

EASTERN DISTRICT SABBATICAL GUIDELINES AND RESOURCES

DRAFT based upon SED Guidelines

BACKGROUND

The Eastern District Ministerial Health Committee, LCMS, asked the Board Of Directors to encourage and provide guidance to congregations for the development of a sabbatical policy.

PROLOGUE

The word "sabbatical" is derived from "Sabbath." Historically, in church and academia, the professionals were given a Sabbath (sabbatical) every seventh year. The observation was that academic professors and clergy were so worn out after six years of teaching and leading that they needed a year of rest, recovery, renewal, and re-education for their field of endeavor. The assumptions were that it paid off for the professional person (avoiding breakdown) and that it paid off for the institution (re-energized and updated leadership). It is based on Genesis 2:1-4a in which God modeled and later required (Exodus 17:8-11) the setting aside of 1/7th of our time for restoration.

“Ministers desperately need to recreate and restore what has been worn down by day-to-day encounters with reality. Nourishing one's soul and regaining perspective requires a change of pace and place --- a pilgrimage. Jesus provides us a good example to follow. He was always moving toward his Father -- in prayer, in his teaching, in his travel. And the apostles who walked with him were renewed day by day. That's what sabbatical is about -- a pilgrimage with Jesus toward our Heavenly Father. Journeying with Jesus we come to know that there is more to life than suffering or hopelessness. We are moving toward the climax and glory of what is to come. Like the early apostles, walking with Jesus during an extended time of reflection, spiritual encounter, and community can recharge us.

Sabbatical typically includes time for travel, rest, prayer, and experiencing different cultures. The best sabbaticals usually are more open-ended than rigid, allowing for the surprises, and possible new direction, that may come. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in his ministry. Moses' time spent tending sheep helped change his perspective on life. David tended sheep and learned valuable lessons about God's care and provision. Paul, struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years, and emerged with a new vision. Sabbatical is a time to receive, to be nurtured, to reflect on your relationship with God and your own story, so that you can be renewed, refreshed, and revitalized by the breath of God."

(Revised from Sabbatical Planning For Clergy and Congregations, Richard Bullock, Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1975).

Sabbath may be viewed as multi-dimensional, which may be diagrammed as concentric circles, beginning at the center with daily "Sabbath time" (15-30 minutes), weekly (2 days), monthly (24 hour retreat), annually, and sabbatical time after 7 years of service (3 months).

I. VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

- A. Giving support to professional workers in maintaining good health benefits the worker, the congregation and the church at large.
- B. Healthy professional workers build healthy congregations and schools.
- C. When there is a good match between the professional worker and a congregation, a long-term ministry is desirable. In such instances a sabbatical is cost effective.
(cf. New Vision For The Long Pastorate, Oswald, Hinand, Hobgood, Lloyd. Alban Institute, 1990)
- D. Good self-care, which includes a regularly scheduled sabbatical, keeps a professional worker healthy. It can enable him/her to achieve a new sense of vision, renew his/her calling, evaluate his/her gifts and skills and the needs of the ministry.
- E. The sabbatical time can open up new opportunities for members to grow in service and be a blessing for the congregation.
- F. Sabbatical leave should be an ongoing *intentional* part of a congregation's ministry, not a reaction to a crisis. (i.e. burnout)
- G. A professional worker that practices good self-care, remains healthier and may extend his or her ministry.
- H. Sabbaticals are a way that congregations can minister to their professional workers.
- I. Every congregation and school has its own unique challenges and resources and therefore needs to develop its own sabbatical "policy."

II. RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A SABBATICAL POLICY

A. Determine The Time Parameters

(1) *When?*

Timing is crucial so as to minimize disruption to the congregation. Plan long in advance to prepare the congregation for a smooth transition. The professional worker and congregation will need about a year to plan the sabbatical.

(2) *How long?*

- The Eastern District recommends 3 months + vacation time (not in place of) every 7 years of ministry within the LCMS.
- Clarify and distinguish *vacation and sabbatical* (A sabbatical is not simply a "reward" or vacation, but an important part of the working relationship between pastor and congregation.)
- Ask: Can the sabbatical purpose and goals be achieved in the *time available*?

