



Joy and peace to you in our Lord and Savior, Jesus!

Enclosed are several documents connected with sabbaticals, as you requested.

We on the Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support are pleased to provide this resource to you and others. We think that the time has come for a broader consideration of the helpfulness of sabbaticals for our professional church workers.

We also recommend The Alban Institute's *Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical* by Roy Oswald and *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning* by Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff (www.alban.org). Wheat Ridge Ministries' web site at (<http://www.wheatridge.org>) and Lilly Foundation at (<http://www.lilly.com>) also have several sabbatical resources, as well as grant information available.

As you further investigate this area, if you discover other articles that might be broadly helpful, please let me know and, if appropriate, they can be added to this collection.

In His Service,

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Enclosures

Sabbatical Guidelines and Resources For Congregations of the FL-GA District Prologue

The word “sabbatical” is derived from “Sabbath.” Historically, in church and academia, the professionals were given a Sabbath (sabbatical) every seventh year. The observation was that academic professors and clergy, after six years of teaching and leading, needed a time of rest, recovery, renewal, and re-education for their field of endeavor. The assumptions were that it paid off for the professional person (avoiding breakdown) and that it paid off for the institution (re-energized and updated leadership). It is based on Genesis 2:1-4a, in which God modeled and later required (Exodus 20:8-11) the setting aside of 1/7th of our time for restoration. The Alban Institute, an organization that does consulting and research with congregations, clergy and church administrative teams, has long recognized the importance of sabbaticals for clergy.

Ministers desperately need to recreate and restore what has been worn down by day-to-day encounters with reality. Nourishing one’s soul and regaining perspective requires a change of pace and place – a pilgrimage. Jesus provides us a good example to follow. He was always moving toward His Father – in prayer, in His teaching, in His travel. And the Apostles who walked with Him were renewed day by day. That’s what sabbatical is about – a pilgrimage with Jesus toward our Heavenly Father. Journeying with Jesus we come to know that there is more to life than suffering or hopelessness. We are moving toward the climax and glory of what is to come. Like the early apostles, we can be recharged by walking with Jesus during an extended time of reflection, spiritual encounter, and community.

Sabbatical typically includes time for travel, rest, prayer, and experiencing different cultures. The best sabbaticals usually are more open-ended than rigid, allowing for the surprises and possible new direction that may come. Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in His ministry. Moses’ time spent tending sheep helped change his perspective on life. David tended sheep and learned valuable lessons about God’s care and provision. Paul, struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years, and emerged with a new vision. Sabbatical is a time to receive, to be nurtured, to reflect on your relationship with God and your own story, so that you can be renewed, refreshed, and revitalized by the breath of God.

Bullock, Richard. Revised from Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations. Washington, D.C: The Alban Institute, 1990.

Sabbath may be viewed as multi-dimensional, which may be diagrammed as concentric circles beginning the center with daily “Sabbath time” (15 – 30 minutes), weekly (2 days), monthly (24 hour retreat), annually, and sabbatical time after 4 – 7 years of service.

I. Values and Assumptions

- A. Giving support to professional workers in maintaining good health benefits the worker, the worker’s family, the congregation, and the church at large.
- B. Healthy professional workers build healthy congregations and schools.
- C. Where there is a good match between the professional worker and a congregation, a long term ministry is desirable. In such instances a sabbatical is cost effective. (cf. New Vision for the Long Pastorate, Oswald, Hinand, Hobgood, Lloyd. Alban Institute, 1990)

- D. Good self-care, which includes regularly scheduled sabbatical, keeps a professional worker healthy. It can enable him/her to achieve a new sense of vision, renew his/her calling, evaluate his/her gifts and skills and the needs of the ministry.
- E. The sabbatical time can open up new opportunities for members to grow in service and be a blessing for the congregation or administrative team.
- F. Sabbatical leave should be an ongoing *intentional* part of a congregation's/administrative team's ministry, not a reaction to a crisis. (i.e. Burnout)
- G. A professional worker that practices good self-care remains healthier and may extend his or her ministry.
- H. Sabbaticals are a way that congregations/administrative teams can minister to their professional workers.
- I. Every congregation/administrative team has its own unique challenges and resources and therefore needs to develop its own sabbatical "policy."

