

IPHC Sabbatical Policy

Biblical Foundations

The primary purpose of the sabbatical is to provide for physical, emotional and spiritual renewal for those serving in ministry. The concept of the sabbatical is derived from the Biblical idea of the Sabbath. The Sabbath tradition is recorded in three main focal points in the scripture: the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath of years, and the Jubilee. It involves God's land as well as God's people and is rooted in the rhythm of creation itself (Genesis 2:2).

The term *Sabbath* is most likely related to the Hebrew verb *shabat* meaning "to cease or to stop." The concept of the sabbatical therefore calls for cessation of normal activities and renewed spiritual focus.

Jesus Himself frequently stopped what he was doing to make space for personal refreshment in his relationship with God. Many people in ministry suffer from burnout because they do not follow this essential practice of Jesus. When we tend to the health of our soul, we express faith that the ministry is not about us. Its success does not depend upon what we are able to accomplish through our own energy and creativity. God can do His work without us. The sabbatical helps ministers to release their work and learn to trust that God will sustain the ministry. It also helps the Body of Christ to break free from unhealthy dependence upon clergy, to embrace their own ministry gifting, and to take up their responsibility to participate in the work of the ministry.

It is essential for pastors to break away from the intense demands of ministry and take time to be still in the Lord's presence. Periods of inner stillness before God lead to restoration of the soul. For this reason, the sabbatical should not be considered a luxury; it should become an essential part of helping to maintain the longevity of those serving in full-time ministry (Exodus 23:10-12; Psalm 27:14; 46:10; 62:1; Isaiah 40:31; Matthew 11:28; 12:8; Hebrews 4:9-10).

Guidelines for the Sabbatical Program of the NC Conference

- 1) The primary objective of the sabbatical is to provide the pastor with opportunity for rest and spiritual renewal. Every pastor should consider the positive effects of engaging in extended periods of focus and reorientation towards calling and strategic life goals. A sabbatical may also be used for continuing education, recovery from medical conditions, addressing family needs, and other emergency situations that meet the approval of the Conference Council.

Commented [RJ1]: Should this be broadened to include all ministers, or is it limited to senior pastors?

Is there a limitation on whether the pastor is full-time? I think the "full-time" language below is probably a reference to service in the church, not whether the pastor works another job.

Do we need to add a statement to the effect that people may take sabbaticals that may not be officially sanctioned by the conference?

Should there be any provision for a sabbatical for people not currently serving in a church?

- 2) A pastor becomes eligible for a Conference sponsored sabbatical after six consecutive years of pastoral service in the IPHC. Exceptions to this time frame may be considered as deemed appropriate by the Conference Council.
- 3) The sabbatical is not to be considered vacation time. The local church should continue paying the pastor's salary and benefits during the sabbatical period. Where possible, the church should include in its budget additional provision for the spiritual renewal and well-being of the pastor.
- 4) The church should have a special time of consecration at the beginning and the ending of the sabbatical to demonstrate its support of the pastor and his/her need for spiritual renewal.
- 5) The Conference Bishop in consultation with the pastor and Local Church Council will determine the specific time span of the sabbatical using the following criteria as general guidelines:
 - a) A period of 3 months is optimum for the full benefits of the sabbatical to be realized.
 - b) Pastors become *eligible* for two weeks of sabbatical for every year of full-time service in ministry. This applies to consecutive years of full-time service, not years of service in a particular position.
 - c) Pastors *may be* granted one additional month of sabbatical for every ten consecutive years of full-time ministry.
 - d) Under normal circumstances, sabbaticals will be limited to six-months. However, the sabbatical term for which a pastor is eligible may be lengthened or shortened as deemed necessary by the Conference Council.
- 6) The Conference Bishop in consultation with the Conference Council may appoint a mentor to help plan the sabbatical and to walk with the pastor through the sabbatical season.
- 7) The pastor will submit a proposal for the sabbatical that includes a plan for how the time will be spent.
 - a) The time should reflect a balance of physical, emotional, and spiritual renewal.
 - b) The sabbatical should include significant consideration for the health and well-being of the pastor's family.
 - c) The Conference will provide materials and assistance in helping the pastor to develop a well-balanced approach to the season of renewal.
 - d) The proposal must be approved by the Conference Bishop or his appointee.
- 8) Determining when to engage the sabbatical for ministerial renewal should take into consideration the needs of the minister as well as the needs of the local church he/she serves.
 - a) The minister.
 - i) Health issues may require a minister to take time away to focus on personal well-being.
 - ii) Care for the minister's family life should be considered when addressing the timing of the sabbatical.
 - iii) A sabbatical could be employed where the minister is experiencing fatigue or symptoms of burnout.

