**SWID SABBATICAL PLANNING**

**Introduction to Clergy Sabbaticals**

In the culture in which we live, busyness is a badge of usefulness, and exhaustion the proof of efficiency. Amid such a culture, the church of Jesus Christ must once again hear the call to Sabbath rest. ***The Sabbath rest is a cyclical season of renewal modeled by God following creation and Jesus as he took his disciples on retreat following intense mission times.*** Keeping the Sabbath is not about increased productivity but rather about the sacredness of the gift of our time to God. Said differently, a holy motivation for keeping the Sabbath is not to be more productive in the remaining six days of the week. The purest reason for the Sabbath is to offer oneself to God – to cease from the business of work and productivity. If we are not careful on this point, the Sabbath becomes merely a component of the "productivity" of the rest of the week.

The Genesis creation model of Sabbath indicates God rested on the seventh day and made it holy. This does not mean God was tired or He needed to nap. God's reason for Sabbath rest is more properly associated with His desire to sanctify His creation. Genesis 2:3 says, "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it . . ." (NASB). God intends that man should enter into His blessing and be holy, even as He is holy. The Sabbath day becomes a memorial to remind man he has been ordained to trust God and serve Him through faith and obedience. For this reason, God commanded that we, too, should enter into the Sabbath rest.

The Sabbath commandment extended to the seventh day of the week, the seventh year in each seven-year cycle, and the seventh cycle of seven years inaugurated the "Year of Jubilee." Clearly, the time of the Sabbath extends beyond the seventh day of each week. The purpose for these Sabbaths is also closely tied to God's plan for sanctification. Exodus 29:8 says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (NASB) The pattern of sevens associated with the Sabbath has a practical basis founded on God's wisdom and a symbolic meaning associated with God's plan for His Creation. Jesus also made it clear to us that God ordained the Sabbath principle for the good of man (Mark 2:27).

The local church, along with the General Church of the Nazarene (Manual 129.10), recognizes the unique need of its pastors to seek and obtain spiritual renewal. We also recognize the special benefit and wisdom of a Sabbath renewal. Ministry is often associated with spiritual challenges that are not often encountered in the secular workplace. Beyond this, pastors are in danger of their work as a job rather than a divine calling. Given the repetition of the routine and the demands of daily problems that seem "ordinary," it is easy for a pastor to lose spiritual perspective, resort to his/her talents and resources, or depend on personal efforts and energy. God's Sabbath principle applied to their ministries provides an opportunity to rededicate (sanctify) one's life and work to the Lord, reacquire God's perspective, and freshen one's spiritual health. In this way, the entire Body of Christ benefits and is blessed by the pastoral Sabbath.

The Pastoral Sabbatical (Sabbath rest or sabbatical leave) is a resource for pastors and their families. It is an extended time away from the routines of ministry and daily life. The sabbatical is to be given as a separate time away from the local assignment and not considered the pastor's vacation time.

It is a time of special renewal for the pastor that will bring personal nourishment to his/her soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord, and a clearer understanding of God's vision for the church. Research has shown the sabbatical did one thing for more than 70 percent of the pastors – it renewed their call to ministry. The pastors felt more connected to God and stronger in spirit. A sabbatical executed well helps to prevent ministry burn-out and may give the pastor a fresh perspective for his/her ministry.

Each church can create its policy regarding "The Pastoral Sabbatical: A Sabbath Rest & Renewal" and include much of the material here. The following is a portion of the policy for the General Church of the Nazarene as outlined in the Manual 129.10: "In order to encourage a healthy pastoral ministry and strong spiritual life of the pastor, the church board, in consultation with the district superintendent, should provide a sabbatical leave for the pastor during each seventh consecutive year of service in one congregation."

An excellent resource for grants and planning is The Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program. This organization awards up to $50,000 to support their congregations in renewal activities. You can download information from Lilly's website: <http://lillyendowment.org/religion_cts.html> for the grant, or simply use their resources (schedule grid, budget worksheet, detail forms) in planning.

**Pastoral Sabbatical Implementation**

Although we are all called by God to observe the Sabbath Rest (Hebrews 4:9-11; Leviticus 25:1-7), clergy are especially vulnerable to the lack of appropriate Sabbath Rest. Therefore, all full-time ministerial staff members are encouraged to participate in two levels of Sabbath Rest regularly:

* Every seventh day, observe a day of Sabbath Rest
* Every seventh year at one church, observe at least seven weeks of Sabbath Rest (Sabbatical)

In cooperation with the pastor, church board, and district superintendent, a Sabbatical Committee can be appointed for the following purpose:

* To manage and coordinate congregational work in the absence of the pastor.
* To ensure quality care of the congregation in the absence of the pastor.
* To assist the pastor before the time of the Sabbath, Rest in developing:
  + a plan as to how ministry plans and goals will be met.
  + an understanding of the plan, purpose, & procedures of the pastor's Sabbath Rest.
  + orientation plans to prepare the congregation for the pastor's Sabbath Rest
  + exit and re-entry orientation for pastor and family. Re-entry orientation would include a financial update, new names, faces, attendance, etc.
  + evaluation of the pastor's Sabbath Rest (e.g., congregational impact) to present to the congregation and the district superintendent.

