

SABBATICAL MANUAL



Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

I. WHY A SABBATICAL?

Church members often see the exciting part of a pastor's role, such as leading meetings and preaching. The fact is that pastoral responsibilities involve numerous hours of high-pressure and routine work each week, including hospital visits, sermon preparation, and so much more. One often overlooked challenge is that the Sabbath, while dedicated to ministry activities like preaching and visitation, is also one of the pastor's busiest days, limiting time with their family. Historically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church addresses this by rotating pastors every three to four years, offering a fresh perspective and enhanced coping abilities.

Allowing pastors periodic breaks for renewal and regeneration benefits pastors and the congregation greatly! Church members have witnessed significant improvements in preaching, prayer meetings, and overall programs when pastors take sabbaticals. Everyone, pastors included, needs dedicated moments for solitude—with family and with God. Considering the pastor's role as the congregation's spiritual leader, such time is particularly crucial.

The sabbatical is not meant to be a vacation! Rather, it serves as a dedicated period for renewal and spiritual regeneration.



II. SABBATICAL POLICY

In July 13, 1989, the Southeastern California Conference Executive Committee approved a sabbatical policy. There are three key presuppositions that are relevant to the local congregation. These include:

1. A sabbatical should be understood and supported by the local church and specially the board.
2. After the sabbatical, there should be a report of the value to the pastor, both to the local church board and to the conference Ministerial Department.
3. The sabbatical should not be combined with vacation time, except in unique cases.
4. The pastor is expected to return to their local church upon completing the sabbatical.
5. A sabbatical is not an employee benefit but can be requested and applied for.

Objectives of the Sabbatical

The sabbatical is not meant to focus solely on intellectual pursuits; rather, it should encompass more than just study time and involve engagement in five specific areas. These are:

1. **A time for personal and family renewal.** Numerous pastors' families face significant challenges, often precipitated by the lack of time devoted to genuine one-on-one relationships.
2. **Physical, intellectual, and emotional restoration.** At the end of the sabbatical, the pastor should have experienced an opportunity to enhance their physical, intellectual,

and emotional well-being.

3. **A time of professional growth.** Pastors need time to develop in new areas that are not feasible within their week-to-week schedules.
4. **A time of spiritual growth.** Pastors cannot spend all their time pouring their experience with God to the congregation if they have no time to "recharge their spiritual batteries."
5. **Peer interaction.** Pastors are often far more isolated than the congregation understands. Pastors need time to visit with other pastors, attend other churches, and get some unique perspectives that will help them break out of the "rut" of pastoring year by year.

Length of the Sabbatical

According to the conference policy, the sabbatical may cover a maximum of four weeks for every two years of pastoral service. This time can accumulate up to one quarter (12 weeks), accruing at a rate of two weeks per year after the initial two years. In most cases, a shorter sabbatical would be appropriate. The time limitations are simply the maximum times available.



The sabbatical is not granted automatically and is based upon (1) demonstrated need, (2) approval from church, (3) approval from the conference administration, and (4) submission of a detailed proposal by the pastor.

Funding

While the pastor's salary continues, sabbaticals can cost money needed to attend a retreat center, attend workshops, etc. For that reason, there are three primary sources of funding. These are:

1. Continuing education funds from the conference up to \$350 annually (depending on Conference Committee funding each year).
2. The recommended local church subsidy is \$250 every two years the pastor has served the local church, which may accrue to \$500. While this is at the discretion of the local church, the local church is encouraged to cooperate in funding the sabbatical.
3. The conference subsidy for every two years is \$250, which may accrue up to \$500 (depending on Conference Committee funding each year).
4. The pastor must submit receipts within 30 days of returning; failure to do so will result in the item being treated as taxable, per IRS regulations.

Funding illustrates the concept that the sabbatical should be a cooperative effort of the local congregation and the conference.

Who May Apply for a Sabbatical?

There are several criteria that have been established as policy for individuals desiring a sabbatical. They are:

1. The pastor must have finished the ordination process, which means individuals cannot take a sabbatical during the initial four to five years of ministry.
2. The pastor should generally have served at least two years in a church before taking a sabbatical.
3. The local church may wish to establish a small committee to help the pastor develop the sabbatical proposal. This should usually be chaired by the head elder.
4. The local church board must give approval to the sabbatical proposal.
5. Conference administration must give approval to the sabbatical proposal.
6. The Ministerial Director will study and evaluate the sabbatical proposal. In many cases, the sabbatical proposal will have to be rewritten several times before it is finally accepted by the sabbatical committee.
7. The Conference Ministerial Department will provide maintenance of records.
8. A sabbatical proposal must be submitted to the Ministerial Department of Southeaster California Conference a minimum of two months prior to the start of the sabbatical.
9. Within 30 days of completion of the sabbatical, the pastor will write a two to three-page evaluation paper describing the growth experience of the sabbatical. This paper will be submitted to the local church board, as well as the Ministerial Department.

