



## **Section 1-Foundation**

**Continuing Education** or **Study Leave** is intended to provide professional staff members with the tools for a lifetime of continuing professional development. In addition, it enhances ministerial skills and understanding of the Christian faith. It is the responsibility of a congregation to authorize continuing education for ministers of the Word and Sacrament and other staff, as well as the responsibility of a professional staff member to update his or her expertise on a regular basis, thereby serving the congregation in an effective manner.

**Sabbatical** (from Latin *sabbaticus*, from Greek *sabbatikos*, from Hebrew *shabbat*, i.e., Sabbath, literally a "ceasing") is a rest from work, or a hiatus. The biblical foundation for sabbatical concepts is found in Genesis 2:2-3, in which God rested from labor after creating the universe: "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day..." (NRSV). Amid the constant demands of ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ knew the need for sabbath time. The Gospels illustrate that Christ experienced sabbatical when he sought respite before continuing with his ministry, taking time to commune with God, gaining perspective, and strengthening himself spiritually.<sup>1</sup>

The Alban Institute describes sabbatical in this manner: "A sabbatical offers opportunity to get off the treadmill and provides an opportunity for renewal of vision and hope. It's more than just a chance to recharge your batteries...It can be a life and soul-changing time, a time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together." For those in ministry, rejuvenation of spirit and clarity of purpose is the best outcome of a sabbatical, while for the congregation a sabbatical may serve as a catalyst for increasing the level of lay leadership and participation in church activities.

## **Section 2 - Definitions**

As used in this policy:

"**COM**" means the Commission on Ministry.

"**Church**" means the organization, ministry, and government of a congregation as defined by the *Book of Order* (G-1.01, G-3.03, and G-3.04).

"**Presbytery**" means the Presbytery of North Central Iowa.

"**Professional staff member**" means and includes the following:

- a. Pastor or Associate Pastor, as defined by *the Book of Order* (G-2.0504)
- b. Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE) or Commissioned Pastor (CP), as defined by the *Book of Order* (G-2.1002);
- c. Persons Called to Certified Ministry, as defined by the *Book of Order* (G-2.10)
- d. Persons employed by a congregation, full-time or part-time, in a capacity related to one or more of the following: campus ministry, Christian education, family ministry, music, pastoral care, youth ministry, or other ministry designated by the Session.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:22-23, Mark 6:30-32, Mark 7:24, Luke 4:16, Luke 6:12-13, Luke 22:41 (all NRSV).

### **Section 3 - Recommendations**

The Presbytery recommends to the Sessions of its congregations that a minimum of two weeks for continuing education or study leave be included within the annual terms of call for pastors, associate pastors, and commissioned pastors (CREs). Other full-time professional staff members should also be allocated a minimum of two weeks for continuing education or study leave, as well as sufficient funds for coverage of related expenses.

Reference to a sabbatical and provisions for sabbatical planning including length of sabbatical and monetary contributions to the recipient should be included in the annual terms of call for pastors, associate pastors, and commissioned pastors (CREs). Sessions are urged to make similar arrangements in writing for other full-time professional staff members.

### **Section 4 - Guidelines for Continuing Education or Study Leave**

- A. Professional staff members are encouraged to consult their Sessions and personnel committees while discerning the areas in which their continuing education resources might best be spent. Professional staff members and Sessions are encouraged to review their administrative procedures to ensure the particular church is able to function smoothly while the professional staff member is out of town.
- B. Types of continuing education include the following:
  - 1. Formal workshops, seminars, and other events sponsored by accredited bodies of higher learning, governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and other recognized institutions.
  - 2. Courses of study leading to further professional degrees (M.A., D.Min., Ph.D., etc.).
  - 3. Travel that is specifically study oriented.
  - 4. Time at a spiritual retreat center or time in individual retreat under the guidance of a spiritual director.
  - 5. A disciplined, systematic, self-directed reading program developed in consultation with the Session and Personnel Committee.

### **Section 5- Guidelines for Sabbaticals**

- A. Sabbatical leave is not a right, but rather a gift from the congregation for a period of time away for study, reflection, and spiritual renewal. For churches with at least 150 members, the maximum length of a sabbatical should be three months. Churches with fewer than 150 members are advised to explore the possibility of granting sabbatical up to three months, but not less than eight weeks.
- B. Professional staff members with six years of continuous years of service to a particular church are eligible for sabbaticals. The length of continuous service shall also include all time served as a Designated Pastor, Organizing Pastor, or Temporary Supply Pastor at the particular church. Sabbatical leave may be repeated at six-year intervals.
- C. During the year prior to that projected for a sabbatical, a professional staff member should prayerfully discern the type of sabbatical leave that will be undertaken. The Session and professional staff member discuss sabbatical plans as they develop and begin planning for coverage of the professional staff member's duties.

- D. Three to four months before the sabbatical, the professional staff member finalizes and submits a detailed, written sabbatical plan to the Session. The plan should include identified goals and expectations. After the sabbatical plan is approved by the Session, it should be submitted to COM for information. The professional staff member and the Session then educate the congregation about the sabbatical plan. In addition, the Session completes and implements plans for coverage of the professional staff member's duties.
- E. After the return from sabbatical, the professional staff member shares with the Session and congregation the experiences and insights of the sabbatical and submits a report to the Session and COM describing the experience and renewal.
- F. The congregation should use the sabbatical as a time of reflection. The professional staff member and the Session will jointly develop a detailed re-entry plan, which will allow the professional staff member and the congregation to share the experiences of their spiritual journeys that occurred during the sabbatical. Examples of such plans might include a one-day, all-church retreat, a special debriefing with the Session, a series of lectures and discussions, etc.
- G. Contractual arrangements for a sabbatical should include the following:
1. The congregation shall continue to pay salary, housing, major medical and pension benefits. Professional expenses such as travel, meals, etc. are negotiable.
  2. When a professional staff member returns from sabbatical, he or she will resume his or her position and shall receive compensation as listed in the approved terms of call.
  3. Professional staff members who participate in a sabbatical should do so with the intent to remain employed at the church for a minimum of one year following the sabbatical.

## **Section 6 - Funding for Sabbaticals**

- A. Ideally, the congregation should set aside some funds each year to fund a future sabbatical, including funds for coverage of the professional staff member's duties and related expenses.
- B. In addition to congregation-supplied funds, the following are some potential sources for funding a sabbatical leave
- The Louisville Institute awards grants for various sabbatical lengths - these grants provide for pastoral leaders' study, reflection, and renewal. Grant applications can be requested on-line at <https://louisville-institute.org/programs-grants-and-fellowships/grants/sabbatical-grant-for-researchers/>.
  - The Lily Endowment Clergy Renewal Program provides grants which may be applied to congregational expenses associated with the leave. For more information, check on-line at <https://www.cts.edu/cpe/clergy-renewal/>.

## **Section 7 - Bibliography**

Melissa Bane Sevier, *Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals*, Alban, 2002.

Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*, Alban, 2000.