II. Recommendations and Guidelines for Developing a Sabbatical Policy

A. Determine the time parameters.

1. When?

Timing is crucial so as to minimize disruption to the congregation. Plan long in advance to prepare the congregation for a smooth transition. The professional worker and congregation will need about a year to plan the sabbatical.

2. How long?

The Florida—Georgia District recommends 3 months + vacation time (not in place of) every 4 to 7 years.

Clarify and distinguish vacation and sabbatical. A sabbatical is not simply a "reward" or vacation, but an important part of the working relationship between professional church worker and congregation.

Ask: Can the sabbatical purpose and goals be achieved in the time available?

B. Determine Financial Arrangements

- 1. A continuation of full salary and benefits during sabbatical (except car allowance) is advisable.

2. How will this be financed? Some options might include:

Entirely financed by the congregation where this is possible. This could be provided for in the annual budget or through special gifts.

The congregation and professional worker each contributing 3% of salary and housing to a sabbatical. After seven years, the professional worker would be able to take a leave of three months plus vacation with pay. The funds accrued, plus interest, would be paid to the professional worker over the period of the sabbatical.

Retired professional workers, or area professionals, may be willing to volunteer their services to make it possible for congregations with limited resources to provide a sabbatical.

Alternate financing may be available, depending on the nature of the sabbatical (e.g. grants through Wheat Ridge, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, etc.).

3. What about *additional* costs? (e.g. Supply preaching/teaching, pastoral assistance)
4. Would the congregation assist with *tuition costs*, where it is feasible?

C. Make Specific Sabbatical Plans

1. Design

Sabbaticals are very individual. There is no right or wrong plan. There needs to be a mutual agreement by the worker and the congregation as to the nature of the sabbatical plan. It is useful to have a “mentor” (one who has done it) help develop the plan. Determine whether the sabbatical will be programmed or open-ended.

Some options might include:

- Encounters with other cultures and with Christian communities in other countries, especially less developed ones (e.g. Mission trip)
- Research or writing on independent projects or as part of a formal seminar or academic program
- Directed reflection on personal and spiritual issues
- Recreation and rest

2. Purpose

A sabbatical could reflect several purposes: spiritual renewal, theological reflection, creative expression, pastoral concerns, justice issues, intellectual growth, decision making time, travel, family time, etc.

The professional church worker needs to ask him/her self what he/she wants to happen to self personally. How would he/she like the congregation and his/her family to benefit?

A sabbatical is a time to NOT DO what you normally do (e.g. Do not preach, teach, do normal preparation for ministry, “set foot on the church property”, etc.)

3. Physical setting

This could be a retreat center, foreign travel, home, university, etc. (Note: Places like Holden Village, Chelon, Washington, have a “sabbatical” program)

Boundaries are important and need to be established in writing and agreed upon; for example, a complete absence from the congregation, even when the worker is in town.

4. Other considerations

The congregation may want to appoint a Sabbatical Committee (5 members, which may include the President and Elder Chairman and Care Committee members) to assist both the professional worker and congregation in planning the sabbatical.

Recognize that it will take at least two years of education to help the congregation understand the value of the sabbatical the first time they offer it. Don't rush this. Gain the congregation's ownership and support.

Clarify sabbatical *benefits* to professional worker *and* congregation. A good sabbatical meets a mutual need. What does the worker want to happen to him/her personally? How would he/she like the congregation to benefit? What can be special for his/her spouse, children, and friends?

What responsibilities need to be continued in the professional church worker's absence? How and by whom will these responsibilities be carried out? What is the congregation's plan for pastoral care and public worship during the sabbatical?

