



'The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.' Mark 2.27-28. NRSV

Sabbaticals: A Call for Renewal

From the beginning of creation, God established times for rest and renewal. Sabbath and Sabbatical times – whether a night of rest, a day of worship, or an extended time of renewal every few years – are meant to be a part of the rhythms of a life of faith. They are the moments when we set aside our work in order to renew, reimagine, and recreate our lives.

The church has long recognized the requirement of Sabbath as a time of weekly renewal, and the need for longer Sabbaticals for clergy and pastors. We recognize, along with many others, the enormous demands on persons in ministry. The pressures of leading worship, preaching most weeks, administration of a non-profit organization, crisis management and intervention, community and denominational obligations, facilitating sessions and committees, and being on-call at all hours and days, among other expectations of clergy, can be unrelenting at times. It leaves little time for clergy to find space for renewal and restoration.

Sabbaticals are times where clergy can step away from these demands to enter a space of renewal, replenishment, and revitalization. It is an act of faithful intentionality that invites clergy into a space of prayer, learning, imagination, and reflection. Sabbaticals may include conferences, travel, retreats, study, or other acts of formation, growth, and development. They may be undertaken alone, with family and friends, or with colleagues.

Our congregations also benefit from Sabbaticals. The community is invited into its own time of reflection and creativity. They have the opportunity to experience new voices in the pulpit and in leadership. They can take the opportunity to explore their own calls to ministry within and outside the walls of their churches. Maybe they take the time to explore creative ways they want to partner in ministry; maybe they enter an intentional time of reflection and study on their faiths. The renewal experienced through a Sabbatical should be a dialogue between the community and its clergy leadership.

Once the Sabbatical is completed, the clergy and community (Session and congregation) come back together to explore what has been experienced, and dialogue about how the Spirit continues to speak to the church and to the ministry of the clergy member. The intent is that the sabbatical be seen as a time of renewal for all. There should be some intentional debriefing about what happened during this time, both for the pastor and the congregation. The intent is for this time away to be seen as something that strengthens the church's ministry, and the relationship between the pastor and congregation.



Denver Presbytery Clergy Guidelines

The Denver Presbytery recommends sessions develop or maintain a sabbatical policy for all Teaching Elders/Ministers of Word and Sacrament who serve their congregation. This policy should be included as part of a Minister's terms of call. We recommend a 3-month sabbatical after every 7 years of service. Sabbatical leave may not be used as a terminal leave. In accepting a sabbatical, the minister agrees to return to the church for at least one year. The minister's vacation time is not counted as sabbatical time, but it may, upon mutual agreement between the Session and the pastor, be combined all or in part, with a sabbatical. The sabbatical is taken in lieu of study leave. During the sabbatical, the minister continues to be compensated at the normal pay rate, including Board of Pensions dues.

Clergy Renewal Support and Procedures

Clergy Renewal Sabbaticals require thoughtful planning by the minister, Session, and the Ministry Relations Committee, in order to

- ensure that ministry in the congregation continues appropriately;
- develop a sabbatical plan and secure funding for it;
- develop a shared sense of purpose for the sabbatical with
- congregation and pastor

The remainder of this document examines some planning and support questions and ideas to consider when developing a Sabbatical policy for your congregation. At the end of the document you will find specific procedures for securing a Sabbatical grant through the Ministry Relations Committee.

Congregational Sabbatical Policy Suggestions

1. **Develop a Rationale:** Communicate it throughout the congregation. Feel free to use some, part, or all of the rationale to frame and guide your own understanding of this important time.
2. **Develop a Timeline:** Create procedures that fit the rhythms of your congregation for preparing for a Sabbatical. Include adequate time for developing the sabbatical, preparing for ministry during the minister's absence, communication with the congregation, grant research and application process, and planning for a ritual of sending and returning.
3. **Develop A Financial Plan:** Determine how the sabbatical time (both the minister's time away, and the congregation's ministry needs) will be funded. There are a number of potential sources listed later in this document.



4. **Develop a Supportive Community:** Brainstorm ways the congregation can actively share in the sabbatical experience.
5. **Develop a Communication Plan:** Develop plans and timelines related to the sabbatical, how and with whom will ministry responsibilities will be accomplished during the minister's absence, and emergency contact information.
6. **Develop a Discernment Group:** Create a small group within or outside the congregation to work with the minister on these tasks.

