



The United Church of Canada

Understanding the Sabbatical Policy for Ministry Personnel in Pastoral Relationships

Authority

At its meeting of October 28–31, 2005, General Council Executive, pursuant to the direction of General Council 2003, Petition 131, adopted the document *Sabbatical Policy for Ministry Personnel in Pastoral Relationships*. In so doing, The United Church of Canada has established the terms and conditions associated with the taking of sabbatical by ministry personnel in pastoral relationships.

This communication offers an introduction to, and interpretation of, the referenced policy decision.

Effective Date

The Sabbatical Policy for Ministry Personnel in Pastoral Relationships is effective as at January 1, 2006 and remains operative until otherwise amended, or superseded, by subsequent action of the General Council or its Executive.

Definition

Sabbatical is a period of at least three consecutive months intentionally set aside by ministry personnel in pastoral relationships as an occasion for reflection, recreation, and revitalization, unencumbered by their usual and customary responsibilities, and yet still receiving their usual remuneration and benefits. Sabbatical finds expression in study, rest, spiritual retreat, and prayer.

Justification

As the gospel story illustrates, Jesus experienced sabbatical when he sought occasional respite from the demands of his ministry (i.e., Matthew 14:23 et al.). On mountaintops and by lakesides, Jesus took time apart to commune with God, to gain perspective, and to strengthen himself spiritually.

In much the same way as Jesus benefited from such times of re-creation, ministry personnel in pastoral relationships, and the congregations they serve, can too. For the minister, rejuvenation of spirit and clarity of purpose may be the outcome, while for the congregation sabbatical may occasion an increase in the level, and expression, of lay leadership.

In recognition of the potential good that can arise from sabbatical, The United Church of Canada both endorses the principle, and encourages its pastoral charges and ministry personnel in pastoral relationships to avail themselves, of the opportunity, consistent with

the considerations and requirements articulated in the corresponding policy and described more fully herein.

Application

The Sabbatical Policy for Ministry Personnel in Pastoral Relationships is applicable to every pastoral charge and all full- and part-time ministry personnel in pastoral relationships who have completed five or more years of service in the pastoral charge that will be party to the sabbatical. However, it does not apply to ministry personnel who are appointed as Interim Ministry to a pastoral charge.

Obligations

Pastoral Charge

- To provide a paid sabbatical of at least three consecutive months to the ministry personnel who has completed five or more years of service to them.
- To dialogue and negotiate with the ministry personnel, via its Ministry and Personnel Committee, about the length, timing, and other specifics of the sabbatical, including, but not limited to, the nature of the study or experience being proposed and the outcomes anticipated.
- To approve the sabbatical plan provided that it has as its focus the practice of ministry.
- To continue, during the sabbatical, to pay the ministry personnel's regular salary and housing allowance (or to continue to provide the use of a manse).
- To continue, during the sabbatical, to make regular and usual remittances associated with the ministry personnel to The United Church of Canada for health and pension plans, the Employee Assistance Program, the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, etc., as of the day prior to the commencement of the sabbatical.
- To, in those cases where the ministry personnel would customarily receive travel expense reimbursement, calculate and pay, on a monthly basis, an income supplement of 40 percent of his/her average monthly travel claim (based on the six months prior to the sabbatical) to the ministry personnel, and to duly report the benefit as being taxable.
- To notify the presbytery/district of the sabbatical, no later than six months prior to its beginning.

Ministry Personnel

- To advise the pastoral charge, via its Ministry and Personnel Committee, at least 12 months prior to its intended beginning, of the desire to take sabbatical.
- To dialogue and negotiate with the pastoral charge, via its Ministry and Personnel Committee, about the length, timing, and other specifics of the sabbatical, including, but not limited to, the nature of the study or experience being proposed and the outcomes anticipated.
- To recognize that the sabbatical plan must be related to the practice of ministry; that it must be approved by action of the Official Board, Church Board, or Council; and that the presbytery/district will be informed of its happening.

- To provide a brief written and oral report to the pastoral charge's Ministry and Personnel Committee and Official Board, Church Board, or Council after the sabbatical has concluded.
- Normally, to continue in pastoral relationship with the pastoral charge that is a party to the sabbatical for a period of one year following the sabbatical's ending.

Miscellaneous Information

Sabbatical taking is in addition to the ministry personnel's vacation time and continuing education leave for the year in which the sabbatical occurs.

There shall be no pro-rating of the minimum three-month term requirement for those ministry personnel whose call or appointment is part-time in nature.

Sabbatical may occur in conjunction with any outstanding holiday and study leave entitlement, but shall not be in lieu of it.

Sabbatical may happen before, or after, any unpaid leave of absence.

The provision for sabbatical taking shall be included in the terms of the call or appointment to a pastoral relationship, and shall be so indicated on the appropriate administrative forms, as and when available for use.

For those ministry personnel in pastoral relationships that were begun prior to January 1, 2006, the calculation respecting five years of service shall commence as at the date that the call or appointment became effective.

The condition respecting indication of the sabbatical opportunity on the call or appointment forms shall be deemed to have been fulfilled for ministry personnel in pastoral relationships that were begun before January 1, 2006.

Knowledge Background

Provided below is a selection of source material that may prove to be helpful as you envision and plan for a sabbatical.

References

Adams, James, and Celia Hahn. (1975). *A Minister's Sabbatical as an Experience in Leaving to Share the Ministry*. The Alban Institute.

Bullock, A. Richard. (1998). *Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations*. The Alban Institute.

Bullock, A. Richard. (2000). *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. The Alban Institute. (This is a must-read when preparing for sabbatical).

Chittister, Joan. (1991). *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. HarperSanFrancisco.

Dawn, Marva. (1999). *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Eerdmans.

Dickson, Charles. (Nov/Dec 1993). "Planning a Pastoral Sabbatical." *The Clergy Journal*. Logos Productions.

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Gabbard, Douglas. (Jan/Feb 2001). "Sabbath as Spiritual Discipline." *Congregations*. The Alban Institute.

Helm, Norman G. (Jan/Feb 1993). "The Parish and the Minister's Sabbatical." *Congregations*. The Alban Institute.

Oswald, Roy M. (1991). *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. The Alban Institute.

Resource

Oswald, Roy M. (2001). *Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical*. Video no. AL238. The Alban Institute. (Includes two 25-minute segments with a leader's guide.)

For Further Information

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