



Brethren in Christ U.S.

SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE

Sabbatical Leave Recommendations

A sabbatical is a proactive way to care for pastors and invest in the future of the pastor and local church. Sabbaticals are a time to step back from a typical ministry to experience spiritual refreshment, new vision, and strengthening of skills. It is a time for rest, reflection, listening, and learning. Often it is a time of restoration of vision, passion, and one's sense of call. Sometimes a sabbatical is part of discerning a coming transition in one's life.

In 2014, the Brethren in Christ church published the following guidance for pastoral sabbaticals:

Sabbatical

A pastor may request a sabbatical for personal and professional renewal after seven years of service in one congregation with a commitment to give one year of further service in the same congregation. In consultation with the bishop, the pastor can prepare a proposal for the pastoral committee, indicating the purpose, duration, activities, and financing of a sabbatical—along with a plan for interim leadership. With the approval of the pastoral committee, the sabbatical can be announced to the congregation as an opportunity for the pastor's growth and development.

The Susquehanna Conference encourages local churches to develop and implement a sabbatical policy for their local church staff that is in alignment with this statement. Here are a few other recommendations to consider in this process:

Eligibility

Pastors are typically eligible for a sabbatical after seven (7) consecutive years of service and are strongly encouraged to serve no longer than 10 years continuously without taking a three to four (3–4) month sabbatical.

In some cases, a single sabbatical plan may include multiple, shorter sabbatical periods (for example: two separate 6-week periods instead of a 12-week sabbatical).

It is expected that pastors will continue service for at least one (1) year after completion of their sabbatical unless the sabbatical is defined as a discernment process in the sabbatical proposal.

Pastors who conclude employment in less than one (1) year after the date their sabbatical ends will be responsible for making repayment to the Susquehanna Conference and the local church for any sabbatical expenses provided at the following:

- Completion of service less than 6 months after Sabbatical conclusion: full repayment
- Completion of service between 6 and 12 months after Sabbatical conclusion: 50% repayment

Planning and Approval Process

Sabbaticals may be initiated by the pastor, the local governing board, or the bishop and Susquehanna Conference Leadership Team (CLT).

The pastor should first discuss the timing of a sabbatical with their local board. If the board is willing to provide the pastor a sabbatical leave, the pastor should develop a proposal and plan for the sabbatical to be shared with both the local church board and bishop.

It is recommended that this process be completed at least 6-9 months prior to the start of the sabbatical in order to help prepare the congregation and other staff members for the sabbatical period.

After a sabbatical plan has been affirmed by both the bishop and the church board, any significant changes to the plan should be discussed with the pastoral committee.

Any supporting staff sabbaticals shall be directed and approved through the lead pastor and board.

Sabbatical Plans Should Include:

- A distinct change of pace and clear break from daily pastoral responsibilities, with intentional and structured activities that provide for spiritual, physical, and emotional refreshment, as well as educational or training opportunities.

- Time away from the work of their local church while still engaging with the broader church. Many pastors like to visit other churches during this time of sabbatical to foster relationships and gain new ideas and inspiration.

- Plan for coverage of normal duties

- Budgetary plan for the sabbatical period
 - The local church may consider making a financial contribution for a pastor's sabbatical activities. Grant monies are also available from both the Susquehanna Conference (Pastoral Growth and Renewal Grant) as well as a number of outside organizations.
 - The local church should consider any expenses related to pulpit supply, counseling services, or other supplements to the pastor's regular duties.
 - If a sabbatical plan is submitted that has not been incorporated into the church's annual budget, additional budget for the sabbatical will require special approval by the church board and local membership.

Compensation and Benefits

The pastor will continue to receive full compensation and benefits during the time of their sabbatical.