III. PREPARATIONAL PROCEDURES



Though the procedures may differ among churches, a helpful general form is outlined below:

- 1. Meet with Church Elders:** A pastor interested in taking a sabbatical should draft a concise proposal and discuss it with the head elder. If the head elder expresses support, the proposal should then be presented to the board of elders in a formal meeting. If the leaders approve the proposal or suggest modifications based on input from other church leaders, the next step is to present it to the church board.
- 2. Church Board Meeting:** During the church board meeting, the head elder should formally present the sabbatical proposal to determine the board's interest in supporting it. If there is interest, the accompanying video tape should be shown.
- 3. Set up Small Committee Headed by Head Elder:** This small committee is organized to sharpen up the proposal to be brought to the church board

next time. If there is sufficient support at this stage, the committee may also proceed with completing the necessary forms.

- 4. Second Church Board Meeting:** At this second church board meeting, the proposal should be studied by the church board, as well as the forms reviewed that have

been proposed by the small committee meeting with the pastor. At this point these are approved by the Conference Ministerial Director. The conference Ministerial Director will secure approval by Conference Administration. Once this is done, it will go to the Conference Executive Committee for final approval. It is crucial that all the material be in the Conference Office at least two months prior to the beginning date of proposal.



IV. DESCRIPTION OF FORMS IN MANUAL

The forms are worksheets meant to be filled out by the pastor and either the head elder or a small committee working alongside them. Once completed, these forms require signatures from both the head elder and the pastor to signify approval by the church board.

Family Involvement

It is important that the family of the pastor be involved in the sabbatical planning. It may be valuable for the family to be with the pastor during certain parts of the sabbatical. At times, it also may be valuable for the pastor to get away from the family and family pressures. This worksheet includes specific questions such as whether the sabbatical has been discussed as a family and if they agree with the proposal. Additionally, it requests a brief statement from the spouse explaining their and the rest of the family's reaction to the sabbatical, which should be signed by the spouse.

Expenses

Funds for the sabbatical are available, but they will only be allocated upon detailed documentation of specific expenses and submission of receipts. This is a critical aspect of the proposal, and adherence to the financial policy outlined in this manual is required.

Worship Speakers

It's essential to organize worship speakers before the sabbatical begins. The form includes the date, names of speakers, and their contact numbers, allowing the head elder or others to reach out if needed. For an associate pastor, indicate "Not Applicable".

Prayer Meeting Speakers

This sheet serves a similar purpose to the one for organizing worship services but is specifically for scheduling prayer meetings. If prayer meetings are not conducted within the local congregation, please make a note of it on this sheet.

Funerals and Times of Crisis

One of the primary concerns for church members is the availability of someone to conduct a funeral in the pastor's absence. This responsibility may fall upon retired ministers or other local pastors. It is crucial to have a list of names of such individuals and to ensure that at least one or two have been contacted to confirm their willingness to step in if needed.

Visitation

During the sabbatical, certain individuals require visits. These visits can be conducted by church leadership within the congregation, retired ministers, and practicing ministers from nearby congregations. The sheet must include the names and phone numbers of these individuals. Crucially, it should indicate whether they have been contacted. While it's assumed that most individuals will be contacted to inform them of the possibility of being called upon, any exceptions should be noted on this sheet.

Boards and Committees

Who will serve as the chair of the church board? When is the board scheduled to meet? Additionally, what other committees, such as Sabbath School councils or lay advisory committees, will be convening, and on which dates? It's important to note

who will be leading these committees, along with their contact information.

Bible Studies

There are typically several Bible studies led by the pastor, and the congregation may worry about their continuity during the sabbatical period, potentially leading to loss of interest. Therefore, it's vital for the pastor to arrange for individuals to conduct these studies and provide their contact numbers. These individuals must be contacted, taken to the homes, and introduced to those involved in the Bible studies. If there are currently no Bible studies being conducted by the pastor, this should be noted on this sheet.

Proposal

Individuals seeking a sabbatical should submit a written proposal (300 to 500 words) detailing the following:

- 1) Explanation of how the sabbatical will serve as a renewal experience.
- 2) Personal benefits anticipated from the sabbatical.
- 3) Benefits anticipated for the congregation.
- 4) Anticipated impact of the sabbatical on the family.

Before proceeding with any other preparations, it is imperative to draft a document that outlines the sabbatical proposal. This document must include signatures from both the pastor and the head elder, along with a statement confirming approval by the church board. Once completed, this document should be forwarded to the Executive Secretary Office through the Ministerial Department. It is essential to ensure that all necessary forms are com-

pleted and that the submission occurs at least two months before the sabbatical is scheduled to begin.

The purpose of this manual is to facilitate thorough planning for the sabbatical and to provide reassurance to the church that essential church functions will be adequately addressed during this period.





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