

APPENDIX A

Purpose

Sabbatical is a time:

- that is a gift
- to re-energize, rest, relax, de-stress, rejuvenate, re-motivate
- to learn, study, read, reflect
- for a true sabbath – time set apart
- to regenerate, renew – spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and physically
- to be unplugged from the congregation
- for spiritual growth
- for a true pause from the work of ministry, a break from the regular routine of ministry, for a mid-career break
- for a time of creativity
- for a time of being, rather than doing
- for a retreat – listening to God, to reconnect spiritually
- for clearing my head
- for attending worship and being ministered to personally
- for looking at the work we are doing and where the Spirit is at play
- for play, revitalization, connecting with family
- for Spiritual perspective
- for opportunities for the congregation to develop strengths within
- for lay leadership development
- for the congregation to come together and grow together
- with a focus on opportunity, rather than expectation – an invitational time
- for unanticipated outcomes – some anticipated outcomes can bring disappointment
- that is not a supplemental vacation
- that leads to coming back with renewed energy, enthusiasm, and ideas
- that leads to a rested, rejuvenated minister, who has some specific learnings to share with the congregation
- for personal needs, not for presbytery or Conference business

Keep the stated purpose as broad as possible and flexible enough to deal with individual needs.

“For me, when people ask how my sabbatical was, I say restorative. Truly, I would likely have left ministry without having had this opportunity for rejuvenation. For me it was a chance to renew my commitment to this vocation.”

The policy really seems to focus on “study” purposes and I think this needs to be broadened so that “restorative purposes” is officially on the table for a sabbatical.

I had been in ministry for 18 years without a sabbatical and almost eight years in the charge and it was too long. I was really on the verge of burn out and said if I didn’t come back revived, I would be retiring.

Procedures

Most agreed with the current procedures for sabbatical leave.

- *“12 months is a familiar planning cycle and gives the minister time to plan as well as the congregation”*
- *A formal plan for the sabbatical is a good idea ... for folks who need to be educated about the need for and value of a sabbatical, a plan can be a good tool for educating those for whom the idea is new.*
- *The 12 months’ notice to congregations is helpful for planning and should be adhered to in the policy. Details can be worked out closer to the time but long-term planning is absolutely necessary.*
- *The time frame of 12 and 6 months also allows for financial planning*
- *The policy was helpful in that it helped me clarify how I might best spend my time and energy and what benefit this might also bring to the congregation.*
- *We used the time to help folk know and understand what sabbatical was and how it could be helpful both for me and for them.*
- *The time frames do allow adequate time for ensuring the church is well prepared*

Some additional helpful comments/suggestions:

- *Workshops need to be given to all congregations to assist them with the processes and any changes to the processes.*
- *We need more support to help educate the pastoral charge about what a sabbatical is; it often falls to the clergy to do the educating.*
- *Our charge had a supervisor but then he went on vacation and the congregation felt vulnerable*
- *Good suggestion was made that a Sabbatical team be formulated to deal with the vacancy issues right from the announcement of the intention to take the sabbatical.*
- *A sabbatical after five years – is that mandatory? Is it mandatory only if the minister requests it?*
- *I gave the congregation lots of notice (several years in advance) so that it did not create a financial hardship for them.*
- *With respect to timelines, it is important to think about “guidelines” vs. “strict deadlines”*
- *A number suggested that notice to presbytery could be given three months in advance of the leave (rather than the current six months in advance)*
- *There needs to be more specific guidance from Presbytery about what they are looking for in the report the congregation sends them about the specifics. That was a problem for us (trying to guess what they wanted).*
- *The wording with a detailed plan may be a little strong. ... it may be difficult to provide a detailed plan when [the sabbatical is intended to be] restorative.*
- *We feel a general proposal is sufficient when requesting a Sabbatical Leave, rather than putting together a detailed study plan. Keep what is presented as a proposal simple and flexible and what is shared afterward or the process ends up defeating the whole purpose of rest and rejuvenation.*

Flexibility

There were a few suggestions for a change in when the ministry personnel is eligible to take a sabbatical (i.e. after 7 or 8 years; after 3 years). However, most participants favoured the current five year standard.

- *I think there is an assumption that may be incorrect that a minister would be eligible for a second sabbatical upon the completion of ten years in a pastoral relationship, or perhaps upon the completion of five years after the completion of a first sabbatical. In my case I did my sabbatical after seven years - and therefore might be eligible three years or five years later. However I am not sure that the policy states that. I think it would be good if it did have something to say about it, and my preference would be that it allows for a second and third sabbatical after five years in the same pastoral relationship after the completion of the previous sabbatical.*

Participants favoured the current wording which indicates the normal expectation to be that the pastoral relationship will continue for a minimum of one year following the conclusion of the sabbatical. Participants appreciated the flexibility that the use of the word “normally” provided in ensuring that ministry personnel and pastoral charges should not have to continue in the pastoral relationship if they discern that they are no longer called to do so.

There was general consensus that a period of a minimum of three consecutive months provides the best opportunity for a true sabbatical, rather than a shorter period. Similarly, the general consensus was against breaking up the sabbatical into two or more periods. However, there was a general feeling that some flexibility should be incorporated into the policy on this point to address individual circumstances.

