

SABBATICAL POLICY

Fairview Baptist Church

WHAT IS A SABBATICAL?

A sabbatical – from the word for sabbath – is a permitted time away for an employee to rest and “reset” and to focus on personal, spiritual, and/or educational development in preparation for their next season of employment and ministry. Sabbaticals are customarily taken by those in academic professions (as in colleges or seminaries) or in ministerial professions at certain predetermined milestones of employment.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SABBATICAL?

Different institutions treat sabbaticals in different ways. Many leave the purpose of the sabbatical up to the proposal of the one preparing to take leave. They are often used for personal retreat or study in church settings, but sometimes also used in academic settings for writing leave or research focus. The purpose of any specific sabbatical leave for a pastor is largely determined by the pastor proposing the leave in conjunction with his fellow pastors and church leadership. Pastors can and should use sabbatical time in any or all of the following ways:

- Personal retreat for spiritual renewal and theological development
- Intentional focus on marriage and family
- Writing projects or other academic pursuits
- Professional development via courses or conferences or travel for educational purposes
- Additional rest/leisure as needed
- Counseling or coaching for emotional and spiritual maintenance
- Prayer and reflection leading into the next season of ministry at the church

The benefits of a ministry sabbatical are numerous to both pastor and congregation, but they typically allow a valuable time of reset for pastors that works against ministry burnout and allows for a time of refreshing and renewed energy and vision for the next season of ministry. By rewarding faithful shepherds with extended time away at regular intervals, congregations obey the biblical mandates to honor their elders (1 Timothy 5:17) and work against their groaning in their work (Hebrews 13:17). There are five reasons why churches should institute pastoral sabbaticals:¹

1. Pastors have emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations. In a day, a pastor can deal with death, deep spiritual issues, great encouragement, petty criticisms, tragedies, illnesses, and celebrations of birth. The emotional roller coaster is draining.
2. Pastors need uninterrupted breaks. A pastor is on 24-hour call. Most pastors don't have an “off” switch. They go to sleep with the knowledge they could be awakened by a phone call at any time of the day. Vacations are rarely uninterrupted. It can be an exhausting vocation, and a sabbatical can be a welcome time to slow down.
3. Pastors need time of uninterrupted study. It doesn't usually happen in the study at church or home. There is always the crisis or need of the moment. Church members expect

¹ These are from Thom Rainer's "5 Reasons Your Pastor Should Take a Sabbatical," <https://thomrainer.com/2014/02/five-reasons-your-pastor-should-take-a-sabbatical/>

sermons and leadership that reflect much prayer and study. The pastor's schedule often works against that ideal. The sabbatical can offer much needed, and uninterrupted, study time.

4. The trend shows that Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches. Pastors who have sabbaticals are much more likely to stay at a church because they are less likely to experience burnout.
5. Pastors who have sabbaticals view the time off as an affirmation from their churches. Pastors need affirmation. Sabbaticals can accomplish that goal.

HOW ARE SABBATICALS ARRANGED?

Sabbatical policies differ from church to church and institution to institution but following the pattern of the biblical sabbatical (Lev. 25), most ministerial sabbaticals occur every seventh year of full-time employment. Sabbaticals range in length, typically 1-3 months, and they do not replace or subsume regularly allowed vacation days.

FAIRVIEWS SABBATICAL POLICY FOR FULL-TIME PASTORAL STAFF

PURPOSE

To reward faithful shepherds with extended time away at regular intervals, obeying the biblical mandates to honor our elders (1 Tim. 5:17) and work against their groaning in their work (Heb. 13:17). In doing so this allows a valuable time of reset for pastors that works against ministry burnout and allows for a time of refreshing and renewed energy and vision for their next season of ministry at Fairview.

ELIGIBILITY AND DURATION

Following every six (6) years, all full-time staff pastors may request a sabbatical of up to 8 weeks. Part-time staff pastors may request an unpaid sabbatical of up to 4 weeks

PROVISIONS

Requesting a Sabbatical. Requests for sabbatical should be submitted prior to the fiscal year budget being final. This allows for potential costs for pulpit supply, worship leadership and other coverage to be considered.

- **Vacation:** Available vacation can be taken concurrently with the sabbatical if desired.
- **Concurrent Sabbaticals:** Only one staff person can take a sabbatical in a given 6 month period.
- **Communications:** The staff and congregation will honor the sabbatical by avoiding communications with the pastor regarding regular church life and administration.
- **Compensation:** Full salary and benefits will continue during the sabbatical. Sabbaticals are offered in addition to other paid time off during the year. No additional compensation is paid in association with the sabbatical.

REPORTING

At the conclusion of the sabbatical the congregation will be excited to hear how

God worked in the pastor's life. The pastor will present to the congregation an informal review covering topics such as:

- What types of things did you do during your sabbatical?
- Do you feel refreshed and restored? If so, in what ways?
- What did you spend your time studying or thinking about? What did you learn?
- How did this time prepare you for your next season of ministry at Fairview?

PROCESS

The purpose of each sabbatical leave is up to the pastors' discretion but is to be submitted in advance for review with the Staff and Personnel Committee. These steps outline the general process taken when a pastor approaches their sabbatical year:

1. During fiscal year planning for the relevant year the Pastor should notify the Personnel Committee of their intent to take a sabbatical.
2. Pastor will prepare the sabbatical request in close coordination with other staff, allowing for their input and review.
3. Pastor will submit the request to the Personnel Committee for review which will
4. be completed within one month.
5. If applicable, Personnel will submit budgetary requirements to the Stewardship Committee.
6. The Personnel Committee will provide the pastor with final approval of the sabbatical request.
7. The Personnel Committee and pastor will present the sabbatical plan to the congregation for awareness at least 2-3 months prior to sabbatical start date.
8. Upon his return the pastor will report back to the congregation within one month of the sabbatical end date.