ministry is both a vocation and a profession. As a vocation, it is a response to God's call for an individual to use his/her gifts in service to God's people. As professionals, ministers have a specialized body of knowledge that they apply in specific ways to attempt to address particular human needs.
2. That this body of knowledge and its application is not static but continues to grow and develop.
3. That seminary is simply the beginning of professional training. Its purpose is to equip ministers with the tools for a lifetime of continuing professional development.
4. That it is the responsibility of a professional to continually update his/her professional expertise that s/he might serve his/her constituents better.
5. That ministerial continuing education is to enhance ministerial skills and the understanding of the Christian faith.

It is for these reasons that all ministerial calls in the Presbytery of the Western Reserve include minimums of both time and money for professional continuing education (see latest presbytery minimum terms of call). These guidelines are intended to assist both clergypersons and churches in using these resources wisely.

Churches are encouraged to consider providing similar provisions for other program staff.

II. GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Clergypersons are encouraged to consult their sessions, personnel committees, or other governing authority in discerning the general areas in which their continuing education resources might best be spent as knowing the needs of those they serve will help in selecting the particular events, classes, books, etc. to be pursued.

Pastors are reminded that time away for continuing education must be approved by the session. Non-parish clergy should have the approval of the appropriate body or supervisor.

Both clergy and churches are encouraged to respect time away. Calls back to the church to see how things are going or consulting with the pastor who is away are discouraged. Pastors and sessions are encouraged to review their administrative procedures so as to ensure the church is able to continue to function smoothly with the pastor out of town. Similarly, provisions for providing normal pastoral care should be made during the pastor's absence so that s/he need not have to be called.

B. TYPES OF APPROVED CONTINUING EDUCATION

Types of approved continuing education include the following:

1. Formal workshops, seminars, and other events sponsored by
 - a) accredited bodies of higher learning
 - b) governing bodies of the church, and
 - c) other recognized and approved institutions (hospitals, AAPC, etc.).
2. Courses of study leading to further professional degrees (M.A., D. Min., Ph.D., etc.).
3. Travel that is specifically study oriented (see below).
4. Time at a spiritual retreat center or time in solo retreat under the guidance of a spiritual director.
5. A disciplined, systematic, self-directed reading program developed in conjunction with the session, personnel committee, or other governing body.

C. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The goal of professional continuing education is to equip the individual to serve his/her constituents more effectively. Clergypersons and their governing bodies are encouraged to develop ways in which new knowledge gained through continuing education might be put to use in the life of the church or organization.

Some examples of the ways professional continuing education might benefit the church include:

1. Improvement of specific ministerial skills such as preaching, administration, counseling, conflict mediation, spiritual guidance, etc. so as to be a better overall leader.
2. Increased spiritual maturity and commitment to Christ so as to better lead the congregation in following God's call.
3. Increased understanding of the Scriptures, Christian history and practice, theology, etc. so as to be a better preacher and teacher.
4. Development of some new, innovative program, mission, outreach, service, or other form of new mission/ministry direction.
5. First hand interpretation of foreign or national mission programs so as to better interpret these programs and encourage greater commitment to mission in general.

D. USES OF RESOURCES

While all clergypersons are encouraged to make maximum use of their continuing education resources, time away over that agreed upon in the call must be approved by the session or other governing body.

Clergy anticipating the need for additional C.E. money in any given year will want to have this reflected at the time the call is approved for the year so as to avoid having to pay tax on this amount.

Continuing Education time or money not spent in a calendar year may be returned to the church budget unspent or accumulated for use in a longer period of leave (see below).

E. TRAVEL

While travel can be enlightening, educational and culturally satisfying, a travel event that is the equivalent of a vacation for a layperson is not an appropriate form of Continuing Education. Travel that is part of one's ministry or which clearly enhances one's work is acceptable.

F. ACCUMULATED STUDY LEAVE

Continuing Education time and funding may be accrued up to six (6) weeks over a three (3) year period when it has been contracted for between the minister and the session. Ministers and sessions are encouraged to plan this time away carefully in terms of 1) the minister's study plans, and 2) the continuing well being of the church (i.e., pulpit supply, pastoral care, etc.). Accumulated study leave may be combined with vacation for a total period of time away of no more than ten (10) weeks.

