

Sample Sabbatical Leave Policy

For Full-Time Pastors and Certified Directors of Christian Education

Holston Presbytery; Presbyterian Church (USA)

Introduction:

These guidelines are meant to help churches and professional staff implement policies for Sabbatical Leave. Sabbatical Leave is beneficial, both to ministry professionals, and to the churches they serve. Sabbatical leave can help individuals to refocus their vision, and find a renewed sense of call. Oftentimes, Sabbatical Leave is needed to find a new or intensive/continuing educational experience that is not possible in a two week time period. Sabbatical Leave is the call from God in a busy world, and in the busy Church. It can offer valuable refreshment and rejuvenation for those who labor continuously for God's people, new vision for continued service, and renewed compassion for the beloved children of God who comprise the Church. Sabbatical Leave offers the church a time to re-focus on their future, a time for members to find new gifts for service in the church, and for the church as a whole, to renew its call as part of the priesthood of all believers. When Sabbatical Leave is completed, the congregation and staff should take the opportunity to reflect on learning, and the benefits gained by the staff member, as well as the congregation.

2 Definition:

Sabbatical leave is a planned time of study, and renewal, by which one seeks personal and professional growth. 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, and their soul renewed to serve refreshed. It is not intended as a prolonged vacation. Through reflection, prayer, rest, study and travel, one finds, through this temporary vocation, the promise of God who sustains us through a period of reflection, leading to the renewal of energy upon the return to the permanent call.

Suggestions:

Churches and their professional staff, (ordained clergy and Certified Christian educators,) are encouraged to use this policy to enact their own specific sabbatical plan, and churches should encourage eligible staff to avail themselves of this opportunity. They should dialogue together to come up with a suitable form of leave that will benefit all involved, and not place too much of a burden on the church, nor ignore the full need of the staff member.

Eligibility:

1. Sabbatical Leave for clergy should ordinarily be included in all calls in Holston Presbytery for Full-time Ministers of Word and Sacrament serving as Pastors and Certified Christian Educators. (hereafter referred to as clergy and CCEs)
2. For clergy, Sabbatical leave involves a change in the Terms of Call, and as such, is subject to the approval of the Session, the congregation, and the presbytery. Clergy and CCEs working full time should be eligible for Sabbatical Leave after six (6) years of service, or "in the seventh year of service." The Session may decide to give credit for previous full time service by the Clergy and CCEs in other positions.
3. The Clergy/CCE should bring a proposal to the Personnel Committee and/or the Session at least 6 months prior to the beginning of the proposed leave. Proposals submitted prior to approval of the church budget for the calendar year when leave is to be taken are preferred. The proposal should include

details on how the time will be used, proposed arrangements for covering the Clergy/CCE congregational duties, and any cost associated with the proposed leave.

4. The Session may allow continuing education money not spent in a calendar year to accrue for up to three (3) years to offset some of the costs of Sabbatical. Please note the IRS rules do not allow Continuing Education monies to be used for travel unless “ministerial duties are performed.” Continuing Education money may be used for travel but it should be reported as income.

5. The time allotted for the Sabbatical should be based upon the purpose of the sabbatical. Sabbaticals that are primarily for educational travel should be no more than 4-5 weeks. In depth educational sabbaticals and/or advanced degree work should be no less than three (3) months. If the sabbatical is primarily advanced degree work, the year it is taken, and should include continuing education time, so that the staff member’s continuing education time is the Sabbatical time. If the sabbatical is primarily educational travel, the 2 week continuing education should remain intact. Sabbaticals shall not include vacation time, so that the staff member’s vacation time shall be intact.

6. Before the leave begins, the Clergy/CCE and the Personnel Committee/Session should inform the congregation about the leave. The leave needs to be approved by the Congregation as change in Terms of Call, if it has not already been done as suggested in “Eligibility.” An explanation of the policy, and the accepted plans for the leave period, is appropriate. The timing and execution of this communication should be determined at the time of approval.

7. The church, no matter its size, should feel encouraged to contact the Presbytery office (423.247.6178) for encouragement and for support before and during the time of the leave. It is possible that there may be grants available, either through the Presbytery, the Board of Pensions, or others. The Louisville Institute (502.895.3411) offers grants, as does the Lily Foundation (317.916.7302). The Presbytery is a resource for helping with staffing issues, pulpit supply, and pastoral care.

8. Upon completion of the Sabbatical Leave, at an acceptable time, the staff member should report to the Session/Personnel Committee about the leave, including the value of the leave.

9. Not more than one staff member should take a Leave per calendar year. In the event that two or more staff members are eligible during the same year, the staff members shall converse openly with the Personnel Committee to determine an acceptable resolution.