

St. John's Lutheran Church of Oregon

Pastoral Sabbatical Leave Policy

I. Introduction

Briefly stated, a Sabbatical Leave is a significant time away from congregational responsibilities.

It is a time

to receive;

to be nurtured;

to dig deeper into oneself, one's relationship with God and one's own roots

so that one can be

renewed,

refreshed and

revitalized by the breath of God.

We usually think of the Sabbath as the seventh day of creation, when God finished creating and rested. More than an afterthought of creation, the Sabbath is a gift from God for rest, renewal and hope. The First Books of Scripture speak of "Sabbath" days and years. Even the land was given a Sabbath when it was left to lay fallow and replenish itself. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness marked the turning point in his ministry. Moses' time spent tending sheep helped change his perspective in his life. David tended sheep and learned valuable lessons about God's care and provision. Paul, struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the Desert of Arabia for three years and emerged with a new vision.

Pastoral life is a demanding profession. Our church is a constantly changing community with a variety of people and missions. In order to nurture the vision of the congregation, it is appropriate that we support a Sabbatical Leave for the health and well-being of our Pastor(s). This Sabbatical Leave Policy represents a commitment to hold a challenging vision before the Congregation and to keep its spiritual leaders vital and renewed in helping to make those visions a reality. An exhausted, burned out Pastor is not going to be able to offer the kind of leadership that is needed to meet that challenge.

II. Reasons for Pastoral Sabbatical Leave

A. The very nature of being an effective Pastor involves continual spiritual growth; and spiritual growth does not happen by accident. It takes hard and intentional work. Spiritual growth is a lifelong process involving big chunks of time set aside for reading, study, prayer, solitude, reflection and renewal.

B. Over the last several years, congregational ministry has changed rapidly. Congregations expect more of their Pastors; and there has been significant growth, both internally and externally, in terms of Congregational vision. In order to meet these changes, clergy must periodically retreat from the Congregation, to retool and refocus their ministry approaches.

C. Without renewal leave, there is a stronger chance that clergy, over time, will demonstrate the key characteristics of burnout – namely, exhaustion, cynicism, disillusionment and self-deprecation. Sabbatical leave helps avoid burnout and supports healthy long term pastorates that benefit congregations.

D. Another lethal effect of burnout is that it makes a Pastor dull, hollow and uninteresting. These people are not the best vehicles to minister to the spiritual needs of the Congregation. Healthy, vital congregations and healthy, vital pastors go together.

E. Being a Pastor many times means 24/7 (working or being on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Generally, pastoral work hours exceed 50 per week.

F. A Pastor Sabbatical Leave affords the Congregation an opportunity to develop skills in self-sufficiency and lay ministry.

Therefore, for the good of our community, the council recommends this Pastoral Sabbatical Policy.

III. Pastoral Sabbatical Leave Policy

A. Definition

A Pastoral Sabbatical Leave is a time away from the Congregation. It is a time of release from normal pastoral duties in order that a Pastor may rest, renew and revitalize through prayer, reflection, travel and/or study. The purpose of such a leave is to afford an opportunity for Pastors and the Congregation alike to grow in their respective ministries.

B. Eligibility

Only Pastors of St. John's shall be eligible for the Pastoral Sabbatical Leave Policy. The Church Council shall have the right to expand the scope of this policy to rostered staff members, in its sole discretion.

C. Prerequisites

In recognition that the Congregation fully appreciates the intense demands placed on Pastors, and the spiritual, mental and physical tolls exacted over the years, each Pastor is encouraged to take a Pastoral Sabbatical Leave after completing six (6) continuous years of ministry with St. John's Lutheran Church of Oregon. By the mutual agreement of the Council and Pastor, the Sabbatical Leave may be taken in the seventh year of ministry, or it may be deferred to a later year. Subsequent Sabbatical leaves are encouraged after an additional six (6) years of continuous ministry following the completion date of prior Sabbatical Leave. Only one Pastor will be on Sabbatical Leave at one time. Should two Pastors be eligible at the same time, the order in which the Sabbatical Leaves are taken will be determined by mutual agreement of the Pastors, subject to approval by the Church Council. Under exceptional circumstances (e.g. extended medical leave, under performance), the council may recommend postponement of Sabbatical Leave.

D. Duration of Sabbatical Leave

Pastoral Sabbatical Leave will normally not exceed eleven (11) weeks in length, to be taken between Easter and Labor Day. With the approval of the Church Council, the Pastor can extend the Sabbatical Leave up to two additional weeks by applying unused continuing education leave and/or vacation leave. Pastoral Sabbatical Leave will afford Pastors ample opportunity for study, research, growth and travel. Variations of this policy may be made by the Church Council to take advantage of unique opportunities where circumstances warrant.

E. Congregational Expectations for the Pastor

1. Notification and Scheduling. Unless the Church Council determines otherwise, the Pastor shall (i) notify the church Council at least nine (9) months prior to the anticipated start date of a Sabbatical Leave of his or her intent to apply for such leave and (ii) request the Church Council's approval thereof at least six (6) months prior to the actual start date of the requested Sabbatical Leave. At that latter time, the Pastor shall submit a tentative overview to the Church Council of what he or she intends to do during the Sabbatical Leave. Prior to actual departure, the Pastor shall notify the Church Council of his or her definitive plans for the Sabbatical Leave. If the Sabbatical Leave is granted by the Church Council, the Pastor(s) and Church Council shall address

any scheduling matters that are anticipated to arise during the course of the Sabbatical Leave so as to minimize the leave impacts upon the Congregation and maximize the benefit of the leave.

