



CRM Empowering Leaders

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SABBATICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to considering a Sabbatical all kinds of questions arise for a pastor, ministry leader or missionary as well as for those who oversee him or her: “What exactly is a Sabbatical, and is taking one a good idea?” “Is a Sabbatical something valid to ask for?” “In taking a Sabbatical, do the benefits outweigh the costs?” These questions are both reasonable and valid, so some exploration of their answers is contained within some of the broader questions below.

What is a Sabbatical?

A Sabbatical is not an extended vacation nor is it study leave. Rather, it’s an intentional process of disengaging from normal ministry and leadership involvement for typically a period of four to nine months after seven to ten years of ministry to allow for rest, renewal as well as attention to one’s spiritual formation and holistic development to which God is calling a pastor, minister or missionary. Often, it also includes a time of assessment and discernment regarding what life ministry should look like as one moves into the future.

Where does the concept of Sabbatical come from?

Just as the seventh day was set aside as Sabbath Day of rest (Ex. 20:8; Dt. 5:12), so the seventh year was set aside as the Sabbath Year (Lev. 25:1-7). The people and the land were to have a year of rest (Lev. 25:4,5) to allow time for physical and spiritual replenishment. Although this is no longer a mandate as it was in the Old Testament, the concept of Sabbatical stems from this idea. Although Sabbatical has been present within academia for a long time, it has come into the Church in more recent years as Church denominations, boards, elders and missionary agencies have recognized their pastors, ministry leaders and missionaries as valuable people who have been entrusted to them by God and whom God is calling them to steward well –with Sabbatical being an important part of this stewardship process.

Why is a Sabbatical important?

The health and well being of our souls has an impact on everything. The health of leaders' souls affects not only themselves and their close relationships, but it also impacts the health of their churches, ministries and those whom they influence both inside and outside the church. If we want our churches to be healthy and thriving and have significant impact on the community and the world with the love of Christ, our missionaries, pastors and ministry leaders need to be healthy and thriving as well as have rest and space to continue to cultivate their ability to discern God's calls to them in every part of their lives and ministries.

Because of the demands and challenges missionaries and pastors face daily in serving the unique needs of their communities and churches, many churches, mission and ministry organizations have discovered that taking a Sabbatical has shown to be helpful not only for the pastors and missionaries themselves, but also for the organizations or churches as well as their future impact with the Gospel.

What are the benefits of a Sabbatical?

In considering the benefits of a Sabbatical, the results of a five-year pilot Sabbatical Grant program by Wheat Ridge Ministries speaks what many have seen and experienced concerning the benefits of Sabbatical for both a pastor as well as his congregation. To put five years of significant findings succinctly they have found:

- "A sabbatical renewed the ministry leader's mind, body and spirit returning him or her to their congregation energized and more committed to their ministry."
- "The sabbatical experience refreshed the congregation and its lay leaders, through identifying and developing new lay leaders, renewed inspiration and energy for new ministries, and greater clarity regarding the mission and ministry of the congregation."
- "The renewal experienced by the ministry leader and congregation led to new energy and commitment for pursuing new ministry development."

Ellen Burany, Church Resource Ministries, November 2014

SABBATICAL PROCESS

CRM's ReNew Team wholeheartedly and supportively walks with missionaries, pastors and ministry leaders not only during their Sabbatical, but beforehand as they plan and prepare as well as after, as they are transitioning back to their field of service. In doing so, here are the general phases that take place:

Phase 1: Pre-Sabbatical Assessment

In order to determine how you are and what your needs are going into your Sabbatical we ask that you engage in:

1. Filling out a Sabbatical Questionnaire
2. Discussing your Questionnaire and goals with a ReNew Team member

At times, we might suggest one or more of the following:

1. Cerney Smith Assessment (Missionaries)
2. Marriage Assessment
3. Personality Assessment

Phase 2: Creation of a Sabbatical Plan

Based off of your assessments, personal insight and the insight of God, you and a ReNew Team member form a plan for your sabbatical that includes the following:

- Supportive people, places and structures you need during your Sabbatical
- A time of rest for your body and soul
- Attention to your spiritual formation and how God desires to form all areas of your life (relationally, socially, emotionally, mentally, physically)
- Reflection on the past and movement toward the future
- Transitioning back into ministry

It also includes:

- Discerning what your Sabbatical rhythms of life should be
- Making a general calendar of how you will engage in each of the above categories
- Deciding how often you will meet with your Sabbatical Coach

Phase 3: Off-ramping out of Ministry

This is the time where you are winding down ministry and preparing to exit and move into your Sabbatical. You will be given:

- An off-ramping checklist to help you think through the details that need to be covered as you leave.

*Phase 4: Rest & Renewal**

- Ceasing from ministry activity or activity that is "work-like"
- Incorporating restful, renewing and life-giving rhythms for your life
- Resources to help you engage in this phase

*Phase 4: Attention to Your Spiritual Formation**

- Spending time engaging in your relationship with God and abiding in Him
- Discerning and reflecting on how the Holy Spirit has been, is and desires to be forming and shaping you to be more like Christ
- Attending to particular ways God desires to form various areas of your life by His Spirit (relationally, socially, emotionally, mentally & physically)
- Resources to help you engage in this phase

Step 5: Reflection on the past and discernment concerning the future

In this step, you'll look at how God's formed and wired you as well as what He's done over time and how His Spirit might be moving and speaking as you move into the future. This includes:

- Looking back at how God has worked in you and through you
- Considering what's been life-giving and what's been life-sapping in life and ministry
- Looking at your giftings and wirings through what you already know and through assessments that might help you see even more
- Potentially, if it is desired, a small discernment group that will listen to God and to you in order to help you gain insight and encouragement concerning who you are as well as wisdom as you steward the whole of your life, including your vocation, as you move forward
- Resources to help you engage in this phase

Step 6: Transition back into ministry

During this last step, your Sabbatical coach will help you determine helpful ways to transition back into ministry and walk with you as you do so. This also includes:

- A helpful checklist for you to help you think through how you will onramp back into ministry
- Resources for your church or organization to help them know how to support you well in your transition
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*These phases may sometimes overlap.