

Section Three: Appendix P

A Sabbatical Leave Policy Statement for Northeast Georgia Presbytery

Rationale for Sabbatical Leave

(as described in the “Sample Leave Policy for Presbyteries and Congregations”)

Someone has compared the life of a minister with that of a taxi leaving an airport. It is so loaded down with passengers and suit cases and the other items that the car has a hard time even moving and is strained to the breaking point yet the taxi may be only a few years old. So it is with clergy. They bear the burdens, the anguish, the pain, and hurt of their parishioners 24-7 – that is 24 hours, seven days a week. As a result, many, if not all, experience to one degree or another symptoms of emotional collapse, stress related illnesses, and “burnout” adversely affecting the minister’s personal, family, and parish life, and greatly diminishing his or her effectiveness and well-being. For too long, this situation has been accepted, even tolerated as an inevitable part of the job.

A viable solution to the unique stresses and strains the clergy encounter is the Sabbath Leave, sometimes referred to as a Sabbatical. This solution has its roots in Scripture and in church tradition.

Although on the face of it, the Sabbatical Leave may seem like yet another financial burden for the local congregation to bear, it is crucial for Session and congregation to recognize the long-term benefits they as a church will reap from granting Sabbaticals.

Ministers/certified educators who have the opportunity to examine issues of professional growth and development as ministers/certified educators within an existing pastorate are more likely to stay more years in a particular call. The sabbatical provision conveys a sense of support and caring on the part of the calling church. **It also offers an incentive to both ministers and certified educators to commit to and think in terms of longer years of service in a particular church.**

The financial cost of the Sabbatical Leave can be absorbed through creative pre-planning. It is strongly urged that ministers/certified educators and churches discuss the provision of and begin preparing for Sabbatical Leave at the time the minister is first called.

In summary, *Sabbatical leave is an important part of maintaining one’s focus, commitment, passion and skill for ministry* – and is a wise investment in the long-term.

All of the above benefits are mirrored by the employing church/agency. It is the church family that

can reap the benefits of a recommitted, revitalized minister/church educator. At the same time, the employing church/agency has the opportunity to discover new, previously untapped talents from their church family.

A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning, (An Alban Institute Publication, 2000), P. 6

Definitions

(as described in the "Sample Leave Policy for Presbyteries and Congregations")

Sabbatical Leave for ministers and church certified educators is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. Sabbatical Leave follows precedents in the academic community and among a growing number of private sector groups. This "extended time" is qualitatively different from "vacation" or "days off." It is an opportunity for the individual to strategically disengage from regular and normal tasks so that ministry and mission may be viewed from a new perspective because of a planned time of focus.

Sabbatical Leave is an extension of the Biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal. It is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and changed activity and occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that ministers and certified church educators serving within the Northeast Georgia Presbytery currently have no definable means to request Sabbatical Leave and that churches within Northeast Georgia Presbytery currently have no parameters within which to grant a Sabbatical Leave, the Committee on Ministry appointed a Sabbatical Task Force to study this issue and "develop a Sabbatical Policy Statement" to address this need.

The Task Force utilized *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*, by A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff as well as the study results of the previous Task Force in its deliberations. As a result of prayerful study and consideration, the Task Force determined that it would be more appropriate to develop guidelines and parameters, rather than a "policy statement" in order to provide the maximum flexibility to meet the particular needs of each church. The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Ministry consider presenting this issue to Presbytery in three parts:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Committee on Ministry recommends that Northeast Georgia Presbytery adopt, in principle, a program to provide Sabbatical Leave to ministers and certified educators serving within Northeast Georgia Presbytery. The Committee is not recommending that this be formally incorporated into the Presbytery's mandatory conditions of call. Rather, the provision of Sabbatical Leave should be left to the individual churches to voluntarily incorporate this provision into their individual pastoral calls or certified educator's contracts. (This recommendation was approved by presbytery.)

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Committee on Ministry recommends that Presbytery adopt the following Sabbatical Leave

Guidelines for Administration. (These guidelines were approved by presbytery.)

SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTRATION

Recognizing that churches within Northeast Georgia Presbytery vary in size, programming and need, it is the intent of this policy to provide guidelines and broad parameters within which ministers, certified educators, and professionals can request and churches can provide Sabbatical Leave to ministers and certified educators.

Churches should work closely with the Committee on Ministry when granting Sabbatical Leave in order to address the unique situations of the particular church.

Eligibility:

To be eligible, the minister/certified educator must have completed six (6) years of consecutive credited service in the same call.

Duration:

Sabbatical Leave with full pay may be for a period of up to one quarter (13 weeks). However, if taken in conjunction with a negotiated portion of earned vacation and study leave for that year it shall not to exceed a total of seventeen (17) weeks.