Commented [RJ2]: Is the eligibility based on full time pastoral service or available to any pastor? Paragraph 5 focuses on full time service.

- iv) If a minister exhibits compulsive or escapist behavior patterns, a sabbatical may be in order.
 - v) The sabbatical need not be the result of physical, emotional or spiritual breakdown. The goal is that this could serve as an intervention to prevent these disastrous consequences from materializing.
 - vi) Every minister could be helped in his/her work for the Lord through engaging in a season of focused spiritual renewal.
- b) The church.
- i) The sabbatical should be considered during a time of year that would have the least possible impact on the ministry of the church.
 - ii) The church should be in a reasonably stable condition in order for the sabbatical to be of maximum benefit.
 - iii) The pastor should not consider a sabbatical before having served at least five years at the church to which he/she is assigned unless granted special approval by the Conference Council.
 - iv) A sabbatical should normally be considered when a pastor enjoys the trust of the majority of the people and can appropriately engage in the process of spiritual renewal for the service of the church he/she is called to serve.
- 9) The Conference Council will work to ensure that the local church is not negatively impacted by pastoral sabbaticals. The Conference will seek to help the church fully understand the benefits and biblical basis of the sabbatical through the following actions:
- a) The Conference will provide materials to the local church leadership to help them understand the nature and purpose of the sabbatical.
 - i) The sabbatical is a way of honoring spiritual leadership.
 - ii) The sabbatical refreshes and renews the pastor for serving the church.
 - iii) The sabbatical contributes to the overall spiritual health of the church.
 - iv) The sabbatical encourages the laity to engage their God-given gifts in the work of ministry and helps to prevent models of ministry that are restricted to professional clergy.
 - b) The Conference leadership will engage with the local church to maintain positive relationships and understandings with the congregation.
 - c) The Conference leadership will monitor the progress and the results of the sabbatical and will assist both the pastor and the church in reengaging in a stable ministry connection after the conclusion of the sabbatical term.
 - d) A Conference sponsored sabbatical should not be considered a mechanism to facilitate pastoral change. However, in the event that the sabbatical results in the perceived need of a pastoral shift, the Conference Council will help guide the process for how any transition should occur.
 - i) This is not necessarily an abuse of the policy. The sabbatical may bring clarity with regard to issues of calling or positioning that present the need for transitions to take place.
 - ii) The sabbatical is a way to honor God and a way to bless those leaders who have given their lives in service to his kingdom. It should neither be

viewed as a burden on the church nor a perk of the pastoral position. It is an important component of spiritual health for ministers.

