

## **Sabbath Leave Policy**

### **Sabbath Leave for Ministers and Educators in Foothills Presbytery**

*Foothills Presbytery strongly recommends to churches, institutions, and agencies within its bounds that Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Christian Educators be granted compensated Sabbath Leave.*

#### **Rationale**

Ministers and educators perform tasks for God's people that require full and broad training in pastoral, theological, ecclesiastical, psychological and managerial skills. They are called upon to be spiritual leaders around the clock, yet the expectations placed upon them often make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to have time for their own spiritual renewal. As a result, many experiences to one degree or another symptoms of emotional fatigue, stress-related illness and burnout which adversely affect the minister's or educator's personal, family and parish life, greatly diminishing effectiveness and personal wellbeing.

Often, ministers or educators move to another call to gain a fresh start and spiritual replenishing, leading to shorter-term ministries. For too long this situation has been accepted, even tolerated, as being an inevitable part of the job. The concept of Sabbath Leave has its solution rooted in Scripture and in church tradition.

Sabbath Leave is **not**:

- An extended vacation or a substitute for a vacation. Vacations are time apart for the whole family. Sabbath Leave involves only the minister or educator.
- An extended continuing education. Continuing education is an annual time of professional development.

Sabbath Leave **is** to enrich, to gain new insights, and to serve as a "change of pace" time that can provide relaxation and renewal.

Sabbath Leave **will** enable the minister or educator to be renewed through the vital pursuit of intentional study, extended time spent in spiritual formation, and fresh mentoring by respected teachers. Sabbath Leave enables a minister or educator to return to the responsibilities of the congregation or institution or agency with new energy, spiritual vision and effectiveness by renewal through rest and reflection.

"Sabbath keeping and sabbatical leave are part of a rhythm of life intended to refresh and renew all of creation so that all of creation will continue to reflect the face and will of God. Hence Sabbath keeping becomes a way of living. Ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting is more than the weekly rhythm of work and rest. It is also the rhythm of life. Without this rhythm, the work of ministry certainly loses its joy, focus, and meaning."i (See Appendix 1 for further insights.)

## **Theological Background**

Sabbath Leave is a period of time provided for the minister or educator to disengage from their regular tasks and from the stress of being constantly on call; ministering to the sick, troubled and dying; meeting, leading, supporting; and dealing with many other stressful situations.

- It has its antecedents in the Biblical concept of the Sabbath day and Sabbath year.
- It is a time for rest, reflection, and recreation; a time for personal spiritual growth; an opportunity for renewed vision and commitment to ministry.
- It is also an opportunity for the congregation, institution, or agency to reflect on the whole nature and meaning of ministry and the place of God's people in that mission.
- Sabbath Leave with its emphasis on rest, travel, study, and reflection is different from other times away for such pursuits as advanced degree work, terminal leave, or career assessment.

Sabbath Leave is rooted in scripture with many examples in both the Old and New Testaments. (See Appendix 2.) The Holy Spirit led our Lord Jesus away into the wilderness for 40 days and nights to commune with God and prepare for ministry. Jesus took time by himself on the mountain and out in the boat. Jesus provides an example, a model for an experience whose time has come.

***Foothills Presbytery strongly recommends a written covenant for Sabbath Leave between the Minister of Word and Sacrament or Christian Educator and the church, institution, or agency.***

### **Covenant Partner (1) – Minister or Educator**

Sabbath Leave is recommended for all ministers and educators serving churches, institutions, and agencies within the bounds of Foothills Presbytery. The Committee on Ministry and the Inspiration and Support Team recommend that Sabbath Leave be built into the initial call process for ministers and educators.

### **Covenant Partner (2) – Congregation or Institution or Agency**

Sabbath Leave is recommended for all congregations, institutions, and agencies to create healthy long-term relationships with their minister or educator. This could effectively be accomplished through a change in the annual review of terms of the present call. Other benefits to the congregation, institution, or agency include:

- Recognizing the roles of persons serving in pastoral or educational ministry as spiritual leaders who need to follow biblical models of spiritual leaders, spending significant time in prayer and study for sustained faithful ministry among God's people.
- Valuing the professional development as well as personal and spiritual nurture of the minister or educator.

