

Sabbatical Leave Policy

Rationale

A sabbatical leave is an extension of the biblical concept of a Sabbath day and Sabbath year for renewal. Within the church, a sabbatical time for congregations and pastors is an opportunity to disengage from regular and normal tasks so that values and directions may be seen in a new light and adjusted as that light may reveal.

For the pastor it is appropriate for sabbatical leave to include rest, family time, recreation, and study in a balanced way. This time away can lead to longer, more effective service to the congregation as the pastor comes back refreshed.

For the congregation it offers opportunities to strengthen lay leadership. The members may find a deepened sense of their own ministry to the church and to each other.

Sabbatical

All new calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors serving congregations shall include a three (3) month sabbatical at full pay and benefits after each seven (7) years of service to a given congregation.

The recommended length of the sabbatical leave is 90 consecutive days. Accrued vacation and continuing education time may be attached to the sabbatical leave upon mutual agreement of the pastor and the Session. Upon completion of the sabbatical leave, the incumbent pastor would, ordinarily, continue to serve the church for not less than one year upon the conclusion of the leave. In addition, in multiple staff situations, congregations may limit sabbatical leave to one staff person per year.

In order for a church to have a refreshed and revitalized pastor, those pastors who have changed calls within six years here in Heartland Presbytery may negotiate with their current session for a sabbatical before serving seven (7) years.

Those who have previously served for more than six (6) years in a PCUSA congregation in another Presbytery without a sabbatical policy and are now serving in Heartland, may, with the approval of the Commission on Ministry (COM), negotiate a sabbatical with their session.

Sabbatical Plan

It is important that a sabbatical plan be worked out well in advance to allow time for the pastor to seek appropriate grants and for the church to budget for the pastor's absence. It is recommended that the pastor begin planning at least a year in advance. Having a sabbatical team to work through the plans and work in educating the congregation is advised. Proposal for a sabbatical leave should be designed by the pastor in consultation with the sabbatical team

and the session with a written outline prepared a minimum of six (6) months in advance of the sabbatical. This should take into consideration budgetary adjustments for pulpit supply/pastoral care/ moderator stipends.

Pastor Responsibilities

1. Make a list of all pastoral services and duties to be covered during the sabbatical.
2. Secure the approval of the Session for the sabbatical proposal and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
3. Make sure that all work is up to date and a clear plan is in place to cover pastoral duties.
4. In order to protect the pastor's privacy and the intent of the sabbatical one contact person within the church should be designated for necessary communication.
5. For informational purposes submit a written sabbatical timetable and plans for coverage to the Commission on Ministry no later than 60 days in advance of sabbatical.
6. Present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the Session on return.
7. Sign a Covenant Agreement with the Session

Session Responsibilities

1. Approve the dates and plans for coverage of pastoral duties at least six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
2. Continue terms of call commitments to the pastor during sabbatical leave. The pastor still receives full salary/housing/benefits during this time.
3. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the church of a sabbatical.
4. Request a written overview of the sabbatical from the pastor upon return.
5. Sign a Covenant Agreement with the pastor.

Returning to the pulpit

Upon return, it is suggested that the pastor share with the congregation a summary of the benefits that resulted from the sabbatical leave.