Are there any restrictions being placed on the professional worker following the sabbatical? (e.g. Must remain for at least 1 year following sabbatical)

5. Following the Sabbatical

A "*Re-entry Plan*" is crucial. Expect some "anger" from members and staff, as well as to feel disconnected and out of touch. Both the worker and congregation are in a different place following the Sabbatical. It is helpful to "re-negotiate" roles and expectations as part of the re-entry process. (This could be an important function of the congregational care Committee.)

Submit a *report* to the congregation as a way of debriefing and reconnecting.

IV. Resources

1. Alban Institute Consultant – 800-486-1318 (e.g. Roy Oswald)
2. Those in the Florida – Georgia District who have taken a sabbatical – Tim Hartner, Karl Dunker, and David Bernthal
3. The Committee for Continuing Education, The Florida – Georgia District
3. Dawn, Marva. Keeping the Sabbath Wholly. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.

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SABBATICAL PROJECT LEAVE POLICY

**Resurrection Lutheran Church
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The purpose of the Sabbatical Project Leave is to provide time for the pastor to gain perspective on ministry by stepping out of it for a specified length of time. During the Sabbatical Project Leave, the pastor will engage in a special project, study, travel, mission, retreat, or other planned activities for renewal. This Sabbatical Project Leave is a part of the ministry of this congregation, and the planning and implementation of the Sabbatical are part of our pastor's job to maintain and enhance his professional skills and his spiritual growth. The components of the Sabbatical Project Leave are specified as follows:

I. Eligibility The pastor is eligible for the Sabbatical Project Leave after serving as pastor full time for seven (7) years; he shall ordinarily be eligible thereafter every five (5) or six (6) years.

II. Length of Sabbatical Project Leave "Ordinarily a period of three (3) consecutive months for each period of five consecutive years of service" [or, "a period of six (6) weeks for each period of three consecutive years of service"]. (The amount of time allowed and funds budgeted for annual education & study leave ordinarily provided continues, except in the year of the Sabbatical, when they are applied to the Sabbatical. Sabbatical Leave Time is not vacation time.)

III. Necessary Arrangements

A. Before

1. At least six months prior, the pastor shall submit the Sabbatical Project Leave Plan, so that pastor and congregation can continue planning together. The Plan, submitted to the President of the Church Council and to the Head Elder, shall contain the following:

- a. Time, length, and purpose planned for the Sabbatical
- b. Proposals for planning to provide for the professional service replacement
- c. Informing the Circuit Counselor and the President of the Pacific Southwest District that a Sabbatical is planned (and asking if resources for assisting the pastor and/or parish for Sabbatical are available).

2. After review of the Plan, discussion with the pastor, and jointly with the pastor making adjustments as necessary, the President and/or Head Elder shall recommend the Plan to the Church Council for approval and action.

B. During

1. A complete break from all professional duties and parish responsibilities shall be in effect for the pastor during the entire Sabbatical Project Leave.
2. The pastor shall develop some method to record and means to give a Report to the congregation after the Sabbatical is completed.
3. The members of the parish will work together and in cooperation with the professional replacement(s) to maintain and enhance the mission and ministry of the church.

C. After

1. Within three months after the Sabbatical, the pastor shall offer a Report and Evaluation to the congregation of the impact of the Sabbatical Project.
2. Ordinarily, the pastor will continue service at this church for a least one year.

IV. Finances

A. Salary, housing, and benefits shall continue.

B. The Sabbatical is a necessary part of our pastor's professional, spiritual, and business life, and expenses shall be reimbursed as possible. The pastor shall present itemized billing for reimbursed business expense.

C. The congregation shall establish a Sabbatical Fund in an interest bearing account (ordinarily, \$1,200 per year shall be budgeted).