- Preventing burnout in the minister or educator before one's ministry faces decline after seven years of service in the same place, and calling forth renewed commitment from the congregation, institution, or agency as partners in ministry.
- Caring for the minister or educator as a partner in ministry allowing for self-care from overextending and opening to new ways of leading and challenging God's people.
- Exhibiting a healthy balance between the minister's or educator's leadership and lay leadership promoting congregational, institutional, or agency self-sufficiency for several months at a time. ii

Congregations, institutions, and agencies are to review and covenant in practice with their minister or educator one of the Sabbath Leave models suggested by Foothills Presbytery. (See Appendix 3.)

### **Minister or Educator Responsibilities**

1. Conversation with Session or Board at least two years prior to Sabbath Leave should lead to bringing a written Sabbath Leave proposal before the Session or Board - at least in outline form - a minimum of twelve (12) months before the intended commencement of the Sabbath Leave.
2. Secure the approval of the Session or Board for the Sabbath Leave proposal and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral, pulpit, educational, and administrative responsibilities through the development of a written covenant.
3. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the Session or Board before departing on Sabbath Leave.
4. Before the Sabbath Leave, and working with the Session or Board, inform the congregation, institution, or agency about the leave period. This should include an explanation of the Sabbath Leave Rationale and Theological Background as well as the proposed plans for the leave period. Particular attention to the needs of the minister's or educator's family should be mentioned as they continue to be involved in the life of the church. The benefits of the leave for the minister or educator and the calling body will depend on the communication and cooperation of all.
5. Submit to the Inspiration and Support Team in writing the Sabbath Leave covenant and timetable outlining plans.
6. Fulfill the Sabbath Leave plans as developed in the written covenant, maintaining a healthy distance from pastoral, educational, and administrative responsibilities in the church, institution, or agency.
7. Upon re-entry, present a written report to the Session or Board sharing the details of the Sabbath Leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit and on its challenges or concerns. This report includes the benefits of the leave

period but is not intended to be a justification for the leave or evidence of intense productivity by the minister or educator. The re-entry process provides a great opportunity to reflect upon the benefits and challenges that resulted from the Sabbath Leave. Such expected benefits may include:

- Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized.
- New understandings of the concept of mission as shared mission between the minister or educator and congregation, institution, or agency.
- Reaffirmation of call to ministry on part of the minister or educator as well as the congregation, institution, or agency with both covenant partners being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of Christ's mission in the world.
- Challenges that may arise include:
  - Disassociation from the church or agency for an extended period.
  - Unhappiness, resentment or frustration expressed by church members or co-workers.
- Send the Sabbath Leave written report to the Committee on Ministry and the Inspiration and Support Team immediately following the Session or Board meeting when it is presented.

### **Session or Board Responsibilities**

1. Begin conversation with minister or educator at least two years prior to Sabbath Leave.
2. Receive "for approval" the minister's or educator's written proposal for a Sabbath Leave, at least twelve (12) months in advance of the intended commencement of the leave.
3. Present Sabbath Leave to the congregation for approval.
4. Consult with the minister or educator and determine all pending responsibilities to be up to date prior to the Sabbath Leave.
5. Verify the coverage of pastoral, pulpit, educational, and administrative responsibilities during the Sabbath Leave through the development of a written covenant.
6. Communicate to the congregation, institution, or agency the importance and values to the church of a Sabbath Leave; what it is, how long it will last, who will fulfill the regular responsibilities in the minister's or educator's absence, etc. Interpret the need for sensitivity to the minister's or educator's family and their continued participation in the life of the church. The ideal perspective is that the congregation, institution, or agency would understand the period of the Sabbath Leave as a time for reflection and renewal for themselves as well as for the minister or educator.
7. Utilize symbols and rituals to signify the beginning of the Sabbath Leave. These may take place during worship to hold the minister or educator in prayer during this time of renewal and reflection. iii
8. Continue terms of call commitments to the minister or educator during Sabbath Leave.

