



## Recommended guidelines for Sabbaticals within FEC

### Rationale

The idea of a sabbatical is biblical. God's work of creation was followed by a sabbatical during which He rested from his labor. The Sabbath Day, the Year of Jubilee and the annual cycle of Feasts and Festivals was created by God for His people and are His gift of rest to us.

God has designed us to need rest. We believe that in Pastoral Ministry, the need for this time of rest is crucial. Pastoral Ministry is a work of production. Pastors, who are required to produce on a daily basis, need time away for themselves to be rejuvenated and refreshed. A sabbatical is a precious gift of time given to your very busy pastor.

Sabbaticals are more than a reward for years of service. They are an investment for healthy years of service to come. A sabbatical is one part of an overall Ministry Health plan designed to keep your pastor healthy. Please see the attachments for ideas of an overall Ministry Health Plan for your pastor.

A sabbatical done well can be an invaluable help to both a pastor and a congregation. Here is an example from the pastor at Grace Community Church in Newton, Kansas:

*I received my first Sabbatical after 38 years of pastoral ministry when the Elders of Grace Community Church established our first-ever Sabbatical policy. This was triggered by watching a classic burn-out of our youth pastor, who had served 9 years. The new policy 'gently mandates' that when a member of the pastoral staff has served seven years, the sabbatical is taken. We received eight weeks during the summer of 2009, and the second longest-tenured member of our pastoral staff received his in 2010.*

*In summary, the time away provided refreshment of spirit and body and an opportunity to think about ministry and our personal lives in a way that the pace of pastoral ministry rarely allows. I found that it created a quietness of spirit that enabled me to sense the Lord's direction in an unprecedented way.*

*We blended time with extended family and personal enrichment experiences with focused thinking about the general direction of the church.*

*In our experience, there are specific challenges associated with establishing a Sabbatical policy in a local church. The first has to do with educating the congregation, some of whom feel that since most working people don't get Sabbaticals, pastors shouldn't be an exception. We*

*worked hard to explain the value of a Sabbatical. There were also some in our body who assumed my Sabbatical was the first step out of ministry at Grace – a 'gentle exit.' The pastor himself will also face a significant adjustment during the transition, dealing with guilty feelings for creating a burden for the congregation in covering his responsibilities while not being 'productive.' I felt the strong need to establish a routine and structure to my days during my sabbatical.*

*Most pastors are forced to become 'production oriented' in ministry. "Sunday always comes," one of our retired FEC pastors once said. The gift of time and rest was a beautiful change from the daily routine. At the same time, I felt that there was a unique call on me for this time, and that was to think through the next five to ten years about what the future direction of the church's ministry would be, and given my age, what a pastoral transition would look like.*

*I find clarity in writing and while away, I wrote a paper proposing a number of areas of ministry redirection, growth, or new initiatives. By God's grace, the elders bought into each of these, sensing they were of the Lord. Much of our leadership work since then has been prioritizing these proposals and we have seen the Lord direct that process. One of those was the Church Multiplication initiative which we are seeing develop even now.*

## **Guidelines**

We are suggesting the following guidelines for sabbaticals in our FEC churches. The Elder Board is available to assist any church in their consideration of a suitable sabbatical arrangement for their congregation.

- Plans for a sabbatical for a pastor must be presented and discussed with the Church governing Board at least 6 months ahead of the intended sabbatical date. Sabbaticals for Associate Staff should be discussed with the senior Pastor before being presented to the Church Council.
- It is recommended that after 7 years of service, a pastor be granted three months for a sabbatical rest. Some churches grant up to 6 months. The sabbatical may be repeated after an additional 7 years of ministry. Each church is free to adjust the exact timetable according to their specific situation and needs.
- The pastor will continue to receive his salary during this time. The church may want to consider providing additional financial help such as travel expenses, lodging, or class fees related to the purpose of the sabbatical. The following web sites give information on applying for grants for sabbatical purposes. In one recent case, a pastor received a sabbatical grant of \$15,000 from the Louisville Institute. He used \$4,000 for his sabbatical expenses and his church received the remaining \$11,000. <http://www.lillyendowment.org/religion.html> and <http://www.louisville-institute.org/Grants/programs/sgpldetail.aspx>

- The pastor is expected to commit to at least one year of continued service to the congregation after returning to ministry at the church.
- It is recommended, though not prescribed, that the pastor divide the sabbatical time into three parts: one third for personal time with family; one third for personal and spiritual enrichment; one third for travel, reading and further educational growth in the area of pastoral ministry. These goals could be reached, for example, by family vacation time, marriage enrichment seminars, personal retreats, personal reading, auditing classes, attending conferences, or engaging in writing projects. One purpose of the sabbatical is to allow the pastor the precious gift of time to focus on his marriage, his family and his walk with the Lord – things which can unfortunately be neglected in the 'line of duty' in pastoral ministry.
- The sabbatical proposal must include a purpose for the sabbatical, a plan to accomplish it and a mechanism for providing feedback and communication to the congregation about the outcomes and achievements from the sabbatical time. For example, the pastor may be asked to submit a detailed written report of how he achieved the sabbatical plan or a paper communicating how his experience helped him grow in some personal or professional area.
- The Congregation may wish to form a temporary "Sabbatical committee" to work with the pastor in preparing for his leave of absence as well as helping to educate the congregation about the purpose and goals of the sabbatical. This would be an appropriate time to challenge the congregation as to how they might incorporate the call for a regular Sabbath rest in their own lives.
- The pastor is to be relieved of all ministry duties while on sabbatical, even if he remains in his home town. Where a church does not have multiple staff, the congregation must make preparations for the duties of the pastor to be covered. FEC is willing to assist the local church in their planning by, for example, suggesting a possible interim pastor. However, a pastoral sabbatical is a good opportunity for lay leadership in the church to use their gifts.

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**FEC Board of Elders**