

Sabbatical Leave Policy Presbytery of Arkansas

Sabbatical leaves are frequently granted to people working in various settings, including academia, business, and church-related institutions. Basing leaves on the Biblically-based Sabbath concept, institutions recognize that people who have worked in their positions for a prolonged length of time frequently could benefit from an extended time away from their work, time usually devoted to study, personal growth, renewal, and reflection. Most Christian denominations, and, as is certainly the trend currently, many local churches and presbyteries, are beginning to implement sabbatical leave policies for clergy, for educators, for denominational staff, and for other full-time church professionals. Accordingly, the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Arkansas, after much thought, proposes a Sabbatical Leave Policy for the Presbytery of Arkansas.

The Presbytery of Arkansas recognizes that pastors, other church professionals, and congregations could greatly benefit if full-time church professionals could have the opportunity to negotiate and be granted a sabbatical leave. Some of the reasons for wishing to grant such leaves include: the challenges of longer pastorates, the intensity of church work, and the opportunity to take advantage of new knowledge and approaches to ministry that may have developed since a pastorate began. These opportunities may well require a longer period of study than the normal two weeks' study leave. Such opportunities will allow one to learn new ministry skills, to gain new information, to become familiar with new resources, and to have time for reflection, and spiritual renewal.

General Considerations

1. Sabbatical leave shall be considered in any new call.
2. The study undertaken during a sabbatical leave shall ordinarily be of a practical nature, designed to increase the skills of the church professional and to benefit his/her current call, although, theological study or spiritual renewal are to be considered legitimate goals for such a leave.
3. Written notice and a written plan shall be given to the church's Personnel Committee, to the church's Session, and to the presbytery's Committee on Ministry for approval. Ideally, this plan shall be submitted a year prior to the taking of the leave. This plan shall include the foreseen benefits to the Pastor or educator, the foreseen benefits to the church or agency, the goals and objectives of the study time, the location of the study, and the particulars about how the person's pastoral or educational duties will be covered during the time of the leave.
4. Before the church professional goes on leave, provision shall be made to cover the duties of the person on that leave.
5. Upon returning from sabbatical leave, the pastor or educator shall present to the personnel committee and to the Session, a written summary statement of the Sabbatical Leave experience, including what was learned and how what was learned will be applied.

Time considerations:

6. Sabbatical leaves shall be granted no sooner than after six years of service has been completed, or no sooner than six years after a previous sabbatical leave.
7. Sabbatical leaves shall normally be no longer than six months
8. Ordinarily, the normal study leave time that is due in the sabbatical year, shall be a part of the sabbatical leave time, not in addition to it, although an exception may be negotiated.
9. The Pastor or educator shall normally pledge to stay in his/her parish for no less than one calendar year after a sabbatical leave. If the pastor chooses to leave the congregation within one year after the completion of a sabbatical leave, the pastor shall refund to the church the salary paid to him or her during the sabbatical leave.

10. We also recommend that any church or agency that has made a provision for a sabbatical leave, fully inform and educate their congregation or constituents about the leave, its rationale, and the foreseen benefits, beginning at least six months prior to the start of the leave time.

Financial Considerations:

11. During a sabbatical leave, all salary and benefits shall continue to be paid by the employing church or agency, except for the travel allowance.
12. While the church professional is on sabbatical leave, the employing church or agency shall provide for payment of the expenses of whomever covers the ministerial duties of the person on leave.
13. All costs to the Pastor or educator for the sabbatical leave time shall be borne by the Pastor or educator, but he/she may apply his/her study allowances to these costs. These costs shall not include the church agency's costs to cover the duties of the person on leave.
14. If a church or agency wishes to put a sabbatical leave provision in the terms of a call, the presbytery encourages them to begin a savings account that would accumulate over the six years' requirement to help defray the additional costs that having a church professional on sabbatical leave would incur.