9. Fulfill the Sabbath Leave plans as developed in the written covenant, maintaining a healthy distance from the minister or educator during this time.
10. Fulfill any covenants or contracts made with substitute personnel during the Sabbath Leave.
11. Following re-entry, all partners in the relationship might approach their common calling with new excitement and enthusiasm. Celebrating the reunited ministry of the minister or educator with the congregation, institution, or agency provides a time of re-acquainting with one another.
12. Request a written report of the Sabbath Leave from the minister or educator upon return.
13. Reflect upon the Sabbath Leave, noting benefits and challenges arising from the experience, and communicate their conclusions to the Inspiration and Support Team.

### **Inspiration and Support Team Responsibilities**

1. Promote congregational, institutional, or agency health by interpreting the Rationale and Theological Background of Sabbath Leave.
2. Consult with Sessions or Boards and their minister or educator to provide guidance and serve as a resource in planning the Sabbath Leave.
3. Receive and review the Sabbath Leave written covenant and timetable outlining plans as submitted by the minister or educator after Session's or Board's approval.
4. Inform the Committee on Ministry about those ministers or educators who are planning to participate in a Sabbath Leave.
5. Receive the Sabbath Leave written report from the minister or educator after it has been presented to Session or Board upon re-entry to ministry.
6. Receive any communications on the Sabbath Leave shared by Sessions or Boards.
7. Maintain a list of ministers or educators within the presbytery who are willing to serve in limited roles for one another during Sabbath Leave.
8. Seek funds and resources to assist ministers or educators with Sabbath Leave.
9. Develop criteria for application of funds and resources for Sabbath Leave.

### **Committee on Ministry Responsibilities**

1. Receive for approval the terms of call or changes in the terms of call including Sabbath Leave.
2. Determine and approve who will moderate the Session in a minister's absence.
3. Serve as a mediator in any concerns of the Session, Board, minister, or educator relative to the Sabbath Leave.
4. Receive the Sabbath Leave written report from the minister or educator after it has been presented to Session or Board upon re-entry to ministry.

## **Stewardship Implications**

Ministers, educators, churches, institutions, and agencies are encouraged to prepare in advance by setting aside funds each year so that resources will be available during the time of Sabbath Leave. The minister or educator will continue to receive full salary and benefits during the Sabbath Leave. While calling bodies may choose to receive a "love offering" to assist the minister or educator with the expenses of travel and study, ordinarily these expenses of the Sabbath Leave will be assumed by the minister or educator.

Churches, institutions, and agencies should take into account that they may also incur expenses for substitute pastoral, pulpit, educational, and administrative supply staff and possibly other matters during the Sabbath Leave. In addition, churches who are unable to secure lay leadership within their own congregation might consider using Commissioned Lay Pastors, associate pastors, or seminary students who might be willing to preach or teach one Sunday. Churches that have difficulty in providing for the Sabbath Leave may consult with Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry or the Inspiration and Support Team for ideas on creatively addressing leadership needs.

## **Suggestions for Transitional Leadership During Sabbath Leave**

In churches served by one pastor, and especially for smaller churches, the following are some ideas for how to fill the leadership needs of the church during the three-month period that the minister/educator is on Sabbath Leave:

