

Presbytery of San Francisco Committee on Ministry Sabbatical Leave Policy 2025

The Committee on Ministry (COM) encourages sessions to develop a sabbatical leave policy for pastors. The policy shall include how long a pastor is in the position before the pastor qualifies for a sabbatical; the length of the sabbatical leave; and an agreement about the minimum time a pastor will serve following the sabbatical leave.

COM will **require** pastoral sabbaticals with the following guidelines:

- Every 7 years, offer 3 months for full-time pastors; if a pastor leaves within one year after returning from sabbatical, the congregation may negotiate for the pastor to repay part of the sabbatical, or
- Every 4 years, 1 month sabbatical for full-time pastors, with no requirement for return.
- Part-time pastors will receive sabbaticals on a prorated basis.

The purpose of a sabbatical leave is renewal and rejuvenation. For the pastor, the sabbatical leave offers a time of sustained study, travel, and personal and professional renewal. For the congregation, the sabbatical leave is an opportunity to 1) reflect on the church's ministry and the role of the congregation in that ministry; 2) renew and strengthen congregational lay leadership; and 3) continue to grow in faith through different perspectives and preaching styles that guest preachers may bring.

A sabbatical, by its nature, requires a change to the Terms of Call. Therefore,

- The pastor who is considering a sabbatical shall consult with COM about plans.
- After the session has received and approved the pastor's proposal, the session must call a congregational meeting with the minimum purpose of changing the Terms of Call.
- The approved sabbatical plan must be submitted to COM no less than two months before the sabbatical begins.

A sabbatical leave is not intended to be an extension of vacation. If agreed upon by session, a sabbatical can be taken in conjunction with vacation and/or regular study leave. Additional months may be allowed as unpaid leave for a longer sabbatical period.

Planned activities may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Professional development- college/university course work, seminars, and workshops.
- Travel- ecumenical, interfaith, community/global partners, cultures, regions to gain new perspectives.
- Research/development tasks.
- Spiritual renewal - spiritual pilgrimage, retreat.

To ensure the pastor's sabbatical, churches shall set aside funds that are sufficient to meet the total cost of providing pastoral services during the sabbatical leave. This includes the pastor's full compensation package (salary, housing, and benefits) and pastoral coverage for the congregation during the sabbatical. Vacation and sick leave continue to accrue when a sabbatical is taken. Sabbatical leave is not payable upon termination.

Guidelines for Carrying Out a Sabbatical Leave:

Minister Responsibilities:

- Bring the sabbatical proposal before the session, a minimum of six to twelve months before the intended commencement of the sabbatical. The proposal shall include a detailed description of the plan and the goals to be achieved, together with a personal statement as to why this sabbatical leave would be valuable for both the pastor and the church.
- Secure the approval of the session for the sabbatical proposal and work out the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
- Work with the session to assure the church of continued service following the conclusion of the sabbatical for an agreed-upon time.
- Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the session before departing on a sabbatical.
- Submit to the Committee on Ministry in writing the sabbatical timeline and detailed plan. The plan shall be submitted for approval no less than two months before the sabbatical begins. Included in the plan will be the church's plan for pastoral services during the period of the sabbatical.
- Upon return, present a written overview of the sabbatical experience (activities and reflections) to the session, congregation, and the Committee on Ministry.

Session Responsibilities:

- Receive for approval the pastor's proposal for a sabbatical at least six to twelve months in advance of the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
- Continue terms of call commitments to the pastor during the sabbatical leave.
- Contract for pastoral services during the pastor's sabbatical.
- Communicate to the congregation the importance and value to the church of a sabbatical.
- Call a congregational meeting to approve the sabbatical plan.
- Request a written overview of the sabbatical experience from the pastor upon return.

Committee on Ministry Responsibilities:

- Encourage churches to offer sabbatical leaves for pastors.
- Review and approve the sabbatical timeline and plan submitted by a pastor.
- Serve as mediator in any concerns of the session or minister relative to the sabbatical.
- Determine who will moderate the session and administer communion during the minister's absence.
- Provide support to the congregation as needed (a list of potential supply pastors, ministers to administer the sacraments or provide pastoral care in the event of an emergency or crisis).
- Receive a written overview of the sabbatical experience (activities and reflections) from the pastor upon return.
- Submit the sabbatical plan to the presbytery.