

Pastoral Care & Wellness Committee of the COM  
**Sabbatical Leave Planning**

- A. As of 2003, a sabbatical leave for pastors receiving calls within Shenandoah Presbytery became a standard feature of the terms of call. The Presbytery's policy defining Sabbatical Leave is as follows:

**Sabbatical Leave Policy: Pastors & Certified Educators in Shenandoah Presbytery**

**Policy statement:**

The Presbytery of Shenandoah requires that all new calls for full-time, installed pastors and full-time Certified Christian Educators include a compensated sabbatical of at least three (3) months after six (6) years of service to a particular position.

**Minister or Educator responsibilities:**

1. To bring at least six (6) months prior to the sabbatical a written proposal including a detailed description of the Sabbatical, the goals to be achieved and the expected benefits for the person and for the congregation.
2. Consult with the Session in bringing up to date all pending responsibilities before departing on a sabbatical and participating with the Session in preparing the congregation for the sabbatical period.
3. Upon return, to remain in the present position at least one year and to join with the congregation in reflecting upon the value and benefit.

**Session Responsibilities:**

1. To budget from the first year of service, money that can be accrued for the use of the session in meeting any additional expenses required to provide alternative leadership for the church during the Sabbatical.
2. To receive the minister or educator's proposal for a sabbatical at least six (6) months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
3. Upon receipt of the proposal for a sabbatical, to begin developing a congregational plan for the Sabbatical, listing their goals and the financial implications.
4. Consult with the minister or educator in bringing up to date all pending responsibilities before a sabbatical and taking responsibility in preparing the congregation for the sabbatical period.
5. Upon completion of the sabbatical, to join with both the pastor/educator and congregation in reflecting upon the value and benefits of the sabbatical.

- B. In an effort to help pastors and churches plan for these sabbaticals, the Pastoral Care and Wellness sub-committee of the Committee on Ministry offers the following suggestions.

**1. Funding**

a) Grants are available from a variety of sources:

- i. *Lilly Endowment - National Clergy Renewal Grant.* P. O. Box 88068, Indianapolis, IN 46208-0068. <http://www.clergyrenewal.org>.
- ii. *Louisville Institute - Sabbatical Grants for Pastoral Leadership.* 1044 Alta Vista Rd., Louisville, KY 40205. <http://www.louisville-institute.org>.

- iii. *Professional Development Grants*. A service of Shenandoah Presbytery. <http://www.shenpres.org/ScholarshipGrants>.
  - iv. *Strong Minister's Program*. Another funding source provided by Shenandoah Presbytery. <http://www.shenpres.org/StrongMin>.
- b) Some funds are available to the church through the PC&W Committee of Presbytery for churches of fewer than 250 members to help subsidize pulpit supply and pastoral care in the pastor's absence. Apply to the PC&W Committee.

## 2. Resources

- a) There are a number of pastors and congregations in the Presbytery that have gone through this process and can be of assistance to you in planning. Among them are: Ann Held, John Peterson, Rich Reifsnyder, Dan McCoig, Mary Lou McMillin, David Witt, Thom Rhyne, and Bill Klein.
- b) Books on the subject
  - i. *Alban Institute*. "Clergy Renewal - the Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning." In Shenandoah Presbytery Resource Center - BK S06 5F009
  - ii. *Congregations*. Summer 2004. ShenPres Resource Center - PP T02 COU04.
  - iii. *Journeying Toward Renewal*. Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals. ShenPres Resource Center - BK S06 5F012.

## 3. Time Line

- a) Begin thinking about and planning the sabbatical leave 18 months prior to the time you intend the leave to begin. Gather resources to help fund the project. Engage members of the congregation to plan with you.
- b) Make application for funding well in advance. Talk to others who have taken a sabbatical.