- iii) The pastor should work with the Conference Bishop or his appointee to develop a fair and reasonable transition that best preserves the integrity of the sabbatical as well as the long-term ministry of the church.
- 10) As part of the process of preparing for the sabbatical, the pastor should submit a detailed plan clearly delineating responsibilities and expectations for staff and/or lay leadership. The Conference may appoint an interim pastor where deemed necessary by the Conference Bishop in consultation with the pastor and the Local Church Council (see section on Interim Pastors for Sabbaticals below).
 - 11) In order for the sabbatical to meet its intended objectives, it is necessary for the pastor to have a significant break from the regular activities and demands of ministry. For this reason, contact with the pastor should be limited to matters of extreme urgency. Contact with the pastor should be conducted by an appointed member of the congregation, church staff, or Local Church Council. Communication with the pastor should flow primarily through the designated appointee from the local church and/or through the designated appointee of the Conference Bishop.
 - 12) Upon completion of the sabbatical, pastors will submit a reflection report on their experience to the Conference Bishop. The report should include how the sabbatical impacted the life of minister, and what might look different in his/her rhythm of life after returning to their full-time duties.
 - 13) Pastors wishing to apply for Conference sponsored sabbaticals should submit the following to the Conference Bishop preferably three months before the intended sabbatical begins:
 - a) Step 1: A letter of intent and purpose.
 - i) The letter should express the candidate's qualifications for the sabbatical and should indicate specific goals and objectives.
 - ii) After receiving approval from the Conference Bishop, the candidate may proceed with Step 2 (outlined below).
 - b) Step 2: A preliminary sabbatical proposal.
 - i) The proposal should indicate the length of time requested for the sabbatical.
 - ii) It should lay out a plan for how the sabbatical would be used (see above).
 - iii) It should suggest resources and/or experiences that would be employed to assist in ministerial renewal.
 - iv) It should propose a budget for the sabbatical experience. If financial assistance is required, a formal request should be submitted with the budget proposal.
 - 14) The Conference Sabbatical Program will be funded through allocation of one percent of Conference tithing **income**.
 - a) Monies will be used for payment of interim ministers and mentors.
 - b) Funds can be made available for financial assistance according to the need submitted in the sabbatical proposal.

Commented [RJ3]: Do we want to set a limit as to the amount a single instance might accrue?

Interim Pastors for Sabbaticals

- 1) The Conference Bishop, in consultation with the pastor and Local Church Council, may appoint an interim pastor for the church where necessary.
- 2) The interim pastor's primary roles will be preaching and providing congregational care.
- 3) Prior to beginning the sabbatical, the pastor should communicate to the interim any information essential to the church's ministry. Issues addressed should include: philosophy of ministry, the church's vision, leadership structure, and worship style.
- 4) The interim pastor will support the practices, vision and leadership of the current pastor. No changes in personnel, programs or policies of the local church during the pastor's sabbatical will be allowed except in the case of a death or an emergency, and then only with the approval of the Conference Bishop.
- 5) The interim pastor should consult with the Conference Bishop before contacting the pastor on sabbatical as continued engagement with pastoral responsibilities undermines the purpose and objectives of the season of rest and renewal.
- 6) Any behavior on the part of the interim pastor, which detracts or devalues the current pastor's leadership and influence in the church will not be tolerated and will result in immediate removal.
- 7) The interim pastor should work with the Local Church Council to plan a special day to welcome the pastor's return at the end of the sabbatical period.
- 8) The Conference will provide compensation for the interim pastor as determined by the Conference Council.

Commented [RJ4]: Is it the intent of the committee that if an interim pastor is assigned to a church, whose pastor is on sabbatical, for that interim pastor to be allowed to become the pastor of that church if the pastor does not return or if the interim pastor is producing good leadership and is therefore preferred above the assigned pastor who is on sabbatical?

Select Resources

ONLINE:

- Caregiversforum.org This website is run by CareGivers Forum, a network of people involved in the ministry of caring for professional Christian workers and their families. The site features a comprehensive directory of retreat centers around the country where ministry leaders can spend their sabbaticals.
- "Exhausted" by Vernal R. Wilkinson, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2014/may-online-only/exhausted.html?paging=off>
- "How to Score a Sabbatical" by Greg Asimakoupoulos, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2012/summer/scoresabbatical.html>
- "In Support of Sabbaticals" by Lou Shirey, <https://old.iphc.org/news/support-sabbaticals>
- *Taking a Sabbatical* from BuildingChurchLeaders.com This 34-page downloadable resource unpacks the underestimated value of taking a ministry sabbatical. It also gives pastors guidance for making the most of a sabbatical when they do take one.

BOOKS:

Alves, David C., and Marcy Devers Alves. *A Sabbatical Primer for Churches: How to Love and Honor the Pastor God Has Given You*. Concord, NH: PaupakPress, 2014.

Alves, David C. *A Sabbatical Primer for Pastors: How to Initiate and Navigate a Spiritual Renewal Leave*. Concord, NH: PaupakPress, 2014.

Bullock, A. Richard, and Richard J. Bruesehoff. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Cordeiro, Wayne. *Leading on Empty*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009.

Nouwen, Henri. *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998.

Ortberg, John. *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.