

ALBANY PRESBYTERY'S CONTINUING EDUCATION AND SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

An effective continuing education policy enables pastors to be renewed through both short term and extended time spent in study, spiritual formation, and mentoring in order to maintain and improve pastoral skills. Working closely together through annual conversations, all pastors and church sessions shall discuss options for continuing education and appropriate ways of implementing these continuing education and sabbatical guidelines. This will also be part of the discussion during Triennial Visits.

Continuing Education Details and Rationale

Continuing Education is a time for rest, renewal and supports growth and learning. It is not an option for Presbyterian pastors, but a must. Continuing education offers time away to learn with and from others for faithful discipleship. Options for continuing education vary greatly depending upon the needs of the pastor from a silent retreat in the mountains to a preaching conference with 1000 other pastors; from an education conference dealing with models of adult Christian education to a canoeing, meditating week-long adventure down a river; from a class on poetry and the arts to a course on spiritual direction; from a week of reading to a week of learning about financial matters.

Purpose: These continuing education opportunities are a time to step out of life's busy routines and experience renewal of mind, spirit, body, and emotion.

Eligibility: Continuing Education shall be a part of every call for pastors in the Presbytery. See Appendix C for a partial listing of continuing education options.

Funding: Continuing Education funding shall be a part of every call for pastors in the Presbytery. See Appendix B for a listing of additional funds.

Sabbatical Details and Rationale

Sabbatical is a time for rest and renewal and supports future growth. "Sabbatical" means every seventh year. 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 an occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.

In Albany Presbytery the normal Sabbatical shall be three months with allowance made for extending that period by adding vacation and study leave. It is our expectation that the Holy Spirit will be alive in both the congregation and the pastor and that both will benefit from this intentional time that has as its object the renewal of the pastor and the strengthening of their ministry.

Purpose: For the minister, sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period in which a pastor is granted leave away from normal ministerial responsibilities in order to spend an extended period in study and reflection. Sabbatical leave is not a vacation, nor is it continuing education.

For the congregation, sabbatical leave can allow the people to re-establish their corporate memory. Without the normal relationships and reliance's that a pastorate can create, the congregation recovers their own sense of ministry to the church and to each other. The sabbatical is an opportunity to identify new patterns that can strengthen the church.

The desired purpose for any Sabbatical should be clearly defined in writing by the minister upon requesting the Sabbatical and by the Session in making plans for the congregational sabbatical.

Eligibility: The Presbytery strongly encourages every Session to explore sabbatical as part of the call for all installed ministers. The minister may take Sabbatical in the seventh year of service in that position. It is expected that a minister will remain in their present position at least for one year following sabbatical.

Funding: During the Sabbatical, the church will continue the minister's salary, pension/medical benefits, book and study allowance at the same level as those in effect at the time of the Sabbatical leave. The Church will also contract for substitute pastoral or educational ministry during the period of the sabbatical.

Although on the face of it, the Sabbatical may seem like yet another financial burden for the local congregation to bear, it is a minor investment in long ministries and the future health of the congregation.

Clergy and churches are encouraged to set aside funds each year in anticipation of the Sabbatical leave. A number of resources in the Presbytery, Synod and denomination are available to assist church professionals in funding Sabbatical projects. Committee on Ministry is available can help direct sessions and ministers to those resources. See Appendix B for a listing of additional funds.

Sabbatical Request Process: A request for Sabbatical must be made in writing to the Session at least six months before the sabbatical is to begin. The request should include a detailed description of the Sabbatical, the goals to be achieved and the expected benefits for the person and for the congregation along with a personal statement as to why this sabbatical would be valuable. The Session would then begin to create their own plan for the Sabbatical, listing their goals and the financial implications. It is the responsibility of the Session, along with the minister, to build support among the congregation in preparation for the Sabbatical.

Re-Entry: Upon return from Sabbatical, it is strongly suggested that the clergy, along with the congregation, share together the details of the leave as well as reflections on its value and benefit.

Sabbatical Leave Guidelines for Pastors in Albany Presbytery

Guidelines Statement:

The Presbytery of Albany strongly encourages that all calls for installed pastors include a compensated sabbatical of at least three (3) months after six (6) years of service to a particular position.

Minister 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 along with a personal statement as to why this Sabbatical would be valuable.
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 in meeting leadership responsibilities a sabbatical might put upon the church.
2. To receive the minister 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 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 in reflecting upon the value and benefits of the sabbatical.

Presbytery Responsibilities:

1. The guidelines will be included with the packet for Pastor Nominating Committees and will be part of the discussion informing the terms of call of all new installed pastors.
2. The Triennial Visit Team will discuss the guidelines with both Session and pastor at its visit.
3. Guidelines will be discussed at the Presbytery's new pastor orientation.
4. Committee on Ministry will assist with facilitation of sabbatical conversations.

APPENDIX A

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Sabbatical anyway?

The word, “sabbatical” comes from the Hebrew word *Shabbat* from which we get our word Sabbath. The root meaning of Shabbat is “to cease.” It is connected with God’s ceasing from creating in Genesis 2: 2-3. A sabbatical in a spiritual sense, then, is a time of ceasing from the routine of daily tasks. For clergy a sabbatical involves a ceasing from the round of pastoral duties.

How is a Sabbatical different from a vacation?