## 4. Engaging the congregation

- a) Newsletters. Prepare the congregation well in advance through newsletter articles. Consider having someone from the personnel committee or Session write the article.
- b) Leave taking. Give some thought to a special send off to begin the sabbatical leave...and then a special welcome home event at the sabbatical's conclusion. Your 'send off' might include a commissioning service and/or blessing for the Sabbatical.

C. Random quotes from those who have taken a sabbatical leave...and from an Elder.

What did you do on your sabbatical leave?

Rich Reifsnyder writes: 10 days at Alban Institute in a program called New Vision for Long Term Pastorates; time on Iona in Scotland; a week at the College of Preachers at the National Cathedral in Washington; read lots of books; conducted a survey of 200 of my seminary classmates asking the question "what has sustained you in ministry after 35 years"--especially focusing on the role of friendship in ministry.

John Peterson writes: Two segments. First, I attended a preaching conference in California and then spent a week on the west coast for some reading/reflective time, then spent several days at a hospital conference in Arizona. In a second segment I spent two weeks in France and three weeks in Scotland with family and friends.

Bill Klein writes: Two segments. First involved time with family as follows: a number of days in Paris; a week cycling in Normandy; several days touring in London; a week in the Cotswold's; a day at Lindisfarne; a week in Edinburgh, a week on Iona. My three children went back to the states. Spent 10 days simply with my wife traveling in Glasgow, the Lake District, Wales, and back in London. Second segment involved undisturbed time at home writing.

Ann Held writes: The theme of my sabbatical was *Nurturing the Spiritual Leadership of Trinity*. I took three weeks to go to Europe with my daughter. We went to Geneva, Paris, Taize, Edinburgh, Iona, the Lake District, Oxford, and London. Primarily I was tracing the steps of our reformed heritage and exploring new worship styles and spiritual practices. In the US, I had a week long silent retreat at a monastery, spent three weeks at Church of the Savior in D.C. working in one of their ministries and attending different mission groups. I also took an Alban Institute class on spiritual leadership and the session read the same book and had a consultant lead them in that on their retreat. I had special times with my husband and daughters.

How did the congregation benefit from your sabbatical leave?

John Peterson writes: It was helpful for the church to see how much they were doing in ministry without me; they didn't just wait for my return, they kept on keeping on. Also, I came back with a greater appreciation for the blessing of serving in this place.

Ann Held writes: I brought back new worship ideas from Iona and Taize and that has been integrated into the life of the church. We have a quarterly healing service which is a direct result of this sabbatical.

What was the benefit for you?

Ann Held writes: It was the first time in my ministry --over 20 years that I had a true extended break--no responsibilities. I truly got renewed physically, emotionally and

spiritually. It also helped me re-establish a devotional life which continues 7 years afterwards.

Mary Lou McMillin writes: It truly 'restored my health'...mentally, spiritually, and physically and gave me renewed enthusiasm for my work. It also 'began' the transformation within me of understanding more fully what it is to 'simply BE'... rather than feeling the need to always be DOING.

What advice would you give someone planning a Sabbatical?

Mary Lou McMillin writes: The advice given me by a member of Office and Personnel was: "Don't think that you have to do anything that is directly related to your work...this is a time to do something entirely different...something you haven't had the opportunity to do before!" This really freed me to dream...and to relax in a new and different way!

Dan McCoig writes: Avoid the impulse to "do something" so you may simply "be." Pursue both professional and personal interests.

Bill Klein writes: Get a task force together of church members willing to think with you and plan with you about the sabbatical. Let representatives from that task force help communicate what you are doing to the congregation - why it is important to the pastor and the congregation.

An Elder's view of the sabbatical leave:

Dianne Herrick, Lexington Presbyterian Church Elder writes: The sabbatical leave benefitted our congregation in many ways. As we prepared for our pastor's departure, we recognized and celebrated his ministry to the church and the community. We wished him God's blessings as he and his family departed on a well-deserved time away. We celebrated again upon his return. Our minister - and the congregation - all benefitted from the "Time for Renewal."

(draft 3/09)