D. Sabbatical Fund monies shall be distributed according to needs inherent in the Sabbatical Plan. (It is hoped that approximately one-third available would be used to provide for professional service replacement and two-thirds used to reimburse applicable Sabbatical expenses incurred by the pastor on leave.) Ordinarily, only monies available from the Sabbatical Fund will be used to support Sabbatical expenses. If the pastor moves or retires, one-half of existing funds is for his use.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE SABBATICAL PROJECT LEAVE

What is a Sabbatical? Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines "Sabbatical Year" as follows: "a. Jewish Antiq. Every seventh year, in which the Israelites were commanded to suffer their fields to lie without tillage [Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:1-7]; b. A leave of absence granted every seventh year, as to a college professor, for rest, travel, or research." In the academic community, the standard is six months to a year leave time. The recommended standard for churches is **three months of leave** time for every six years (or six weeks every three years) of service in the same parish. Sabbaticals are beneficial for both parish and pastor for a number of reasons.

1. "There are so many reasons why sabbaticals are of value to an institution – more than anything else, perhaps, is the fact that they are an important investment in the key personnel of the institution. **When leadership is renewed, the organization is renewed.**" ["The Common Sense of Sabbaticals or Project Leaves," provided by the Rev. Dr. Bruce Hartung, of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO.]

2. New Visions for the Long Pastorate [published by the Alban Institute, 1983] conducted a study of long-term pastorates (ten years or longer) and discovered "**powerful evidence favoring long pastorates.**" The researchers concluded: "While all the disadvantages of a long pastorate [such as communication gaps, stagnation, burn-out] can be managed with skill and training, few of the enormous advantages of a long pastorate [such as continuity, stability, in-depth knowledge of relationships, possibility of greater spiritual growth] are available to shorter ministries." (p.7) The book concludes: "In many ways, maintaining a healthy long pastorate is more difficult than changing pastorates every five to eight years. Clergy can dazzle and even fool a congregation over shorter periods of ministry. Many simply repeat their five year bag of tricks everywhere they go. In a long pastorate, people get to know their clergy very well, both their assets and their liabilities. These clergy either need to be genuine, authentic persons who live by what they preach and advocate or, to the detriment of their ministry, they are soon found out. It is infinitely easier to be the spiritual mentor of people over the short haul than over the long haul." (p.87) A **Sabbatical Project Leave** for the pastor is one recommended way to provide **renewal and perspective** for both pastor and parish to keep the balance tipped in favor of the strong advantages of a longer-term pastorate. The Sabbatical helps to sustain the pastor's personal, professional, and spiritual growing edge. (pp. 60-63) The pastor as "spiritual mentor" only works when the pastor is renewed and refreshed. This book recommends three months Sabbatical Leave for every three years of ministry (!) [Update: six weeks every three years].

3. **Sabbaticals are both cost effective and spiritually beneficial for parishes.** Setting funds aside each year to accumulate monies to help support the pastor's leave and to provide for professional replacement is much less expensive than going through the high costs of paying moving costs for a new pastor every five or six years. Spiritual benefits for the parish include the potential for new perspectives and varied approaches in

preaching, teaching, leading by guest pastor(s) during this three month break from the routine. After the Sabbatical, the possibilities for renewed zeal and enthusiasm for new visions for ministry together by the returning pastor and the parish are certainly increased.

4. In the Alban Institute Publication titled Sabbatical Planning for Clergy & Congregations (1987), emphasis is given to the **special benefits to the congregation** in having the Church Council and other members involved in the planning process to make preparations for the continuation of ministry. Lay participants in an Alban Institute Workshop concluded, **“We’re on sabbatical, too.”** (p. 10) Church boards and the entire congregation gain new insights into how ministry is conducted, take on new responsibilities in the process, and become more involved in leadership and ministry. Lay participants in an Alban Institute Workshop concluded, **“We’re on sabbatical, too.”** (p. 10) Church boards and the entire congregation gain new insights into how ministry is conducted, take on new responsibilities in the process, and become more involved in leadership and ministry. The book recommends a sabbatical which includes time for travel, study, rest, prayer, and seeing different cultures. (p. 4) Pastors who regularly have put in 60+ hour weeks and who face a weekly sermon deadline week after week and who spend themselves in ministry to the varying needs of people “may grow weary trying to operate a service agency on a shoestring without volunteers or paid staff. The situations differ, but the reality is the same. You reach a point where you must get off the treadmill for awhile...A sabbatical gets one off the treadmill and provides an opportunity for renewal and hope. It’s more than just a chance to recharge your batteries for another year. It can be a life and soul-changing time-a time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together.” (p.2)

J. W. Hallerberg/5-22-02[9/21/92] File: “SABPLCY” Resurrection Lutheran Church, Coronado, CA. Adopted/Funded: Council Meeting June 1992.