Sample comments:

- *Three months is a reasonable amount of time; any less makes it difficult to wind down, before you have to gear up again. More than three months, you risk feeling very disconnected.*
- *Three consecutive months have both pros and cons for the minister and congregation. Dividing the time might be easier financially for congregations.*
- *Our congregation felt very strongly about having a constant during our minister's leave. Therefore the consecutive approach worked for us.*
- *Three month period is easier to handle than breaking the sabbatical up into smaller periods of time. Time for the congregation to take stock too and see where their relationship with the minister will further their mission.*
- *I think it also needs to be consecutive because it takes time to renew and that doesn't happen quickly but flexibility is always good.*
- *I also believe that consecutive is important but perhaps we could word it “normally” consecutive to allow for unique cases.*
- *The “consecutive months” is probably something that could be negotiated.*
- *Whether the leave is consecutive or interspersed throughout the year, that would need to be evaluated according to an individual's particular needs.*

- *There might be variation in this, but I think you would miss the value if the time away is for a few days here and there.*
- *We discussed the question of consecutive months or not. There was a desire of some to have the flexibility of allowing the minister to split it up but, then again, would that defeat the purpose? It could also be more upsetting to the congregation to have the minister coming and going.*
- *We liked the minimum three months but understand the flexibility of breaking it up into two six-week periods may be beneficial in some cases.*
- *I think guidelines are good, because they are more flexible. I am aware that the situations between small rural charges and big city charges are vastly different.*
- *The first time I went on Sabbatical, I negotiated splitting the Sabbatical into two 6 week parts; mid-June to the end of July in 2009 and 2010. This proved to be beneficial to me as the clergy person and also to the pastoral charge. The benefit to me, especially at that time, and being in a rural charge, was that I was able to take at least two intensive courses, one each year. The benefit to the Pastoral Charge was breaking up the gap in leadership and spreading out the cost of pulpit supply. It was so successful that we are in the middle of the same arrangement, two 6 week parts; mid-June to the end of July in 2014 and 2015.*

Finances

It was noted that the grant funding, which was available through the General Council Office to assist with the costs of pulpit supply during sabbaticals for in-need pastoral charges, has been discontinued, due to lack of available funds.

There were many suggestions as to how sabbatical leaves could be financed.

Some suggestions focused on a deferred income approach, wherein the ministry personnel defers 20% of her/his income for a four year period and then takes a period of leave, receiving the deferred salary at 80%. Deferred income periods of self-funded leave require the establishment of trust funds and have specific tax implications. Others expressed concern that with more and more part-time ministries, it would be very difficult to defer a portion of ministry personnel's salaries.

Others included the following:

- *From the beginning of the pastoral relationship, pastoral charges budget \$10/week (\$40/month, \$500/year) to cover the expenses of pulpit supply in five years' time when the ministry personnel takes sabbatical*
- *It's hard to include a line item in the budget when we're already running a deficit.*
- *In tough times that may be difficult to keep as a line item.*
- *Cost can be a burden for small rural pastoral charges. There should be funding available or taking a sabbatical may appear as irresponsible to the pastoral charge.*
- *One ministry personnel "made a significant donation to the church in order to help pay for pulpit supply and to show I appreciated their trust in me; also to recognize the privilege of this time."*

- *I donated my pulpit supply monies to a fund for my sabbatical. We had ... more than enough to cover the Sundays during my sabbatical.*
- *Presbytery had provided a list of retired ministers and DLM's who could be available for pulpit supply. This was used along with a small list of church members to fill the Sunday vacancies.*
- *Some presbyteries have funding available to the pastoral charges to help address the additional costs.*
- *We have to cover the entire cost during the sabbatical period. Not only that but, because our operational costs go up due to covering two salaries, we get hit with a higher Presbytery assessment.*
- *We negotiated with a retired minister on a compensation package for 10 hours/week minimum, with a per-hour rate for necessary time above that, for instance, for extraordinary pastoral care needs, because we wanted to be flexible with respect community needs. The Conference insisted that we MUST use the ADP payroll system, NO FURTHER DISCUSSION. Neither we nor the "sabbatical supply minister" wanted to use the ADP payroll system for such a short period. As it turned out, we had to pay the base "salary" by ADP and then cut separate cheques for "overtime" and "expenses". The ADP system cost both of us time and money. Dealing with the ADP payroll system was the single most frustrating aspect of our minister's sabbatical, and was totally unnecessary.*
- *I'd be happy to see telephone taken off the call/appointment form and add in a sabbatical funding piece.*
- *The funding from General Council helped us and I was able to use that to encourage them to increase M&S giving because they actually got some benefit from it.*
- *One suggestion, depending on the size of the congregation and its means, is that the General Council could pay the minister's benefits while she/he is away on leave. It really affected our bottom line, as we were without the funds from our sharing congregation [a neighbouring congregation which is provided services by this pastoral charge's ministry personnel and, in return, makes a financial payment to this pastoral charge].*
- *We've also made sure that we had lots of resources for lay leadership of worship and also did some training before the sabbatical. They get paid for pulpit supply but usually return the payment to the church.*
- *I think it would be a good investment for the General Council to fund the sabbatical – a joint endeavour between minister, charge, presbytery, and General Council. It would connect us to each other. ... The investment to connect pastorates to the larger church would have much value added.*
- *A sabbatical can be extremely rejuvenating for a minister. So, if the United Church values the health and well-being of their clergy, then I think the program needs national funding.*
- *We had excellent support from another minister in the presbytery for pastoral care. We did a 'sponsor a Sunday' and members of the congregation sponsored the minister's salary for a week.*
- *To have a 'policy' that some churches and some clergy cannot afford to take advantage of is unrealistic.*
- *If energy is directed towards seeking out ways of funding, rather than directed towards how to resist or protest the policy - some very amazing things can happen.*