- a) Be sure that the Sabbath Leave is planned at least a year in advance so that the leadership needs can be planned appropriately.
- b) Many retired ministers live within the bounds of our Presbytery. The Committee on Ministry and/or Presbytery staff can provide names of these persons who live nearby. Finding such a retired person who could work part-time in the minister's absence, i.e., preaching on Sundays and visiting the sick and moderating the Session meetings is a natural way to be the church. The Session and retired minister negotiate an appropriate honorarium for these services.
- c) Several retired educators live within the bounds of our Presbytery. The Committee on Ministry and/or Presbytery staff can provide names of these persons who live nearby. Finding such a retired person who could work part-time in the educator's absence, i.e., teaching on Sundays and coordinating programs is a natural way to be the church. The Session and retired educator negotiate an appropriate honorarium for these services.
- d) The Session might consider asking Elders to take extra leadership responsibility to fulfill the various administrative and ministerial tasks of the minister or educator, including rotating the preaching and teaching.
- e) The Session is encouraged to consider inviting Presbytery staff, other denominational officials, seminary faculty and leaders in church agencies and institutions to preach and teach. The Sabbath Leave can be a time in which the particular congregation becomes better acquainted with the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly and their various missions.

- f) Our denomination now has trained Transitional pastors. Generally churches that are seeking a full-time pastor use the services of these specialists for an extended period of time. Sometimes Transitional pastors might be available to serve during a Sabbath Leave. Most often the Presbytery staff is aware of Transitional pastors and their availability.

### **Special Considerations**

In addition, congregations, institutions, and agencies with multiple ministers or educators on staff may limit Sabbath Leave to one staff person within twenty-four (24) months.

Where married couples serve in ministry to the same congregation, institution, or agency, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the calling body. However, in such situations the maintenance of faithful ministry by all participants should be the primary concern. Incumbent upon the congregation, institution, or agency and the married couple serving in ministry is the attention to detail of responsibilities.

## Sabbath Leave Policy Appendix 1

“In her book, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Marva Dawn describes this way of living first of all as ceasing. *‘We cease not only from work itself, but also from the need to accomplish and be productive, from the worry and tension that accompany our modern criterion of efficiency, from our efforts to be in control of our lives as if we were God, from our possessiveness and our enculturation, and finally, from the humdrum and meaninglessness that result when life is pursued without the Lord at the center of it all.’*

But, Dawn goes on to say, true Sabbath keeping also involves embracing. *‘Sabbath keeping is not just negative ceasing. We choose to embrace time instead of space, and giving instead of requiring. In response to the grace of God we gladly embrace our calling in life, and in the fullness of healing brought by our relationship with God we can embrace the wholeness of God’s shalom. All these Sabbath gifts set us free to embrace the world. These elements of God’s kingdom and his purposes move us beyond the repentance of ceasing and the faith of resting into the application of the Christian lifestyle.’*

Finally Sabbath keeping comes round to feasting. *‘After the ceasing, the resting, and the embracing comes the feasting. Observing the Sabbath includes not only the freedom from, and repentance for, work and worry (ceasing), the renewing of our whole being in grace-based faith (resting), and the intentionality of our choosing and valuing (embracing), but also the fun and festivity of the weekly eschatological party. I use the word eschatological to emphasize our experience of both present joy in our feasting and anticipation of the future, eternal consummation of joy.’*<sup>iv</sup>

## Sabbath Leave Policy Appendix 2

Sabbath is a concept rooted in scripture which relates to rest from labors for God (Gen 2.3), humans and animals (Ex 34.21), and the land (Ex 23.10-11). Sabbath is also about true worship of God (Isa 58.13-14) as well as God’s love for humanity (Mk 2.27-28). Sabbath in its final sense relates to enjoying God forever (Heb 4.9). In scripture Sabbath is modeled on a series of interrelated times of rest—days, years, and cycles of years. Resting from labors begins in the act of creation when God rested on the seventh day. Again in Exodus 20:10-11 the fourth commandment calls all people to “remember” and “keep holy” the Sabbath. Exodus 23 and Leviticus 25 speak of Sabbath days and years and Sabbath land years when the ground is untilled so that it can be naturally replenished. Sabbath is a time to refill and replenish the soul, to be refreshed in the Spirit with renewed dedication and vision, restored in physical health and energy all of which potentially can bring great benefits in renewed and more fulfilling and productive ministry that glorifies God.

