

Sabbatical Leave Policy for Ministers and Educators in the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley (2018)

Policy Statement

The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley recommends to the Sessions of its churches that Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Church Educators be granted a compensated Sabbatical Leave of at least three (3) months after six (6) years of service to an individual church.

Rationale

A Sabbatical Leave will enable the minister/educator to be renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. It will serve as an extended period of time away from normal responsibilities and locations to pursue a plan of personal renewal and growth that combines study, travel, relaxation, education and research. The Sabbatical Leave is not just a reward for longevity of service and commitment. More importantly, it is an opportunity for those who have given consistently of their teaching and life to refill their own hearts and resources in order that they might continue in effective service to God and the church.

Eligibility

Sabbatical Leave is recommended for all full time ministers and educators serving churches who have served in their present position for six continuous years. The recommended length of the Sabbatical Leave is three months. It is further recommended that this Sabbatical Leave be built into the Call Process. Upon completion of the Sabbatical Leave the incumbent minister/educator would normally continue serving the same congregation for a period of at least four times the length of the Sabbatical Leave. In addition, congregations may limit Sabbatical Leave to one staff person per year in multiple staff positions.

Eligible Program Activity and Judicial Review

To be eligible for a Sabbatical Leave, the minister/educator shall present, in writing, to the Church Session for their approval, a program ("The Plan") of activity for the Sabbatical Leave at least six (6) months prior to the proposed beginning of the Sabbatical Leave. This program of activity and meditation shall include a detailed description of the plan, the goals to be achieved and the expected end-product(s), together with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical Leave would be valuable for both the minister/educator and the church.

Upon approval by the Session in the period prior to the Sabbatical Leave, the Plan shall be forwarded to the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery for its information. Included in this Plan will be the church's plan for ministerial/educator services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave.

At the completion of the Sabbatical Leave the minister/educator should present a written report of activities and findings to the next regular meeting of the church Session. This report will also be sent to the Committee on Ministry immediately following the Session meeting at which it is presented.

Funding

The employing church will continue the minister's/educator's salary pension and medical benefits/housing and book allowances and any other elements of that person's financial arrangement with the church. The employing church will also contract for substitute minister/educator services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave. Ministers/educators and churches are encouraged to set aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of Sabbatical Leave. Those churches that would have financial problems in providing for the Sabbatical Leave should consult with Presbytery for assistance toward grants from many sources that are available for that purpose.

Re-Entry

Upon re-entry, it is strongly suggested that the minister/educator share with the entire congregation the details of the leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit. The re-entry process provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the benefits that resulted from the Sabbath Leave. Such expected benefits as;

- Discovering the strength of congregational leadership heretofore underutilized
- New understandings of the concepts of mission between minister/educator and congregation
- Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on part of minister/educator and the congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the mission of God.

The ideal result would be for the congregation to see this period of time not just as the minister's/educator's Sabbath Leave but also as the congregation's Sabbath Leave.