Continuation of Salary and Benefits:

The employing church will continue the ministers/certified educator salaries, pension/major medical benefits, book allowance and, at the direction of the Session, continued education reimbursement. Any other benefits may be determined by mutual agreement among the particular church, minister/certified educator, and Presbytery's Committee on Ministry.

Planning for Sabbatical Leave:

Planning for a Sabbatical Leave should begin one (1) year, but not less than six (6) months prior to the beginning of the Leave. Presbytery recommends *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* by A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff as an excellent resource for churches/agencies contemplating Sabbatical Leave.

Written Plan

A detailed written plan of renewal with identified goals and expectations must be approved by the Session in consultation with the Presbytery Committee on Ministry at least six months before the anticipated departure. If requested, Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry, or other designated committee, may assist the local church in securing a supply pastor for the sabbatical period.

Minister/Certified Educator Supply

In addition to continuation of the minister's/educators salaries, pension/major medical benefits, book allowance, etc., the employing church will also contract for Supply ministers/certified educator services during the period of the Sabbatical Leave. Again, Presbytery through the Committee on Ministry, or other designated committee, may assist in

securing appropriate personnel for those services for the particular church.

Funding of Sabbatical Leave

It is strongly urged that ministers/certified educators and churches discuss the provision of – and begin planning for – the funding of a Sabbatical Leave at the time the minister is first called. A budget line item could be established to set aside funds each year for this purpose. Planning ahead will also provide the opportunity for creative planning and alternative funding of the Sabbatical Leave.

Re-Entry:

Within a month of the conclusion of the Sabbatical, the Minister/Certified Educator, Session and a representative of Presbytery's Committee on Ministry shall participate in a consultation. At this time, the Minister/Certified Educator, Session, will present in writing their experiences and learning during the Sabbatical. Immediately following this consultation, the written report will be provided to the Committee on Ministry.

Again, Presbytery commends "Alban Institutes, *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* by A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff to both churches/agencies and ministers/certified educators as an excellent guide for the "re-entry process."

In addition to receiving the minister's/educator's report, the re-entry process provides a great opportunity for the Church Session to reflect upon the benefits that resulted from the Sabbath Leave. Such expected benefits as:

- Discovering the strength of lay leadership heretofore under-utilized;
- New understandings of the concepts of mission between clergy and congregation; and
- Reaffirmation of calling to ministry on part of clergy and congregation with both being reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of God's people.

Terminated Service:

Ideally, as stated above – and reflected in *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* by A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, the result of Sabbatical is the renewal of relationships and reconnection with the community in the minister's/educator's particular congregation or agency. The Sabbatical is not intended to be utilized as an opportunity for the minister/educator to search for an alternate church or agency in which to serve. However, it must be recognized that in some cases, the Sabbatical may solidify the minister's/educator's awareness of being called away from the present place of ministry.

Similarly, the Sabbatical is not intended to be utilized as an opportunity for the church to search for an alternate minister or educator. However, the Sabbatical may also be a time during which the congregation or agency realizes its own need for different leadership.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Committee on Ministry recommends that Presbytery adopt the following Sabbatical Leave Guidelines for Funding: (The presbytery approved these guidelines for funding and did establish a Sabbatical Fund as a part of the Committee on Ministry's budget.)

SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES FOR FUNDING

It is strongly urged that ministers/certified educators and churches discuss the provision of -- and begin planning for -- the funding of a Sabbatical Leave at the time the minister is first called. The following guidelines provide a suggested method of funding. However, these guidelines are voluntary and Churches/agencies are encouraged to develop a funding method that best addresses the needs of the particular church/agency. Whatever strategy is decided upon, the employing church/agency should report the chosen funding strategy to Presbytery's Committee on Ministry for review to ensure compliance with any applicable funding regulations.

- The program requires the participation of three parties; a church professional, the employing organization and the Presbytery.
- Each party will contribute to the funding and retain an interest in the particular share until the sabbatical is performed.
- The minister's/church educator's contribution will be taken from the portion of the employing organization's budget for staff and taken before distribution to the church professional. (i.e. before tax liability to the individual)
- The employing organization's contribution will be attached to the employee's part and both parts placed in a separate account.
- The Presbytery share will be contributed annually in a "set aside fund" controlled by the Presbytery.
- In the event the relationship between church professional and particular church ends prior to the exercise, the minister's/church educator's portion shall be paid to the individual as taxable income. The employing organization's portion remains with the organization and the Presbytery's portion remains with the Presbytery.
- To fund a three month period of leave on a six year schedule will require about 2% (or less) of the annual salary (basic) from each party. $.06 \times \text{salary} \times 6 \text{ years} = .36$ of annual salary to be applied to a four month interim. (At one percent; $.03 \times \text{salary} \times 6 \text{ years} = .18$ of annual salary to be applied to a four month interim.) Add interest accrual and the target deduction might be .014 of salary base.

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