

Sabbatical Policy
The Diocese of New Jersey
Approved by Diocesan Council on January 17, 2017

Introduction

Sabbatical Leave is a period of planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. It is not vacation, but a renewal period for a cleric's sense of vocation. A balanced renewal program includes opportunities for exploration, reflection, rest, and recreation. A well-designed sabbatical enables the strengthening or even re-discovery of enthusiasm and creativity in ministry.

The Lilly Endowment writes in their description of Clergy Renewal Programs, "Pastors serve a variety of roles in their privileged position at the center of congregational life: preacher, teacher, spiritual guide, pastoral visitor, friend, and confidant. The responsibilities are continual, and the pace and demands of parish life can be relentless, often leaving even the most dedicated pastors recognizing the need to replenish their own spiritual reservoirs to regain energy and strength for their ministry."

As God's people, we recognize Sabbath as a vital part of the regular rhythm of our individual and common lives. Both Genesis 1:1 – 2:4 and the Ten Commandments attest that God gave us the gift of the 7th day as a day of rest to enjoy what God has made. The idea of periodic rest was also given to the land when God commanded the Israelites to refrain from planting every 7th year so the land could lie fallow (Leviticus 25:1-5). This also gave the Israelites themselves rest through refraining from farming. That rest is necessary for the land to be abundant again.

These practices stand behind the development of the Sabbatical, from its origin in academic centers in the Middle Ages to its increasingly common practice in corporate settings. Some denominations have church-wide sabbatical policies. In the Episcopal Church, most dioceses have some established sabbatical practices.

Sabbatical Planning

Letters of Agreement for all clergy in charge of congregations shall contain a provision for Sabbatical Leave at the rate of two weeks for every year of service, available beginning at the 5th year and cumulative through the 7th. We strongly encourage that letters of agreement for assisting clergy also include this sabbatical provision.

Clergy in charge of a congregation whose tenure in a congregation precludes them from taking a sabbatical shall be able to carry up to four weeks of accrued sabbatical time into their next congregation and up to eight weeks into the next succeeding congregation if they still have not taken their sabbatical. Sabbatical time is not "leave time" as reference in Canon 74.1.f. Clergy who carry over their sabbatical time shall be able to take a sabbatical in or after their third year of service in a congregation, as negotiated in the cleric's Letter of Agreement.

By its very nature, an interim position is short-term, yet interim clergy whose ministry takes them from one congregation to the next can also benefit from a sabbatical. The cleric, diocese, and congregation are encouraged to make provision for a sabbatical period based on the cleric's deployment and previous sabbatical history and anticipated tenure in a congregation.

At least six months prior to the start of Sabbatical Leave, the cleric will develop a sabbatical plan for Vestry or Bishop's Committee endorsement. The timing should be agreeable to both the cleric and the congregation, with clear expectations and provision for coverage of all special services as well as regular services during the sabbatical leave period.

A Sabbatical Planning Committee including parishioners and colleagues can be a useful resource for developing such a plan. A healthy sabbatical plan includes time for exploration, discovery, rest, and renewal. It is expected that engagement with family and friends will be a vital part of a balanced sabbatical plan. While Sabbatical Leave is not a substitute for vacation time or continuing education time, it may be extended by including these elements.

The Sabbatical Plan should include a statement of an overall goal or theme for the renewal program, a general description of activities to be undertaken, a budget and funding sources, and provision for pastoral and liturgical coverage for the congregation. A Sabbatical Plan must also include related renewal activities to enable the congregation to engage the sabbatical theme as well.

Priest and congregation may choose to mark the Sabbatical Leave period with an inaugural celebration of some kind, prayers for the renewal program and its participants during the prayers of the people while the sabbatical period is underway, and a concluding celebration when the priest returns and the sabbatical period is concluded. The cleric and congregation should both share their experiences of the sabbatical program and its fruits in the subsequent months.

Expectations

A Sabbatical is a leave. Therefore, the cleric should not be interrupted during the leave period for routine pastoral or administrative matters. Likewise, the cleric should not contact the parish leadership to "check up on things." The cleric may choose to stay informed of pastoral events but should not be expected to return for funerals, weddings, or other pastoral events. These are the responsibility of the pastoral coverage specified in the Sabbatical Plan.

Since the purpose of a Sabbatical Leave is for renewal and re-engagement, neither clergy nor congregations are expected to use the time to explore other vocational or leadership opportunities. Once a sabbatical is concluded, the congregation and cleric should expect to continue to serve together for a minimum of 18 months. Exceptions may be made for priests-in-charge who normally serve for a specific contracted period. Use of sabbatical time at the conclusion of one's tenure, apart from temporary cures, is antithetical to the purpose of a sabbatical and may be done only with the approval of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and the Bishop.

All of the cleric's compensation, including stipend, housing, expenses, insurance, pension, vacation and continuing education shall continue at their normal rates during the sabbatical period. Vacation and Continuing Education may be taken in the Sabbatical Year if not already added to the Sabbatical Plan.

Funding

Funding a sabbatical has several components: funding the cleric's sabbatical activities, funding the congregation's sabbatical activities, and clergy coverage during the sabbatical period. The

congregation also continues to pay the cleric's full compensation (stipend, benefits, expenses) during the sabbatical period.

The cleric and congregation are encouraged to explore grants and other funding opportunities for a sabbatical period. However, since such programs are limited, the following methods of funding may be utilized. Please note that congregations and clergy should consult with tax professionals before implementing any of these ideas, because the Diocese is not in a position to give tax advice.

- At the end of each year, the cleric may, in agreement with the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, reallocate any of the unspent Professional Expense funds to be placed into a designated sabbatical account for the cleric's use on approved sabbatical activities. For tax reasons, the account should be kept in the church's name with provision for the cleric to access the funds as needed.
- Similarly, the Vestry or Bishop's Committee may, in agreement with the cleric, reallocate any of the unspent Professional Expense funds to be placed into a designated sabbatical account for the congregation to use on approved sabbatical activities or congregational expenses incurred during a sabbatical.
- At the end of each year, the cleric may, in agreement with the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, reallocate up to \$500 from any remaining Continuing Education funds be placed in a designated sabbatical account for the cleric's use on approved sabbatical activities. This does not waive the cleric's responsibility for fulfilling canonical requirements for continuing education each year.
- The cleric may fund sabbatical activities not covered by grants or funds in designated sabbatical account out of personal funds. With careful planning and consultation with a tax professional, it may be possible to do this on a pre-tax basis. Care should be taken to ensure that any unused portion of the cleric's own funds are disbursed to the cleric, with appropriate tax reporting based on how the funds were directed to the sabbatical account.
- All or a portion of the unspent funds in the designated sabbatical account for the cleric's use accrued from Professional Expenses and Continuing Education Funds may be gifted by the Vestry to the cleric's next congregation for sabbatical purposes.
- The congregation will need to provide for supply clergy for liturgical and pastoral needs. The congregation is encouraged to set aside annually an amount equal to two weeks of supply coverage plus additional clerical support for pastoral oversight, administrative needs and sabbatical activities with the congregation.

Sabbatical Coaches

The Diocese, through staff and appropriate commissions or committees, will maintain a roster of clergy experienced with sabbaticals willing to serve as sabbatical coaches to help clergy and congregations plan for both the financial and program aspects of a sabbatical. (Clergy are encouraged to contact a coach 3 years before the designated time of the sabbatical, especially if wanting to apply for a Lilly Grant.) The Diocese, through staff and appropriate commissions or committees, will also maintain a list of potential funding sources and sabbatical opportunities.