

SABBATICAL STUDY LEAVE POLICY

Ministerial Leaders are called to a servant ministry. They usually are prepared for this service with four years of college and three years of seminary. However, this preparation is only the beginning of a need for lifetime learning, renewal, and upgrading of their understanding of the faith and its application to life.

Due to the nature of servant ministry, adequate time and space for in-depth study and reflection is rarely available during or on the field of service. The pressure of time and of responsibility depletes a leader's resources over a period of years.

Therefore, it is in the best interest of the leader and the church or agency to provide for times of concentrated learning, renewal, and upgrading. This need has sometimes been addressed with the provision of a sabbatical study leave. The word sabbatical has its roots in the Biblical Sabbath teaching, calling for rest and renewal.

The Ministers Council of the American Baptist churches calls upon churches and agencies who work in partnership with ministerial leaders to adopt a policy providing for sabbatical study leaves. The following guidelines are suggestions which may be adapted for each unique situation. They are addressed to the employing church or agency, the one requesting the sabbatical, and both together.

CHURCH OR AGENCY

1. Adopt a policy providing for professional staff sabbatical study leaves every five or six years.
2. Design a process for sabbatical requests to be submitted. Ideally, the Pastoral Relations or a Personnel Committee would receive the leader's request, negotiate and then recommend to the governing body that the request be granted.
3. Include in the policy the length of time to be provided. This may be equivalent to a school semester, but may be adapted according to the plan presented by the leader.
4. Determine how normal continuing education time and vacation are to be treated during the sabbatical year. Since the sabbatical is not vacation, it is usually best to separate the two in the calendar year.
5. State the financial basis for the sabbatical. Full salary, housing, MMBB retirement, and health benefits should be assured. Other professional expenses such as car allowance may be altered during the time of the sabbatical. Provision for a sabbatical allowance to cover at least a portion of the expenses to be incurred will be helpful. The cost of replacement personnel during the leader's absence will be covered by the church or agency.
6. Indicate who will be responsible for the normal duties of the one receiving the sabbatical.

THE MINISTERIAL LEADER

1. Once a policy is in place, and the appropriate time has been served, design and present a written proposal for a sabbatical to the appropriate committee. This should be done with adequate lead time, six to twelve months in advance.
2. The proposal should contain a statement of purpose for the sabbatical and how that purpose will be accomplished.

3. Following the sabbatical, a written report will be given to the church or agency indicating what has been accomplished.
4. In accepting a sabbatical, a leader agrees to continue service to the granting church or agency for a period of at least one to two years. This general agreement may be amended by mutual consent if the relationship is to be dissolved sooner.

TOGETHER

The granting of a sabbatical study leave implies a positive relationship between those parties involved. The plan for the sabbatical should reflect a desire for personal renewal and increased proficiency in carrying out one's service. As the plan is developed in a spirit of mutuality, so it should be concluded with a time of celebration.

The purpose of the Ministers Council is to build up the Church of Jesus Christ by sustaining and improving the professional church leadership of the American Baptist Churches in the USA. It is to that end that we recommend this sabbatical policy.