

Sabbatical Policy

(Adapted by the Diocesan Personnel Committee for parochial and diocesan clergy from a proposal developed by the Diocesan Commission on Ministry, approved by the Executive Board, September 16, 1989)

In Biblical tradition, a sabbatical, or recurrent period of rest and renewal, is a full year every seventh year. Such an extended absence is rarely practical in parishes of the church, yet there seems to be a need for, and value in, a periodic sabbatical leave for full time ordained clergy in parochial or diocesan employ.

As intended by this policy, a sabbatical is not a leave intended for rest, relaxation, and a change of routine. Such is already provided for clergy as annual vacation. Nor is a sabbatical necessarily or simply an extended continuing education program. Sabbath time is for the opening of one's self to the working of the Holy Spirit and for renewal of one's sense of vocation. Sabbatical leave offers opportunity for a more extended learning experience than is possible in the typical week of continuing education to clergy. It allows for reflection, research, writing, internship and other organized opportunities not possible in a brief education leave.

Sabbatical leave also provides time for less structured personal and spiritual renewal which might or might not have immediately apparent benefits or measurable products. Any plan for sabbatical leave needs to leave room and time for the gracious and often surprising movements of God's Holy Spirit. Even so, plans shall have measurable goals and defined benefits for both priest and parish.

For the parish, sabbatical time is an opportunity to hone the ministry of the laity. To this end, it is highly recommended that the parish at large be kept informed from the earliest stages concerning plans for the sabbatical. Also recommended is that one or more re-entry and debriefing meetings for all interested be held very soon after the sabbatical. The purpose of such meetings is not simply to welcome the priest home but for clergy and lay leadership to recognize and discuss anxieties and hopes as the priest-parish relationship is re-established.

Conditions and Definition of a Sabbatical leave.

1. A sabbatical is understood to be time released from regular duties for the purpose of spiritual renewal, study, theological reflection, and strengthening of skill according to a well defined plan developed by the person taking the leave and accepted by his or her

vestry.

2. A sabbatical leave is not a gift but a normal and expected part of spiritual and professional development for clergy.
3. Clergy who are granted sabbatical leave are expected to complete at least a year of service to the parish or diocese upon return from the sabbatical. If the priest departs from the parish or diocesan employment during the first twelve months following sabbatical leave, then shall the recipient of the sabbatical reimburse the parish and diocese for any tuition or similar fees which the diocese or parish paid in support of the sabbatical.

Eligibility and Application Procedure

1. A priest is eligible to apply for sabbatical leave after having completed five years of service to the parish or diocese.
2. A recommended diocesan standard for sabbatical leave is three to six months leave for every five to seven years of accrued service, not to exceed six consecutive months. Alternatively, one month, or some other definite amount of time, might be allowed for each year of service.
3. A priest applying for sabbatical leave shall prepare a proposal that identifies the time requested and that describes a plan of study, action, training, reflection, together with anticipated costs and benefits. Such a plan must be approved by the applicant's vestry before application may be made for financial support from the Bishop.
4. A sabbatical leave proposal that has been endorsed by a vestry and which seeks financial support from the Diocese will be forwarded to the Bishop for review. Such proposals shall be submitted to the Bishop with as much advance notice as possible, one year being recommended. The Bishop may choose to appoint a group such as the Diocesan Commission of Ministry to serve in an advisory capacity in this process.
5. If the Diocesan Sabbatical Fund is exhausted in any one year, applicants may be turned down for the funding. In that event, those persons would receive priority consideration for diocesan assistance in the following year.

Financial Arrangements

1. Clergy Compensation. It is the parish's responsibility to continue to pay the normal salary and benefits to and on behalf of the priest for the duration of the leave. It is recommended that parishes establish a line item in their budgets as an accrual fund for sabbatical leave so that funds will be available when a sabbatical is warranted. Funds so accrued should be used only in support of a sabbatical or for parochial expenses incurred as a result of a sabbatical.
2. The diocese shall establish a Sabbatical Fund for the purpose of a) assisting parishes for which an accrual fund of their own would constitute an unreasonable burden, and b) providing up to a twenty-five

percent (25%) share of the costs incurred in the execution of a sabbatical leave plan which has received vestry approval.

3. The diocese shall fund up to twenty-five percent (25%) of the cost of an approved sabbatical plan; the priest and parish shall fund the remaining costs with an equal division being the norm.

Supply Arrangements

1. The priest applying for sabbatical leave shall take primary responsibility, in consultation with the vestry for making satisfactory arrangements for worship services, pastoral care, and parish administration during his or her absence. This will include:
 - a) ordained priest for regularly scheduled sacramental worship;
 - b) lay readers for occasional morning prayer services;
 - c) lay committees for pastoral and new member visitation;
 - d) supply clergy for pastoral emergencies; and
 - e) preparation of wardens, parish secretary and others for additional responsibilities.
2. Priests developing a sabbatical proposal shall be sensitive to the liturgical needs of the parish, especially during Lent/Easter and Advent/Christmas. It shall be the joint responsibility of the priest and vestry to inform the parish at large as the proposal develops.

Accountability

1. The person returning from a sabbatical shall present, with reasonable promptness, a written report to the Bishop, any appropriate diocesan committee, and the vestry.
2. A brief oral report on the sabbatical experience shall be made at the next clergy conference.
3. A report, in some appropriate form, shall be made to the congregation.

Education within the Diocese concerning Sabbatical leave.

1. This sabbatical leave policy is highly recommended to all congregations. The terms of this diocesan policy shall be in effect when funds are applied for to form the Diocesan Sabbatical Fund.
2. Efforts to educate the diocese concerning the concept of sabbatical leave may be made through such means as:
 - a) Stories in the Southwestern Episcopalian;
 - b) A pamphlet, yet to be developed, to be distributed to vestry members and diocesan committee members;
 - c) Diocesan staff may meet with vestries to explain the policy and its advantages;
 - d) Publicity should be given to the projects and programs of those priests who have completed sabbaticals; and
 - e) The Diocesan Personnel Committee should include this policy as part of the recommended

compensation package for clergy throughout the diocese.
Adopted 1989

(Approved for immediate implementation, Executive Board of the Diocese, September 16, 1989)