

SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING ELDERS SERVING CONGREGATIONS IN PITTSBURGH PRESBYTERY

Sabbatical leave for teaching elders is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. Sabbatical leave follows precedents in the academic community and among a growing number of private sector groups. This "extended time" is qualitatively different from "vacation" or "days off." It is an opportunity for the individual to strategically disengage from regular and normal tasks so that ministry and mission may be viewed from a new perspective because of a planned time of focus. Sabbatical leave is an extension of the biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal. It is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and changed activity and an occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.

Recommendation

Pittsburgh Presbytery recommends to the sessions of its churches that pastors be granted a compensated sabbatical of at least three months after seven years of service to an individual church.

Rationale

A sabbatical will enable the teaching elder to be renewed through the vital pursuit of continuing education, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A sabbatical enables a teaching elder to return to the responsibilities of the parish with new energy, spiritual vision and effectiveness.

Commission on Ministry Responsibilities

1. Encourage churches to offer sabbatical leave for pastors.
2. Review the sabbatical timetable and usage plan as submitted by the pastor.
3. Serve as mediator in any concerns of session or pastor relative to the sabbatical.
4. Determine who will moderate the session in the pastor's absence.

Pastor Responsibilities

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the session – at least in outline form - a minimum of six months before the intended commencement of 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. Assure the session of continued service to the church for at least one full year from the conclusion of the sabbatical.
4. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the session before departing on a sabbatical.
5. Submit to Commission on Ministry in writing the sabbatical timetable and outline of plans.
6. Upon return, present an overview of the sabbatical experience to the session, congregation, and Commission on Ministry.

Session Responsibilities

1. Receive for approval the pastor's proposal for a sabbatical, at least six months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
2. Continue terms of call commitments to the pastor during sabbatical leave.
3. Contract for pastoral services during the pastor's sabbatical.
4. Communicate to the congregation the importance and values to the church of a sabbatical.
5. Request a written overview of the sabbatical from the pastor upon return.

If agreed upon by session and the pastor, the sabbatical might be combined with study leave for extended study.