

# **Sabbatical Policy for Pastors in FMC Congregations**

## **Introduction**

The MC USA Guidelines for Pastors' Salaries and Benefits encourage congregations to provide a periodic sabbatical for pastors. The Ministerial Committee of the Franconia Mennonite Conference heartily endorses this idea. While the Leadership Manual of the Franconia Conference does not specifically address the matter, increasingly congregations are developing their own sabbatical policies for their pastor(s). To provide guidance for congregations who have not yet adopted a sabbatical policy, or for those who wish to review or modify their policy, the following counsel is being offered.

## **Rationale for Pastoral Sabbaticals**

While a sabbatical is not common in most professions except for teachers, there is increasing awareness of the validity for planned sabbaticals for pastors.

1. Pastoral ministry is highly demanding due to intensive involvement with people, the inability often to maintain adequate boundaries between one's personal life and ministry responsibilities, the growing expectations for high quality leadership, and the increasingly complex nature of congregational life and issues that pastors must address.
2. In pastoral ministry, the person of the pastor is inseparable from his or her functioning in ministry. In a manner possibly unlike any other profession, one's personal life and character must be congruent with one's pastoral functioning in order to be effective in ministry. This requires pastors to be constantly vigilant about both their personal lives and the people entrusted to their care. This factor greatly increases the demands of the pastoral role.
3. The challenges of pastoring call for continued renewing of one's mind and spirit, as well as one's physical body and family relationships. It is difficult to keep renewed for effective and inspiring leadership while continually being on call for ministry. A sabbatical provides relief from "compassion fatigue."
4. To enable pastors to be growing leaders and to provide longer service, sabbaticals are recommended. As the Guidelines for Pastors' Salaries and Benefits state, "In order to encourage significant growth in ministry and to increase the likelihood of longer pastoral tenure, the congregation is encouraged to establish (a) sabbatical policy."
5. Congregations will be blessed by the renewing of their pastor(s), will grow in their appreciation of the ministry of the pastor through planned sabbaticals, and will often in the course of a sabbatical discover leadership gifts among themselves that were previously dormant.
6. Pastors need to model wholesome living in a culture where many people and families live at an unhealthy pace and do not devote adequate time to spiritual, physical, emotional and interpersonal self-care.

## **Purpose of a Pastoral Sabbatical**

To provide an extended time for spiritual, intellectual, physical, relational and emotional renewal of pastors, and to enhance congregational health through long-term vital leadership, congregations are encouraged to plan periodic sabbaticals for their pastor(s). To pursue these ends, the pastor will normally be relieved of all congregational responsibilities during the sabbatical.

## **Sabbatical Policy**

To grant a three month sabbatical (one month for each year of ministry), to be taken in the fourth year of ministry, and subsequently during the eighth and twelfth years, etc. of ministry. During the sabbatical, the pastor will receive full salary and benefits as defined in the then current

covenant of understanding. Sabbatical plans shall be developed in consultation with the elders and conference minister and submitted by the pastor four months in advance to the appropriate governing body of the congregation. Following the sabbatical, the pastor shall agree to provide a minimum of one year of service to the congregation, with the understanding that repayment of sabbatical salary and benefits will be made for failure to do so. Accumulated sabbatical time is not transferable from prior congregational assignments, nor are terminal sabbaticals usually acceptable. Following the sabbatical the pastor shall provide in writing a report to be shared with the appropriate bodies in the congregation.

### **Special Concerns Related to a Pastoral Sabbatical**

1. If a congregation needs to call a supply pastor during the time when the pastor is on sabbatical, it will want to plan ahead by placing an amount in the annual budget to pay for this service.
2. Congregations with only one pastor may wish to be creative in providing for leadership through lay people or visiting preachers during the pastor's sabbatical, along with making special arrangements for someone to assist in funerals or other special needs that arise during the absence of the pastor. This may also be a good time for persons considering a call to pastoral ministry to test their call by functioning in specific pastoral ways.
3. Unless the policy states otherwise, part-time pastors will have their sabbatical support prorated according to the amount of time they serve the congregation.
4. Special effort needs to be made to prepare the congregation for the sabbatical, with particular clarity on how leadership will be handled in the pastor's absence. The pastor's attendance or absence from the worship of the congregation during the sabbatical needs to be clarified in advance.
5. Pastors will also need to plan ahead for any additional expenses they may incur in fulfilling their sabbatical plans. MMA provides matching funds to congregations to assist pastors in study during a sabbatical. Other funds may also be available from national organizations who provide grants to assist in funding a sabbatical for pastors.
6. It will be essential for the conference minister and elders to plan carefully for the re-entry of the pastor following the sabbatical.

February 6, 2002

Ministerial Committee of the Franconia Mennonite Conference