While a sabbatical does involve a stepping away from pastoral ministry, its purpose is directly connected to the pastor’s calling. It is not a break *from* ministry; it is a *ceasing* of the routine of ministry in order to be able to be renewed in God’s direction for her or his life and ministry. The passage from Genesis reminds us that God’s ceasing *completed Creation*. Therefore a sabbatical is part of God’s call to ministry.

Why does a sabbatical have to be so long?

Simply ceasing from the daily work of ministry does not automatically mean entering into an open and rested state of mind and spirit. Anyone who has taken time away from work or family responsibilities knows that it takes at least several days to wind down from the deeply rooted patterns of life. It takes time to allow the clamor of thoughts and emotions to quiet and allow us truly to rest. This is even truer after a pastor has served a church for seven years or more. An extended time away allows for time to devote time to quiet the soul in order to be open to God. At the other end of the sabbatical, there is also time for the pastor to prepare to return to her or his ministry able to integrate the learning into the life of the community of faith.

What happens if during the sabbatical the pastor decides to leave?

It is the strong expectation that the pastor taking the sabbatical commit to remaining in her or his ministry for a minimum of a year. It is our experience that in most cases clergy return with renewed desire to serve the congregation that gave them this wonderful gift. However in the case that the minister hears a new call, it is important to recognize that this is God’s will and that God will provide new pastoral leadership for the congregation.

Paying the pastor to go on sabbatical and pay a substitute minister is beyond our means. How can we afford to do this?

This is a very real concern. The Committee on Ministry feels so strongly about the importance of sabbatical time that we will work with you to find grants to assist your congregation in providing for pastoral ministry while the pastor is away. However it is critically important that each congregation develop with the pastor an intentional sabbatical fund. This can be achieved in a number of ways such as special fund raisers, or second mile Sundays, or the solicitation of special gifts. It is the loving commitment of a congregation to provide sabbatical time that will make the pastor’s time away a blessing not only to the pastor, but to your congregation as well.

How do we cover the ministry of the church while the pastor is gone?

It is our strong recommendation that planning for the sabbatical begin **no later than six months before** the pastor leaves. Together with the session the pastor will identify pulpit supply, identify someone to be on call for pastoral emergencies, and work with the Committee on Ministry to name a moderator the session. In addition the pastor will work with the session and deacons to plan for committee meetings and congregational care for sick and home bound members. The Committee on Ministry is very willing to assist in this planning.

Why doesn’t the pastor save for the sabbatical by not taking her or his continuing education time?

This has been part of the previous continuing education guidelines of the Presbytery. We feel strongly however that the two need to be separated. Continuing education is essential for the ongoing personal growth and skill development of the pastor. It is our experience that pastors who do not take their full annual continuing education are frequently vulnerable to burn out. Burn out not only is destructive to the spiritual health of the pastor but is acutely detrimental to the health of the congregation.

So, this sabbatical sounds like a good idea for the minister. What's in it for us?

The occasion of a sabbatical is for the congregation to grow spiritually independently of the pastor. A well designed sabbatical will include a program of intentional spiritual exploration for the congregation. The Committee on Ministry recommends that the session invite a ministry consultant to work with the congregation to develop such a plan before the pastor departs and to guide the program during the sabbatical. Our hope is that not only will the pastor returned renewed; but the community of faith will greet her or him with new insights and visions which will inspire future partnership in ministry.

OK! We're sold! How do we get started?

Start the conversation with your pastor now. If you want a member of the Committee on Ministry to join, in please contact the Presbytery Office.

Thank You for considering this important and exciting opportunity!

**APPENDIX B
Funding Options**

In each pastor's call, there should be a continuing education allowance. In addition to these funds there are other places to look for sabbatical funding assistance.

<http://www.lillyendowment.org/religion.html>

<http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/grantsinfo.aspx>

http://www.ministerscouncil.com/Sabbaticals/sabbatical_funding_resources.aspx

**APPENDIX C
Continuing Education Options**

(this list is not exhaustive and we would welcome suggestions to be added to this list)

PC(USA) theological seminaries:

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas <http://www.austinseminary.edu/>
[Columbia Theological Seminary](http://www.columbia.edu/~cjs/ctsnet.edu/LifelongLearning.aspx) in Decatur, Georgia <http://www.ctsnet.edu/LifelongLearning.aspx>
University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa <http://udts.dbq.edu/>
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky <http://www.lpts.edu/>
McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois <http://mccormick.edu/>
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania <http://www.pts.edu/>
Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey <http://www3.ptsem.edu/default.aspx>
San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo and Pasadena, California <http://www.sfts.edu/>
Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia <http://www.itc.edu/pages/smith.asp>
Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia <http://www.union-psce.edu/>

Seminaries Related to the PC(USA) by Covenant Agreement:

Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, New York <http://auburnsem.org/>
Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico in San Juan, Puerto Rico <http://www.se-pr.edu/index.htm>

Retreat Centers and other entities:

- Capital Region Theological Center (CRTC) www.capitalrtc.org
- Kirkridge in Bangor, PA <http://www.kirkridge.org/>
- Eastern Point Retreat Center in East Gloucester, MA <http://www.easternpoint.org/>
- Stillpoint Retreat Center in Mechanicville, NY <http://www.stillpointretreatcenter.com/>
- Website for Find the Divine – Directory of Spiritual Retreats, Religious Retreats and Conference Centers <http://www.findthedivine.com/>
- Website for conference and retreat centers <http://www.allaboutretreats.com/>