A Suggested Timeline for Sabbaticals

I. Preparation (Typically 1 year-18 months prior to the leave)

- a. Gather a Discernment Team to assist minister.
- b. Contact the Ministry Relations Committee.
- c. Develop rationale, timeline, potential funding.

II. Proposal (Typically 1 year prior to the leave), including Timeline.

- a. Secure Session approval
- b. Explore together the congregational needs during a Sabbatical (worship, pastoral care, Session moderation, funerals, emergencies, etc.), and how those needs will be met.
- c. Talk about finances and explore how this will impact the church budget and other plans that can be made in advance. Submit grant applications.
- d. Propose an initial set of ideas for exploration, rest, renewal, and revitalization.
- e. Explore how the congregation might take part in the Sabbatical as co-learners during this time apart.

III. Participation (Typically 2-6 months prior to the leave)

- a. Complete sabbatical budget and ministry plan
- b. Prepare sending ritual
- c. Review communication plan



- d. Develop ways the congregation can participate with the minister in his/her sabbatical experience.
- e. Complete plan for reporting to the Session, congregation, and Ministry Relations Committee (if grant is received) following the sabbatical time.

Financial Resources for Sabbaticals

Sabbaticals are investments in the long-term future of a congregation and the minister. As such they require us to think about how we relate to one another and provide various kinds of support, challenge, and opportunities for growth. Both minister (and Discernment Team) and congregation have responsibility for pursuing investment strategies. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Internal Support and Budgeting** – Congregation begins to set aside money annually for future sabbatical use. Personnel Committee develops and/or reviews sabbatical guidelines before annual approval of ministers' terms of call.
2. **Ministry Relations Committee Sabbatical Grants** – The Ministry Relations Committee will distribute small grants on behalf of the presbytery to a minister or congregation to help defray the costs of a Sabbatical. There is an application process and grants from the Ministry Relations Committee are prioritized in this manner:
 - a. Requests from solo-pastors serving a Denver Presbytery congregation.
 - b. Requests from congregations with fewer than 200 members.
 - c. In order to receive a Ministry Relations Committee Sabbatical Grant a minister will adhere to the following guidelines:
 - i. The grant funding deadline is October 1 in the year prior to the sabbatical [i.e. - A Minister who has a sabbatical planned for the summer of 2019 would send in their request for funding by October 1, 2018]
 - ii. Funding requests may be made by the minister or the Session.
 - iii. Sessions may request funding for replacement staff support during the sabbatical.
 - iv. Minister may request funding for activities that pertain to the sabbatical plan approved by the session.



- v. If ministers from the same congregation request funding, the Ministry Relations Committee may distribute the grant between the two requesting entities in a proportion that benefits both grant requests.
 - vi. The minister shall inform the Ministry Relations Committee of other grants he/she receives.
 - vii. Sabbatical grant recipients (whether a Session or minister) shall provide the Ministry Relations Committee a written report on the sabbatical experience within 3 months of the completion of the sabbatical.
 - viii. The size of a grant in any given year is based on the number of applications received.
 - ix. For more information on applying for grants through the Ministry Relations Committee please contact the MRC Moderator at mrcmoderator@denpres.org
3. **The Louisville Institute.** Grant applications can be requested by writing: Sabbatical Grants for Pastoral Leaders, The Louisville Institute (louisville-institute.org), 1044 Alta Vista Road, Louisville, KY 40205 – 1789 Telephone (502) 895-3411.
4. **The Lily Foundation Clergy Renewal Program** For more information contact the program web site: www.clergyrenewal.org or write to: Lily Endowment Religion Division, 2801 N. Meridian Street – P.O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, IN 46208 – telephone # (317) 916-7302 Please note the Lily Grant Applications are required to be submitted a year in advance of the planned sabbatical and require both committee and congregational participation.

RESOURCES

Richard Bullock & Richard Bruesehoff. Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning. (Alban Institute 2000)

Melissa Sevier. Journeying Toward Renewal. (Alban Institute 2002)

Marva Dawn. Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting. (Eerdmans 1999)

Articles on clergy sabbaticals are found on this Lilly Endowment-sponsored page:

<http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/overview-resources/articles/clergy-sabbaticals>