

# SECC MINISTERIAL

Expanding the Kingdom of God



## SABBATICAL MANUAL

SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

11330 PIERCE STREET RIVERSIDE, CA 92505

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## I. Why a Sabbatical?

Church members often see the exciting part of being a pastor—that is, chairing meetings, preaching, etc. The fact is that being a pastor involves many hours every week of very high pressure and often routine work, running from one hospital to another, trying to prepare sermons, etc. One problem that church members often forget is that usually the Sabbath is one of the busiest days for the pastor. While he/she is indeed ministering through preaching, visitation, attending potlucks, etc. it still takes away from time alone with his/her time with family. One of the ways the Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically handled this is to move pastors every three to four years. This way, the pastor gets a little different perspective and is often able to better cope.

Certainly, it is far better for pastors to have time built in, from time to time, for renewal and regeneration. This benefits the congregation greatly! Several congregations whose pastors have taken sabbaticals have been amazed at the changes in preaching, prayer meetings and other programs after the sabbatical. All of us need time to be alone, alone with our families, and alone with God. Since the pastor is the spiritual leader of the congregation, it is especially important for him or her to have this type of time.

The sabbatical is not meant to be a vacation! The sabbatical should not generally relate to vacation time. Rather, it is a time for renewal and spiritual regeneration.

## II. Sabbatical Policy

The Southeastern California Conference Committee, in July 1989, voted a sabbatical policy. There are three major presuppositions that are relevant to the local congregation. They are:

- 1) A sabbatical should be understood and supported by the local church, and especially by the local church 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 his/her local church upon completion of sabbatical.
- 5) The sabbatical is not an employee benefit but can be requested and applied for.

### Objectives of the Sabbatical

The sabbatical is not intended to be a time of only intellectual pursuits. It is not only a time of study, but rather should involve five specific areas. They are:

- 1) **A time for personal and family renewal.** Many pastors' families are in serious difficulties. This is often precipitated by the lack of time for true one-to-one relationships.
- 2) **Physical, intellectual, and emotional restoration.** The pastor, at the end of the sabbatical, should have had an opportunity to improve his/her physical, intellectual, and emotional realms.
- 3) **A time of professional growth.** The pastor needs time to develop in new areas where time is not available in his/her week-to-week schedule.
- 4) **A time of spiritual growth.** Pastors cannot spend all their time pouring out 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, to attend other churches, to get some unique perspectives that will help them break out of the "rut" of pastoring year by year.

### Length of Sabbatical

The conference policy states that the sabbatical can involve up to four weeks for every two years of pastoral work and that this time may accrue up to one quarter (12 weeks), at the rate of two weeks per year, after the first two years.

In most cases, a shorter sabbatical would be appropriate. The time limitations are simply maximum times available. The Sabbatical is not automatic and is based on: (1) need; (2) church support; (3) conference administration support; and (4) a detailed proposal by the pastor.

## Funding

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

They are:

- 1) Continuing education funds from the conference up to \$350 a year (depending on Conference Committee funding each year).
- 2) Recommended local church subsidy of \$250 for every two years the pastor has served the local church, which may accrue to a total of \$500. While this is at the discrimination of the local church, the local church is encouraged to cooperate in the funding of the sabbatical.
- 3) Conference subsidy-for every two years, \$250, which may accrue up to \$500 (depending on Conference Committee funding each year).
- 4) Pastor must turn in receipts withing 30 days of returning otherwise it becomes a taxable item per the IRS.

Funding illustrates the concept that the sabbatical should be 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 completed the ordination process. This precludes individuals taking a sabbatical during the first 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

While the procedures will vary from one church to another, a general form that would be of help would be the following:

### 1) Meet with Church Leaders

A pastor desiring a sabbatical should put together a short proposal and share this with his/her head elder. If the head elder is supportive, then it should be supported by the board of elders at a more formal meeting. Once this is done, if the leaders agree with the proposal, or the proposal is modified by some of the church leaders' input, then the next step is to present it to the church board.

