

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES  
EASTERN OKLAHOMA PRESBYTERY  
December 2003

**Policy Statement**

Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery recommends to the Sessions of its congregations that full-time Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators be granted a compensated sabbatical leave of at least three months (to include thirteen consecutive Sundays) following seven years of service to a particular congregation. In multiple-staff congregations, the Session may choose to modify this recommendation (eg: no more than one staff person per year will be granted a sabbatical leave).

**Rationale**

Sabbatical leave is a planned time of study and renewal by which a minister or educator seeks personal and professional growth. Sabbatical leave may include continuing education, spiritual formation, mentoring with respected teachers, and personal refreshment. It is an opportunity for an individual to disengage from regular and routine tasks so that their ministry may be viewed from a new perspective.

Sabbatical leave is an extension of the biblical concept of the Sabbath year of renewal. It is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and an occasion for the renewal of vital energies. The goal of the sabbatical leave is to allow the minister or educator to return to the responsibilities of the parish with renewed energy, spiritual vision, and effectiveness. Ministers and educators who have the opportunity to reflect on issues of professional growth and development are more likely to stay more years in a particular call.

Sabbatical leave is qualitatively different from “time off” or “vacation” in that there is a plan for personal and professional renewal. Neither vacation nor study leave should be affected by sabbatical leave. However, accrued vacation or study leave may be taken in conjunction with the sabbatical leave, adding no more than four additional weeks to the sabbatical leave.

**Responsibilities of the Person Requesting Sabbatical Leave**

1. Bring the proposal for a sabbatical leave and at least an outline plan for that time to the Session at least six months prior to the anticipated leave.
1. Secure the approval of the Session for the sabbatical leave and work with the Session to provide the necessary coverage for pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
1. Assure the Session of continued service to the congregation for at least one year from the conclusion of the sabbatical leave. (Taking a sabbatical leave cannot formally obligate the minister or educator to continued service to that congregation, but it should at least be the intent of the person at the time of the sabbatical.)
1. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities, in consultation with the Session, prior to departing on sabbatical leave.

1. Submit to the Committee on Ministry in writing an outline of the sabbatical plan and time line.
1. Upon return, present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the Session and the Committee on Ministry.

### **Session Responsibilities**

1. Act on the proposal for sabbatical leave. Negotiation of the details attendant to the proposal should normally be completed no later than four months prior to the proposed leave. If necessary, the Committee on Ministry may be called upon to mediate the details of the proposal.
1. Forward a copy of the approved plan for sabbatical leave to the Committee on Ministry.
1. Continue the terms of call to the minister/educator during the sabbatical leave.
1. Fully fund any temporary pastoral or professional services necessary in the absence of the minister or educator. Congregations may wish to set aside funds each year, in anticipation of requests for sabbatical leave. In addition, the Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program housed at Louisville Seminary, provides study grants for pastoral leaders. Contact Rev. David J. Wood at 1044 Alta Vista Rd., Louisville, KY 40205-1798; phone: 502-895-3411; e-mail: [info@louisville-institute.org](mailto:info@louisville-institute.org) for more information.

### **Committee on Ministry Responsibilities**

1. Receive for concurrence the agreed upon plan for sabbatical leave as submitted by the Session.
1. Serve as a mediator of any concerns of the Session or minister/educator relative to the sabbatical leave.
1. If needed, determine who will moderate the Session in the minister's absence.
1. Request a report on the sabbatical experience upon the minister or educator's return.

### **Further Resources**

1. PCUSA Churchwide Personnel Services guideline for Sabbatical Leave available at <http://pcusa.org/ministers/sabbatical.htm>
1. Sabbatical Planning: For Clergy and Congregations, A. Richard Bullock, Alban Institute, 1987.
1. The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care, Rochelle Melander & Harold Eppley, Alban Institute, 2002.