**Pastoral Sabbath Rest Planning and Preparation**

The following steps of planning and preparation for the pastor can be followed before the Sabbatical.

1. Take time to plan the Sabbatical ahead of time.
2. Develop a plan on which the Sabbatical Committee and church board mutually agree.
3. Timing is vital--- there's a time to work, and there's a time to rest.
4. Use a mentor or consultant to help/assist you in planning and evaluating objectively.
5. Search out program resources.
6. Ask for congregational and church board input for the development of your plan.
7. Organize your financial arrangements. Extra expense may be incurred during Sabbath Rest.
8. Plan to keep a daily journal.
9. Make travel plans that will remove you from your routine.
10. Ask yourself the following:

* What do I want to happen to me personally?
* How do I want the Sabbath Rest to affect my family/spouse?
* How would I like the congregation to benefit?

**Resources**

Bullock, A. Richard. 2000. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. The Alban Institute.

Dawn, Marve. 1999. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Eerdmans.

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

Dietterich, Inagrace. 2001. *The Practice of Sabbath Time*. The Centre for Parish Development.

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*. Alban Institute.

McKie, Rusty, 2018 Sabbiticals: "How To Take A Break From Ministry before Ministry Breaks You.

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

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

# Saler, Robert, November 19, 2019. Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and their Pastors

**SWID SABBATICAL PLANNING SHEET**

**Submitted by Pastor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**To the [Name] Church Board and The District Superintendent**

**Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Proposed Date of the Sabbatical**

Start Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Ending Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Goals and Plans**

*Outline what personal enhancement or study project you will undertake. Also, outline how it will be reported.*

**Delegation of Ministry Responsibilities**

*Outline what ministry responsibilities (local, district, national) need to be cared for, the key layperson who will care for them and how and to whom they will report. Ensure that in the absence of the pastor, plans for board meetings are arranged per Manual paragraph 128, and any meetings of the membership with Manual paragraph 113.4.*

**Re-Entry Plan**

*Outline the steps to be taken for the minister to re-enter and re-establish ministry. It is recommended the pastor provide a report sheet to each person he has delegated assignments to, such as the Sample Report sheet for re-entry. Upon re-entry, this will give a way to update the pastor and integrate him back into the church's ministry. An example of the questions the pastor should ask include: "What do I need to know?" and "What ministries would you like to keep and/or begin."*

**Date of Sabbatical Report Session**

*Set the date when the minister, church board, and key lay leaders will report to each other on the results of the Sabbatical.*

**Sabbatical Agreement & Approval**

By signing this document, both the pastor and the church board agree that the pastor will remain at the church for at least 12 months after returning from the sabbatical. Suppose the pastoral staff person voluntarily leaves the assignment in a time shorter than this. In that case, repayment of salary and benefits will be made to the church in an amount agreed upon by the church board and the district superintendent. If the pastor leaves due to either a regular or special review earned vacation will be provided.

Before presenting the Sabbatical plan to the church board, the pastor will send a copy of the proposed plan to the District Superintendent. When submitting the plan to the church board, the Pastor will sign two copies of the request. The Secretary of the church board will sign when the board has approved the sabbatical. The District Superintendent will sign the final plan following board approval.

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*Pastor Secretary of Church Board District Superintendent*

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*Date Date Date*

**SABBATICAL POLICY**

***[Name]* Church of the Nazarene**

**Adopted by the Church Board, *[insert date]***

**PURPOSE OF SABBATICAL**

We, the congregation of [*name*] Church of the Nazarene, wish to provide long-term pastoral staff and their family the opportunity of a sabbatical leave for professional development, personal and spiritual renewal, rest, and visioning. By means of a sabbatical leave, the congregation wishes to express gratitude and affirmation to our pastors and their families.

At the same time, it is the intent that the church will be challenged to a special time of renewal as well as an enlarged vision of its ministry.

**SABBATICAL TIME FRAME FOR THE SENIOR PASTOR**

A sabbatical leave of at least seven weeks will be provided to the senior pastor during each seventh year of consecutive full-time employment with [*name]* Church of the Nazarene.

It is preferred that the sabbatical be taken in consecutive weeks. However, a two-session sabbatical of four weeks and three weeks will be considered by the church board if the pastor desires.

The scheduling of the sabbatical leave shall consider the needs of the congregation, the scheduling needs from the pastor's proposal, and other pertinent concerns as may be established.