48 hours to be renewed – refreshed – relaxed and energized for ministry

by Rev. Walt Waiser, Peace Lutheran, Hurst

I'm not sure exactly when I took my first **48 hour retreat for solitude and prayer**. It all began by going off for that purpose to a nearby lake for eight hours; next I tried a 24-hour period, then I explored 48 hours. After a number of 48-hour retreats, I was led to Big Bend National Park, to spend a week in the desert. That week in the desert was in January of 1990.

I write this piece at the end of my most recent 48-hour retreat, this one at Lake Whitney State Park. On a Monday noon through Wednesday noon, it is easy to find a quiet place in mid April. In the outdoors, surrounded by bluebonnets, near the water, with numerous cardinals singing, and a fire to provide the needed warmth evening and morning, **this is just what I needed** in these post-Easter days.

Those who have attended a Prayer Retreat I've led, or heard me talk about it, know that this is a quarterly pattern in my life and ministry. **God keeps me spiritually refreshed** by devoting this 48-hour period to Him each quarter. As I have experienced once again, it leaves me **renewed, refreshed, relaxed and energized for ministry**. Who is involved in ministry who does not feel a need for the same after another wonderful, but draining, Lent-Holy Week-Easter Celebration?

The longer I experience this quarterly pattern of going off alone for 48 hours, **the more I value it**. While the 23rd Psalm is powerful promise and strength for so many, we seem rather selective in the parts we will emphasize. When was the last time you heard an emphasis on "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still water, **He restores my soul**." I have discovered that when I do not let God "make me lie down in green pastures, and lead me beside still water", I keep him from "restoring my soul" because I won't be still long enough.

Whenever I am still and quiet for this 48-hours, **God does His work to renew, refresh, relax and energize me**, to return to ministry in Jesus' name. This retreat gives me extra time to reflectively journal about plans and directions he has for ministry. It gives me extra time to meditate on God's Word (currently in Hebrews 5) and time for prayer. Both of the evenings ended with extended time for prayer for many on my personal prayer list, and even for the upcoming Synodical Convention. Then in the evening beside the fire, I sang "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow," and "Sun of My Soul, O Savior Dear", and Abide With Me, Fast Falls the Eventide." Of course, there were corresponding morning hymns of praise. Perhaps you already have a pattern of solitude and prayer that allows God to keep you spiritually renewed and energized. If so, that's wonderful. If not, and you would like to explore the possibilities, **mark your calendar now for October 1-3**, and join the group that will gather together at the Canyon of the Eagles.

You can register for the initial **foundation 48 Hour Retreat on Prayer and Spirituality** that I will lead. If you already have a helpful pattern for solitude time, you can register for the **Alumni Retreat** led by Pastors Randy Haedge and Steve Stutz. **Both retreats are open** to all **fulltime church workers** and their spouses. For more information and to register on-line, go to www.txdistlcms.org.

Remember, mark your calendar now! Once I put my personal 48 hours on the calendar, only an emergency will keep me from this appointment with God.

Assurance of the Ascension

After the resurrection, the risen Lord instructed his followers not to leave Jerusalem. It was there, Jesus said, that they would receive "the promise of the Father: (Acts 1:4, NRSV). What was that promise? It was that they would be baptized not with water but with the Holy Spirit.

Shortly after that utterance, Jesus was "lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (v.9).

The Ascension reminds us that even though Jesus isn't physically present on earth, as the living Christ, he is as near as we allow him to be.

Jesus' Ascension offers us the assurance that God is now available to all people all the time. He lives as a guiding, loving Spirit in our midst.

*Peace Lutheran,
Hewitt newsletter*

