

Grace Community Church, Olivia, MN
Pastoral Staff Sabbatical

Description: A plan for the church to provide a major time of rest, refreshment, and renewal for their senior pastor and full-time associate pastoral staff in order to allow them to serve the Lord and His church with consistent vision, vigor, and longevity.

Discussion: Many pastors devote most of their lives to helping others, often neglecting their own families to minister to the larger family of God. They often serve long hours. They are virtually always on call. Their lives are not their own and have little privacy. The majority of pastors do all this without complaining or feeling sorry for themselves. They have voluntarily chosen to be servants of Jesus Christ and others.

These leaders are often the last to be shown special appreciation and honor. They are often taken for granted. There is an awkwardness with discussions of time off, salary raises, and other material issues, the discussion of which can appear self-serving. Yet the biblical principle is to give special honor to those who serve in this role, which certainly includes caring for their material and emotional needs as co-workers.

Churches do well to provide a well thought out sabbatical customized to their local circumstances which benefits both pastor and congregation. A major benefit to the congregation is prevention of burnout and reinvigoration of their pastor and his family before fatigue and pressure of the job takes its toll and pulls able servants out of the ministry. An organized approach also gives the local church an opportunity to give special recognition to the pastor. A send-off to a sabbatical can be a special time of appreciation for the pastor and his family.

Details:

1. Three weeks' sabbatical is available after three years of ministry; six weeks after an additional three years, and six weeks after the next three years.
2. Sabbatical to be taken after three consecutive years; credit for continuous service at a previous church could be given at the elders' discretion if no sabbatical was given during that time.
3. Pastors would submit their sabbatical proposal to the board, outlining their plan for the sabbatical time. It is recommended that sabbatical proposals reflect a balance of physical rest, personal recreation, intellectual stimulation and spiritual renewal. The pastor should include sufficient family time during the sabbatical. A sabbatical differs from vacation time in that there is some expectation of spiritual and professional renewal which would directly enhance the pastor's ministry. These aspects should be discussed at the time of the request for the sabbatical.

4. Sabbatical time is considered as separate from the pastor's yearly vacation time. It is best not to add vacation to sabbatical time; sabbatical time is not accrued if unused and is intended to be used.
5. The pastor should report to the board after his sabbatical has been completed.
6. The pastor's full wages and benefits should continue for the duration of the sabbatical.
7. There is an expectation that the pastor would intend to continue to serve at the congregation for a reasonable period of time after a sabbatical, and that a sabbatical time not be used to seek out a position at another church.
8. The elders are responsible for supplying pastors for Sunday services and for pastoral care while the pastor is gone. This can be an opportunity for a church to learn to minister without dependence on a particular pastor.

It is hoped that the sabbatical time will be used regularly to counter the emotional drain which often saps a servant's physical, emotional, and even spiritual energy. The local congregation will find that the time granted is well spent and is in their own best interest as well. Although a sabbatical is granted as a privilege, it is intended to be used and its implementation should be encouraged by the elders.

Approved 2005, GCC elders