

## Sabbatical (Part 2)

A policy of “professional development leave” (i.e., sabbatical) is something a church establishes for the benefit of both its pastoral ministers and the overall church. A sabbatical is *a period of time in which the minister is relieved from his normal duties with pay in order to renew and grow for future ministry*. The minister benefits with rest and a growth opportunity he would not otherwise get. The church benefits by having ministers who are refreshed and better at ministering. Professional development leave is one way a flock blesses itself by blessing its shepherds.

Here is Bluebonnet Baptist Association’s policy on professional development leave. I will use it to point out aspects to consider in formulating a policy for your church.

*The BBA recognizes the value of effective, long-term personnel. To maintain these relationships and maximize the effectiveness of staff, the BBA may grant leave for professional development of Board elected staff. Staff may request this leave during their sixth, twelfth, eighteenth, and twenty-fourth years of employment. Previous ministry service time is not included in determining years of employment for professional development leave. This leave will be for one month in addition to any accrued vacation time. The BBA may provide up to one month’s salary for the expenses of such leave as well as continued salary and benefits for the employee while they are on this leave.*

*The purpose of professional development leave is to renew an employee personally and professionally for future service to the BBA. For this reason, an employee must negotiate a plan with the Executive Director that can be presented to the Administrative Team for approval prior to the leave. This leave should be designed to invigorate an employee through a field-based experience, not primarily an academic experience.*

Notice the following elements that you will want to include in your policy.

1. A statement of purpose for the policy (i.e., why the church thinks this is important).
2. The timeframe for when the staff member is eligible to request a sabbatical. I recommend sabbatical eligibility after each five years of continual service.
3. How long the sabbatical may be. I recommend a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 90 days in addition to regular vacation time.
4. A provision for continuing the minister’s regular compensation during the sabbatical.
5. A provision for assisting with sabbatical expenses.
6. The general goals and guidelines for a sabbatical. I recommend that sabbaticals be built around a combination of rest, learning, and recreation.
7. How the minister goes about requesting a sabbatical and who approves it.

I realize that churches have a number of concerns about implementing a sabbatical policy. *Who will preach for us? How will decisions get made? Who will take care of the flock? How will we bear the*

*additional cost of supply preachers or other temporary personnel?* These are legitimate questions, but I believe with some planning and the partnership of your association these issues can be addressed. Here are some suggestions.

1. As part of the written sabbatical proposal, the minister should propose a plan for how his area of responsibility will be covered while he is on leave.

2. Once approved, the terms of the sabbatical, including how responsibilities will be covered, should be communicated clearly with the congregation and church staff.

3. If supply preachers from outside the church are needed during the sabbatical, contact the association in advance to help. BBA staff members will provide pulpit supply when requested and available or will help the church arrange for other supply preachers.

4. If the costs of supply preachers, other temporary staff, or sabbatical expenses for the minister on leave are a challenge for the church, the association will consider partnering to help defray the cost. Contact the Executive Director in advance so that a partnership plan can be developed.

Church, do yourself and your ministers a favor by implementing a policy for professional development leave. Help your pastors rest and grow by providing them with the special opportunity for a sabbatical. I believe it will help more pastors *stay put, stay healthy, and stay focused on their call*. That, in turn, will help more churches experience health.