**SABBATICAL TIME FRAME FOR ASSOCIATE PASTORS**

A sabbatical leave may be provided to full-time associate pastors at the discretion of the senior pastor. A sabbatical leave provided for an associate pastor shall follow the same guidelines as for the senior pastor and as set forth in this outline.

**SABBATICAL PLANNING**

The sabbatical will be primarily planned by the pastor with church board input and shall require church board approval. It is recommended and preferred that the leave include activities and events that will carry out the purpose of the sabbatical as stated above.

The church board shall appoint a Sabbatical Committee to receive and review the pastor's proposed plan of sabbatical leave. It shall help establish specific expectations of the sabbatical and present the plan to the church board for review and approval. It shall help develop a plan for implementing the sabbatical leave and carrying on the church's ministry in the pastor's absence.

These specifics shall be followed:

1. It shall be the board's responsibility to initiate the planning by setting aside funds on a regularly scheduled basis to finance a sabbatical. A budget line item shall be established to track the accumulation of funds.
2. During the pastor's sixth year of employment, the board shall appoint a committee of a minimum of three individuals from the board and the congregation. The committee will serve from the date of receipt of the pastor's sabbatical plan until the sabbatical evaluation is completed upon the pastor's return.
3. During the pastor's sixth year of employment, the board shall ask the pastor to prepare a sabbatical leave itinerary to be presented to the church board. The pastor's proposed plan shall be received by the Sabbatical Committee at least two months before the planned date of commencement of the sabbatical. The proposed plan should focus on the specific objectives of the leave. The proposed plan shall also outline how the pastoral duties will be carried out in the pastor's absence.

**PROCEDURE FOR CONTINUING THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH DURING THE PASTOR'S SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The pastor will provide a proposed plan for the continuing ministry of the church during the sabbatical. The pastor will be responsible for appointing persons from the pastoral staff or arranging for interim leadership to carry out the administrative duties, congregational care ministries, and pulpit responsibilities.

It is recommended that only normal activities and regularly scheduled events in the ministry of the church (i.e., Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, regularly scheduled board meetings, regularly scheduled meetings) are to be carried out. It is recommended that special events and programs or fellowship gatherings are limited during the sabbatical.

During the sabbatical, contact with the senior pastor should be limited to the following:

1. Serious illness or death of a member of the congregation;
2. Any event that the Sabbatical Committee and the interim pastor jointly determine to be an emergency; and/or
3. A specific prearranged request by the senior pastor.

**FINANCING OF SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The church shall make the following financial commitment during the pastor's sabbatical leave:

1. The pastor's full salary and benefits will continue. There will be no reduction in pay or benefits during the duration of the sabbatical.
2. Seminar or educational expenses incurred by the preapproved sabbatical plan will be supported by the church according to professional development policies.
3. A sabbatical budget will be established with the amount to be approved by the church board after considering and approving the sabbatical plan. The budget may assist with additional expenses (e.g., travel expenses).

**THE PASTOR'S FAMILY DURING SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The pastor and his or her spouse shall determine the role family members will take in the sabbatical leave. That role shall be included in the proposed plan for a sabbatical that the pastor submits to the Sabbatical Committee for board approval. The pastor's immediate family members may, but are not expected to, attend regularly scheduled services and/or activities. The pastor and family members shall be free to communicate with the church community as they desire.

However, to enable the sabbatical to accomplish the intended purpose, the congregation and the board will request that no direct communication is made with the pastor or the pastor's family members.

**RETURN FROM SABBATICAL**

Upon returning from sabbatical leave, the pastor shall first meet with the Sabbatical Committee (and interim pastor, if applicable) before re-entering his ministry duties. A date shall be scheduled for this meeting before the commencement of the sabbatical leave. The purpose of the meeting shall be twofold. First, the committee and interim pastor will inform the pastor of all issues that have arisen in his/her absence, bring him/her up to date on all activities, and discuss the effect the sabbatical has had on the church. Second, the pastor may, in turn, give a brief oral report to the Sabbatical Committee on his activities and what he feels transpired with regard to carrying out the goals of the sabbatical.

The pastor and the Sabbatical Committee shall prepare a written report approximately one month following the pastor's return.

The first Sunday worship service following the pastor's return should be planned as a celebration of renewal for the pastor and congregation.

**STIPULATIONS**

1. Sabbatical leave will not negate any of the pastor's earned vacation. Vacation days may not be used to extend the length of sabbatical leave.
2. Sabbatical leave will be in addition to board-approved events or seminars throughout the rest of the year.
3. No more than one member of the pastoral staff may be on sabbatical leave at any one time.
4. No personnel shall be hired or terminated while the senior pastor is on sabbatical unless the senior pastor gives approval.
5. This sabbatical leave policy shall be reviewed periodically.
6. The purpose of this policy is for direction and is not intended to be all conclusive.
7. Proposed changes or additions in the above policy may be submitted to the Sabbatical Committee and presented to the church board for approval.