B. Determine Financial Arrangements

(1) A continuation of *full salary and benefits* during sabbatical (except car allowance) is advisable.

(2) *How* will this be financed? Some options might include:

- Entirely financed by the congregation where this is possible. This could be provided for in the annual budget or through special gifts.
- The congregation and professional worker each contributing 3% of salary and housing to a sabbatical fund each year. After seven years, the professional worker would be able to take a leave of three months, plus vacation, with pay. The funds accrued, plus interest, minus Concordia Plans expenses would be paid to the professional worker over the period of the sabbatical.
- Retired professional workers may be willing to contribute one or more sabbatical periods to make it possible for congregations with limited resources to provide a sabbatical.
- Alternate financing may be available, depending on the nature of the sabbatical (e.g. Wheat Ridge (www.wheatridge.org), Lilly Endowment (www.clergyrenewal.org), Thrivent (www.thrivent.com), and Pew Charitable Trust (www.pewtrusts.org).

(3) What about *additional costs*? (e.g. supply preaching, pastoral assistance)

(4) Would the congregation assist with *tuition costs*, where it is feasible?

C. Make Specific Sabbatical Plans

(1) *Design*

- Sabbaticals are very individual. There is no right or wrong plan. There needs to be mutual agreement by the pastor and congregation on the sabbatical plan. It is useful to have a "mentor" (one who has done it) help develop the plan. Will the sabbatical be programmed or open-ended? Will it be for the purposes of spiritual growth? Theological reflection? Creative expression? Pastoral concerns? Justice issues? Travel?
- Options might include:
 - a. Encounters with other cultures and with Christian communities in other countries, especially less developed ones (e.g. mission trip)
 - b. Research or writing on independent projects or as part of a formal seminar or academic program
 - c. Directed reflection on personal and spiritual issues
 - d. Recreation and rest

(2) *Purpose*

- Is it for rest, spiritual renewal, new experiences and relationships, intellectual growth, decision-making time, travel, family time, etc.?
- What does the professional worker want (dream, hope) to happen to himself personally? How would he like the congregation and his family to benefit?
- A sabbatical is a time to NOT DO what you normally do. (e.g. do not preach, teach, do normal preparation for ministry, "set foot on the church property", etc.)

(3) *Physical setting*

- This could be a retreat center, foreign travel, home, university, etc. (Note: Places like Chautauqua Institute and Pioneer Camp and Retreat Center would be conducive to the support of a sabbatical program.)
- *Boundaries* are important and need to be established in writing and agreed upon - For example: a complete absence from the congregation, even when the worker is in town.

(4) *Other Considerations*

- The congregation may want to appoint a *Sabbatical Committee* (5 members, which would include the President and Elder Chairperson) to assist both the professional worker and congregation in planning the sabbatical.
- Recognize that it will take at least two years of education to help the congregation understand the value of the sabbatical the first time they offer it. Don't rush this. Gain the congregation's ownership and support.
- Clarify sabbatical *benefits* to professional worker and congregation. A good sabbatical meets a mutual need. What does the worker want to happen to himself personally? How would he like the congregation to benefit? What can be special for his spouse, children, and friends?
- What is the congregation's plan for *pastoral care and public worship* during sabbatical? What responsibilities need to continue and how will they be taken care of?
- Are there any *restrictions* being placed on the professional worker following the sabbatical? (e.g. must remain for at least 1 year following sabbatical)

(5) *Following The Sabbatical*

- A "*Reentry Plan*" is crucial. Expect some "anger" from members and staff, as well as to feel disconnected and out of touch. Both the pastor and congregation are in a different place following the sabbatical. It is helpful to "re-negotiate" roles and expectations as a part of the reentry process.
- Submit a *report* to the congregation. This is a time for debriefing and reconnecting.

IV. RESOURCES

- (1) *Alban Institute* Consultant - 800/486-1318 (e.g. Roy Oswald)
- (2) The Regional Facilitator can assist the professional worker and congregation in exploring and developing a sabbatical policy for your congregation. Model policies may be obtained from the Eastern District.

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(You may want to call Roy Oswald at Alban Institute for his direction. 800/486-1318)
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