The Hebrew calendar included a Sabbatical Year, sometimes called "the dropping year" or "the year of Sabbatical Desistence." It occurred every seventh year. God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai and directed its establishment. (Ex. 23.10 - 11; Lev. 25.1-7, 20-22;

Deut. 15.1-6) The primary purpose was to let the field lie fallow. The Hebrews believed that the land belonged to God, and since it was in constant use during the previous six years, required a year of rest. "The sabbatical year began in the seventh month, and the whole law was then read during the feast of tabernacles; so that holy occupation, not apathetic rest, characterized it, as in the case of the Sabbath day. At the completion of the week of sabbatical years the jubilee crowned the whole. Canaan's conquest took seven years, the allotment of land seven more; then began the law of the sabbatical year."<sup>v</sup> At one point it included the cancellation of all debts, but after rebuilding of the temple, lending money on interest was forbidden. "...the Sabbatical year bore to the other years precisely the same relationship as the Sabbath bore to the other days."<sup>vi</sup> It was a time of rest and renewal for the fields.

Scripture abounds with illustrations of God's leaders spending significant time in solitude and reflection in preparation for God's service and continuation of ministry. Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai (Ex 24.18). Elijah stood apart at the cave and listened to God (I Kings 19.13) Esther fasted three days to prepare for her calling to a "time such as this" (Esther 4.14-16). Elizabeth remained in seclusion during part of her pregnancy (Luke 1.24). Mary remained with Elizabeth for three months when she was expectant with the Christ child (Luke 1.56). John the Baptist received the word of God in the wilderness (Luke 3.2). At the Spirit's direction Paul spent days dwelling with various disciples prior to one of his beatings and his imprisonment (Acts 21.4-11). Jesus constantly sought relief from the crowds that followed him by going to the wilderness, a mountain, or by the sea (Matt 4.1, 5.1, 13.1, 13.53, 14.13, 15.29). Jesus called Peter, James and John with him to the mountain for the transfiguration (Matt 17. 1f, Mk 9.2f, Lk 9.28). Jesus took time away for prayer (Jn 18.1f)

### **Sabbath Leave Policy Appendix 3**

#### **Traditional Sabbath Leave Model**

- A minister/educator who has served in their present call for six (6) continuous years receive a Sabbath Leave of three (3) months.
- The Sabbath Leave would ordinarily come during the seventh year of ministry in one place.
- Sabbath Leave with full pay would not ordinarily exceed three months.
- Accrued vacation time and annual continuing education may be attached to the Sabbatical Leave.
- Individual churches, institutions, or agencies and the minister or educator could negotiate for a longer period depending upon the nature of the Sabbath Leave experience.
- Additional time without pay could be approved provided the total time away does not exceed four months.
- Upon completion of the Sabbath Leave, the incumbent minister or educator would normally continue serving the same call for a period of at least four times the length of the Sabbath Leave plus accrued vacation time.

- A minister or educator who contemplates seeking another call within the next 12 months should not participate in a Sabbath Leave.

### **Gradual Sabbath Leave Model**

- A minister/educator receives gradual Sabbath Leave after four (4) to twelve (12) years of continuous service of ministry in one place.
- After four (4) years, the minister/educator receives one (1) month of Sabbath Leave.
- After eight (8) years of service, the minister/educator receives two (2) months of Sabbath Leave.
- After twelve (12) years of service, the minister/educator receives three (3) months of Sabbath Leave.
- The Sabbath Leave would ordinarily come during the fifth, ninth, and thirteenth years of ministry in one place.
- Accrued vacation time and annual continuing education may be attached to the Sabbatical Leave. Individual churches, institutions, and agencies and the minister or educator could negotiate for a longer period depending upon the nature of the Sabbath Leave experience.
- Sabbath Leave with full pay would not ordinarily exceed three months.
- Additional time without pay could be approved provided the total time away does not exceed four months.
- Upon completion of the Sabbath Leave, the incumbent minister or educator would normally continue serving the same call for a period of at least four times the length of the Sabbath Leave plus accrued vacation time.
- A minister or educator who contemplates seeking another call within the next 12 months should not participate in a Sabbath Leave.