2. Desired Activities. Activities to be pursued during the Sabbatical Leave shall be at the Pastor's reasonable discretion. It is the hope and desire of the Congregation that Pastors will seek spiritual, mental and physical renewal through combinations of prayer, reflection, rest, travel and/or study. A Sabbatical Leave is not an opportunity for a Pastor to engage in alternative gainful employment, unless the Church Council otherwise agrees.

3. Feedback. Within thirty (30) days of completion of a Sabbatical Leave, the Pastor shall give a brief report to the Church Council of the Sabbatical Leave experience.

4. Return to Ministry. As a condition precedent to the granting of any such Pastoral Sabbatical Leave, the Pastor must agree that upon completion of the Pastoral Sabbatical Leave, the Pastor will continue to serve the Congregation for a period of not less than twelve (12) months following the conclusion of such leave, unless this requirement is waived by the Church Council, whenever it determines that the best interest of the congregation may be served thereby. In the event of the failure of a Pastor to continue such service for reasons other than death or disability, and absent the foregoing waiver, then in such event the Pastor shall repay to the Church a sum determined pursuant to the following formula:

$$\frac{WS \times (\text{times}) 11 \times (\text{times}) M}{12} = (\text{equals}) RB$$

Where:

WS = means the annual housing allowance plus the gross annual salary of the Pastor in effect on the date of the Pastor's departure for the Sabbatical Leave, determined on a weekly basis.

M = is the number of full calendar months between the date of the Pastor's departure from the ministry of the Congregation and the expiration of 12 months following the date of the Pastor's return from the Sabbatical Leave.

RB = is the sum of money (the "Returned Benefit") to be repaid to the Church by the departing Pastor.

Example of Pastor's Failure to Continue Ministry:

Pastor Sabbatical Leave = 11 weeks

Assumptions:

\$70,000 annual salary and Housing allowance (\$1,346.15/week)

Return from Sabbatical Leave 8/31/13

Pastor departs Congregation 2/28/14 (6 months)

Formula: $\frac{1346.15 \times 11 \times 6}{12} = \$7,403.82$

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F. Pastoral Expectations for the Congregation

1. Salary and Benefits. During the period of the Sabbatical Leave, the Pastor's full salary and benefits, except for automobile expense reimbursement, will continue to be paid by the Congregation. This would include salary, housing allowance, benefit contributions, insurance, vacation and continuing education.
2. Payment of Related Expenses. To the extent a Pastor utilizes continuing educational leave to extend a Sabbatical Leave, any regularly budgeted continuing education funds applicable to such educational leave may be used to defray the cost of continuing education which a Pastor undertakes during such Sabbatical Leave. If a Pastor does not extend the Sabbatical Leave, a Pastor may alternatively combine continuing education leave with the eleven (11) weeks Sabbatical Leave by applying budgeted continuing education funds to defray costs of continuing education undertaken during the Sabbatical Leave. No other expenses of the Sabbatical Leave will be paid for by the Congregation.

G. Coverage of Ministry to Congregation During Sabbatical Leave

The Pastor(s) who is (are) not on a Sabbatical Leave shall have the primary responsibility of ministering to the Congregation during the leave period. It is the general expectation that pastoral care for the Congregation will be substantially available for the duration of any Sabbatical Leave, without significant interruption of pastoral absence. Accordingly, the remaining Pastor(s) shall work with the Church Council to schedule vacation or other voluntary time off in such manner so as to achieve this expectation. During the period of the Sabbatical Leave, the remaining Pastor(s) shall be entitled to receive the maximum car allowance reimbursement that is being paid by the Church to its pastors. If there is no remaining Pastor(s), the Church Council shall make all the

necessary arrangements to provide for the ministry to the Congregation during such Sabbatical Leave.

H. Congregational Support of Pastor During Sabbatical Leave

As a supportive community, we recognize that the pastor on sabbatical is away from congregational responsibilities in order to be renewed, refreshed and revitalized. To that end, members will contact the Pastor(s) who is (are) not on a Sabbatical Leave for all pastoral care during the leave period.

I. General Provisions

1. General. A Pastoral Sabbatical Leave is not a benefit that accrues during the course of employment of a Pastor. Rather, Sabbatical Leave for pastors is a ministry of the whole congregation, a ministry that helps both the congregation and pastor find rest and renewal and benefits the mission, ministry and vision of the whole Church, often in surprising and Spirit-led ways. The decision to grant such leave should be taken within the year following completion of six continuous years of ministry with the Congregation, unless deferred to a later year with prior approval of the Church Council.
2. Administration. The Church Council shall have all reasonable and necessary authority and power to administer this Pastoral Sabbatical Leave Policy on behalf of the Congregation.

Adopted: June 18, 2013.

This policy supercedes any prior Sabbatical Policy.