Introducing Sabbaticals

How they benefit Congregations and Pastors

WHAT IS A SABBATICAL?
The word “sabbatical” comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat (Sabbath), meaning “cease” and “rest,” but in the Biblical understanding it means more than just a day off. It is a day consecrated to God, when God’s people cease to do ordinary labor, but instead rest, worship and enjoy God’s creation. In the last several years, many churches have become convinced of the importance and benefit of granting a periodic sabbatical leave to ministers. By being released for a period of time from their normal, ongoing responsibilities, ministers have time to reflect and rest for the purpose of renewal and revitalization toward sustained excellence in ministry. (This wording is taken from the new guidelines provided for the Orthodox Presbyterian Congregations by the Committee on Ministerial Care. See back panel for more details.)

RESOURCES

Resources that might help sessions as they consider planning a sabbatical for their pastor.

- Review the “Guidelines for Implementing a Ministerial Staff Sabbatical” at www.opCMC.org/Resources.
- Read article “Sabbaticals for Ministers: The Benefits for Pastors and Congregations” by Dale Wolyniak, as found on the Focus on the Family website.
- Eli Lilly offers grants for pastors to take sabbaticals. Visit their website to learn more.
- Review the article “Sabbaticals for Pastors,” by David VanDrunen, in the Ordained Servant online archive at www.opc.org.
- Contact the Committee on Ministerial Care if you have further questions about sabbaticals or applying for a sabbatical grant.

www.opccmc.org

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Why are Sabbaticals Needed?

The role of a pastor can be extremely stressful. In effect, he is never off-duty. This long-term stress can take a toll physically and spiritually. Churches that want to keep their pastor for many years should consider providing him with a season of rest. The Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) of the OPC recommends that all full-time pastors take a sabbatical after an appropriate period of service in a church. See back panel for possible guidelines to use in developing a sabbatical plan, as provided by the CMC.

Who benefits from Sabbaticals?

Pastors:
1. Many pastors return physically and spiritually refreshed.
2. Helps to develop a deeper relationship with God. Sabbaticals give pastors time to reflect and spend larger blocks of time in their personal walk with God.
3. Pastors usually reflect on their ministries and how they can sharpen areas of strength and improve areas that are lacking.
4. Longer pastorates are often seen when sabbaticals are taken.

Congregations:
1. Congregations can stretch their spiritual gifts. They might become less dependent on their pastor.
2. They find out how much the pastor really does.
3. Congregations can learn more about how the church, as a body, works together.
4. Coming together, after a period of absence, leads to appreciation for each other’s gifts.

Consider the following statistics:

- **21%** spend less than 15 minutes a day in prayer — the average is 30 minutes per day.
- **31%** do not exercise at all, while 37% exercise at least three days a week.
- **40%** report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- **44%** of pastors do not take a regular day off.
- **65%** think their family is in a glass house.
- **70%** constantly fight depression.

Steps for Sessions to Consider when Planning a Sabbatical

1. Create a Sabbatical Committee early in a pastor’s call to the church to prepare for a future sabbatical.
2. Communicate the need for sabbaticals to the congregation.
3. Consider starting small by giving the pastor a 1–2 week study break.
4. Have a line item in your budget to fund sabbaticals.
5. Ask for personal donations or thank offerings for sabbaticals.
6. Apply for grants or ask foundations that would help finance sabbaticals.

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2. Focus on the Family; 2009 survey of 2,000 pastors.