

COM Guidance for Sabbaticals for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators

INTRODUCTION

Often on completion of several years of ministry and service in the same setting, Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators value time to refocus their vision, update professional skills, and find renewal of the sense of their Call. Just as the Sabbath day is a gift from God during a busy week of work, so the greater gift of a Sabbatical Leave can offer valuable refreshment and rejuvenation for those who labor continuously for God's people.

PURPOSE

The purpose of a Sabbatical Leave is to allow adequate time away from normal job responsibilities for personal and professional growth, spiritual renewal and a revitalization of vision and hope. The Leave should offer a time of reflection for the benefit of both the participant on the Sabbatical Leave and his or her congregation or ministry setting.

DEFINITION

A Sabbatical Leave is a break and change from the everyday routine and therefore would include a balance of reflection and prayer, rest, study, and travel. A Sabbatical Leave is taken in partnership between the Minister of Word and Sacrament or Certified Christian Educator and their ministry context. A written plan proposing how the sabbatical would fulfill the purpose of a sabbatical to the benefit of both parties should be submitted to the Session or governing body overseeing the work of the Minister of Word and Sacrament or Certified Christian Educator. The plan should include study plans (conferences, seminars, reading lists, advanced degree work relevant to the ministry context, etc.), plans for renewal and rest, and any travel plans relevant to the purpose of the sabbatical.

Sabbaticals are not vacation or ordinary study leave. They are also not intended to be used as a chance to escape difficulties within the local church. While the Committee on Ministry encourages congregations and ministry settings to make provisions for Sabbatical Leave for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators, the decision rests with Sessions and governing bodies overseeing the work of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Certified Christian Educators. Ideally, Sabbatical Leave provisions will be discussed when calls and contracts are first being discussed, based on a clear Sabbatical Leave Policy of the Session or governing body.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for a Sabbatical Leave ordinarily requires completion of at least seven (7) consecutive years of employment. The Minister of Word and Sacrament or Certified Christian Educator should be in good standing with the congregation or ministry setting, receiving positive work evaluations. There should be at least seven (7) years between Sabbatical Leaves.

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. The length of a Sabbatical Leave is ordinarily 8-12 consecutive weeks. Depending on policy, accumulated Study Leave time may be taken as an extension of the leave if the purposes are for specific study and professional growth goals. Vacation time should not be taken to extend the time of Sabbatical as the purposes of vacation and Sabbatical are not the same.
2. Adequate opportunities for planning the substance of the Sabbatical Leave and for the sharing of its results are vital to its success and should not be overlooked. Planning with the Session or Governing Body overseeing the work of the Minister of Word and Sacrament or Certified Christian Educator should begin several months in advance of a possible Sabbatical Leave. If requested, Committee on Ministry can assist a Session in securing pastoral services for the sabbatical period and consult as necessary on how a Session or ministry setting might fulfill the role of Certified Christian Educator.
3. During the period of the Sabbatical Leave, full salary and benefits will be provided by the Session or employing organization. Payments under the terms of call for travel expenses and other administrative expense would ordinarily be suspended during the period of the Sabbatical Leave and adequate funding of the Sabbatical Leave plan should be included in the annual budget for the year the Sabbatical Leave occurs. (Below are links to possible sources of grants for funding for Sabbaticals.)
4. Upon returning home from Sabbatical Leave, the Minister of Word and Sacrament or Certified Christian Educator should remain in his or her position for at least one (1) year.
5. There should be intentional re-entry plans which will allow the congregation/ministry setting and Minister of Word and Sacrament/Certified Christian Educator to share their different journeys during the Sabbatical Leave. Examples of such plans might include a one-day all church retreat with church congregation leaders, a special debriefing with session members followed by an all church supper and time for sharing, etc.

For further information or consultation concerning Sabbatical Leave Policies and possibilities, including sample Sabbatical Leave policies, please contact the Committee in Ministry Office of Grace Presbytery at: 214.393.5607.

Links for possible grant funding:

The Lilly Foundation <https://lillyendowment.org/for-grantseekers/renewal-programs/pastors/>
The Louisville Institute <https://louisville-institute.org/programs-grants-and-fellowships/grants/>