### 2) Church Board Meeting

At the church board meeting the head elder should present the proposal to the board to see if they are interested in supporting the proposal. If they are, then the video tape should be shown.

### 3) Set up Small Committee Chaired by the Head Elder

This small committee is organized to sharpen up the proposal to be brought to the church board next time. If there is adequate support at this time, the process of filling out the forms may take place also.

### 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 the proposal.

#### IV. Description of Forms in Manual

The forms are worksheets that are to be prepared by the pastor and the head elder or small committee that works with him/her. These are to be signed off by the head elder, whose signature signifies the approval of the church board, as well as the pastor, when approved by the church board.

##### **Worship Speakers During Sabbatical**

It is crucial that worship speakers be arranged before the sabbatical begins. The form shows the date, the individuals who will be speaking, and their phone numbers, so the head elder or anyone needing to contact the individuals from the church can contact them. In the case of an associate pastor, simply state "This does not apply" and sign.

##### **Prayer Meeting Speakers During the Sabbatical**

This sheet is similar to the worship services but is used to line up the prayer meetings. If prayer meetings are not in operation in the local congregation, that needs to be noted on this sheet.

##### **Visitation During Sabbatical**

There are individuals who need to be visited during the sabbatical. There are three types of people who could be doing the visiting. They are church leadership in the congregation; retired ministers; and practicing ministers from other nearby congregations. The name of the individuals who can visit and their phone numbers must be on the sheet. Of great importance is the question, "Have they been contacted?" It is assumed that most people will be contacted so that they will know they

could be called upon. If they have not been contacted, this needs to be checked on this sheet.

##### **Funerals and Times of Crisis During Sabbatical**

One of the biggest concerns to church members is if there were to be a funeral and the pastor is out of town for several weeks, who will be available to conduct the funeral? This could be retired ministers or other local pastors. It is extremely important that these names be provided and that at least one or two have been contacted to be sure they would be willing to fill in.

##### **Boards and Committees During Sabbatical**

Who will be chairing the church board? When will it be meeting? What other committees are meeting, such as Sabbath School councils, lay advisory committees, etc.? What dates will they meet? Who will be in charge? And what are their phone numbers?

##### **Bible Studies During Sabbatical**

There are a number of Bible studies usually given by the pastor. One of the concerns of the congregation would be that these could not be carried out during the period of a sabbatical, and during these weeks the interests could be lost. For that reason, it is important that the pastor arrange for individuals to carry out Bible studies, and that their phone numbers be available. It is crucial that these individuals be contacted and taken to the home and introduced to the people who are involved in the Bible studies. If there are no Bible studies being given in the church at the present time by the pastor, this should be noted on this sheet.

##### **Family Involvement During Sabbatical**

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 asks specific things, such as have you discussed the sabbatical as a family, and do they concur with the proposal? Then a brief statement by the spouse is to be added explaining the spouse's and the rest of the family's reaction to the sabbatical. This should be signed by the spouse.

## **Expenses for Sabbatical**

While funds are available, they will not be funded unless specific expenses are detailed, and receipts submitted.

This is a very important part of the proposal. The financial policy previously stated in this manual governs this section.

## **Sabbatical Application**

The sabbatical application is a summary form of all the previous forms. The question is asked, "Are the following completed?" They should be checked off apart from "Conference administration approval" That will be obtained by the Ministerial Department at the Conference office.

The person desiring a sabbatical should write (in 300 to 500 words) what his/her proposal is and include such things as:

- 1) How this will be a renewal experience.
- 2) Benefits to you.
- 3) Benefits to the congregation.
- 4) How it will impact the family.

It is crucial that this document bear the signature of the pastor and of the head elder with a statement that this has been approved by the church board, before it is sent to the Conference Sabbatical Committee through the Ministerial Department.

This document should be written before anything else is done. This is the document that should be presented and approved by the church board and then sent to the Ministerial Department with all the forms completed, at least two months before the sabbatical is to begin.

The purpose of this manual then is to make sure that adequate planning has taken place for the sabbatical. It is also to assure the church that the major functions of the church are being covered during the sabbatical time.