III. SABBATICAL LEAVE

Sabbatical leave is not a right, but rather a gift from the congregation of a prolonged period of time away for study, reflection, and spiritual renewal over and above the normal study leave. It is intended to enhance the long term minister's effectiveness by giving him/her an uninterrupted time to care for his/her own well being so as to return to his/her work with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

A period of sabbatical leave also offers several benefits for the church:

1. Established routines (ruts!!) can be broken and new styles of worship and administration explored.
2. The undiscovered leadership of laypersons and other staff can be allowed to develop.
3. A new appreciation of both the pastor him/herself and the role of pastor may be found.
4. The break provided by a sabbatical leave may provide the rest a pastor needs in order to continue his/her work at the church for a longer period of time.

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES

In general, ministers with seven (7) continuous years of service at a particular church are eligible for a Sabbatical Leave. Sabbatical leave may be repeated at seven (7) year intervals. Both pastors and sessions are encouraged to consult with the General Presbyter or Committee on Ministry when planning a sabbatical, particularly when issues of conflict, finances, or "bad timing" apply (see below). The following guidelines are offered for ministers and sessions planning sabbatical leaves:

1. Plans for sabbatical leave should be made with the session, personnel committee, and/or other appropriate body in time to be included in the congregation's annual review of

terms of call. These discussions should be a candid and open reflection on needs of the church and the pastor and done in a spirit of care for all involved. Sabbatical plans should include:

- a) Provision for pulpit supply, pastoral care, moderator for the session, administrative leadership, etc. (The hiring of a Temporary Supply Pastor is often appropriate.)
 - b) Establishing the philosophy behind the sabbatical. Some understand sabbatical leave as an extended time of spiritual rest and renewal. Others view it as an extended time for formal professional training. Whether or not there are expectations on how the time away is to be used and if there are specific programming implications stemming from the sabbatical should be settled well in advance of the leave.
2. The person away should expect to give a written report upon returning describing activities, accomplishments, next steps, etc.
 3. Full compensation shall be paid to the person during the sabbatical leave.
 4. Sabbatical leave shall not exceed three (3) months. Sabbatical leave may be combined with vacation and study leave so that the total time away with full salary and benefits is no more than four and one-half (4 ½) months. Additional time away without pay may be approved for a total of no more than six (6) months time away.
 5. Sabbatical leave may not be used as “terminal leave.” Using sabbatical leave to look for a new call is an inappropriate use of this time. If the minister chooses to leave the congregation within a period of one (1) year following the sabbatical, the salary attributable to the sabbatical may need to be refunded.

B. NOTES

There are some situations in which sabbatical leave is not recommended and/or needs extra care in planning.

1. CONFLICT

It is normal for a request for a sabbatical to flow from a sense of personal or professional weariness or “burn out.” Sabbatical leave should not be used, however, as “time out” when conflicts exist between the minister and his/her congregation. The issues, practices, and self-defeating patterns of behavior that cause problems in congregational life will not go away on their own just because the participants are separated from one another for a period of time. Ministers and churches experiencing particular tensions or conflicts are strongly encouraged to use the resources of the Presbytery, Midwest Career Development Center, and/or other resources for handling conflict before talking about a sabbatical leave.

2. MAJOR CONGREGATIONAL DISRUPTION

The timing of a well-earned sabbatical leave may not fit well into a particular congregation’s history. Rather than slavishly adhering to the seven-year schedule, ministers and sessions are encouraged to talk frankly with one another as to the needs and goals of the church and those of the pastor when determining when is an acceptable time for the pastor to be away. Deciding to reach or postpone certain specific goals or

programs, and/or making allowance for additional time away at a later date may be ways around such difficulties.

3. SERIOUS FINANCIAL BURDEN

One of the unfortunate realities for most ministers and churches is that the church simply cannot afford to pay for ministerial services while their pastor is away on sabbatical leave. “Creative financing” is counseled for these circumstances. This might include some combination of the following:

- a. Going it alone: using of lay preachers, Men’s Sundays, Women’s Sundays, Youth Sundays, etc. for pulpit supply; relying on elders, deacons, Stephen Ministers, etc. for pastoral care.
- b. Hiring seminary interns or inquirers for preaching and pastoral care.
- c. Making temporary part-time stated supply arrangements with hospital chaplains, pastoral counselors, minister members-at-large, etc.
- d. Applying for funding from the Pastor’s Salary Sharing Fund.
- e. Offering “mini-Sabbaticals” on a more frequent basis (e.g. six-weeks sabbatical for every four years of service).
- f. Instituting a policy of additional vacation and/or study leave as an incentive for long-term employment (e.g. ten days additional time-off for every five years of service).
- g. Exploring residential pulpit exchanges where the minister and his/her family exchange churches and residences for an extended period of time.
- h. Spreading the four months of sabbatical over the year in one or two week pieces.

IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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