

## **Presbytery of Cincinnati**

### **Sabbatical Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament Policy**

#### **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The contemporary model for sabbatical leave comes from the university and college systems in which professors may be granted study leave usually after seven years of teaching. The theological roots for the idea of sabbatical, however, run deeper than the academic model.

The term sabbatical has its roots in the Hebrew cultural-religious concepts of Sabbath, or rest after seven days or years. Genesis 2:1-3 states that God rested from the work of creation after seven days. Both versions of the Ten Commandments describe the Sabbath as a day of reflection on the blessings of God for creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and release from the bondage of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Deuteronomy 15 describes a period after seven years in which release from several kinds of debt and labor are itemized. Finally, a cyclical fiftieth year jubilee (the year following seven times seven years) was celebrated. During the Jubilee, land was returned to its ancestral owners and slaves were freed from bondage.

Clearly, for a biblical perspective, sabbatical was a time of rest, renewal and recovery.

Sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period of time in which a pastor is granted leave away from his or her normal ministerial responsibilities in order to spend an extended period of time in study and reflection. Sabbatical leave is not vacation, nor is it only continuing education. Sabbatical leave can be a needed break from the long hours, high pressure, personal sacrifice, and 24 hour a day, seven day a week nature of pastoral ministry.

Sabbatical leave can be a time of prayer, rest, study and travel, either at home or abroad. It can provide the needed change of scenery and pace that can help prevent burnout for the pastor of a congregation. Sabbatical leave can also be beneficial for the congregation in that the pastor may return from sabbatical leave with renewed energy and rediscovered zeal for ministry.

Note on Terminology: Certain terms have been used in this document to note a more inclusive group so as to simplify the document and to render it more readable. Terms have been chosen with the understanding that while the document is relevant to many situations the most common will be the church served by a solo pastor.

- Pastor should be understood to include ministers of the word and sacrament, commissioned ruling elders, and certified Christian educators.
- Church should be understood to also include other ministry settings.
- Session should be understood to indicate the appropriate governing board for a ministry setting, responsible for overseeing the work of said professional.

## **POLICY**

Full-time pastors and certified church educators shall be eligible for sabbatical leave after six consecutive full-time years of service to an individual church/validated ministry. This policy shall be included in the Terms of Call for all Presbytery of Cincinnati pastors. The Session of the congregation and COM must approve the sabbatical at least 3 months in advance so plans can be made for worship and the life of the church.

The recommended length of the sabbatical leave is not less than 60 nor more than 90 days. Accrued vacation time and continuing education time may be attached to the sabbatical leave. Upon completion of the sabbatical leave, the incumbent pastor/educator would ordinarily, continue serving the same congregation for two years beyond the conclusion of such leave. In addition, congregations may limit sabbatical leave to one staff person per year, in multiple staff.