Redeeming Grace Baptist Church

Policy for Pastoral Sabbatical Leave

In the context of ministry, sabbatical time is for spiritual renewal and growth. Most sabbatical leaves include study, spiritual retreat and rest.

Sabbatical leave is not a right, but rather a gift from the congregation of a prolonged period of time away for study, reflection, and spiritual renewal over and above the normal vacation. It is intended to enhance the pastor’s effectiveness by giving him an uninterrupted time to care for his own well being so as to return to his work with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

**General Guidelines for a Sabbatical:**

In general, pastors with seven continuous years of service at RGBC are eligible for sabbatical leave.

- Upon completing first seven year term = Up to 8 weeks sabbatical leave.
- Upon completing second seven year term = Up to 10 weeks sabbatical leave.
- Upon completing third seven year term = Up to 12 weeks sabbatical leave.
- All subsequent seven year terms = Up to 12 weeks sabbatical leave.

NOTE: Earned vacation time can be combined with sabbatical leave to further the overall leave period.

**Planning for a Sabbatical:**

- When? Timing is crucial so as to minimize disruption to the congregation.
- Pastors shall notify the elders at least six months prior to taking sabbatical leave.
- At the time of the sabbatical leave if there is only one pastor at RGBC then funding for a replacement pastor might be necessary. This would take careful financial planning so pastors shall coordinate the sabbatical date closely with the elders and stewardship ministry team to ensure that funding is available.
- No two members of the pastoral staff may be on sabbatical leave within six months of each other.

**Staffing during a pastor’s sabbatical leave:**

- If RGBC is ever in the position of having only one pastor, pastoral needs during sabbatical leave would obviously be a major concern. Several options are available, a few of them would be:
  - An Elder
  - A retired pastor
  - Hiring of a seminary intern or graduate
An interim pastor from the Potomac Baptist Association.

**Benefits of sabbatical leave for pastors:**

- Sabbatical leave is a wise investment for the professional by avoiding breakdown and for the church by re-energizing the pastoral leadership.
- Good self-care, which includes sabbatical leave, enables the professional church worker to achieve a new sense of vision, renew his calling, evaluate his gifts and skills and the needs of the ministry.
- Sabbatical leave should be an on-going intentional part of a congregation’s ministry, not a reaction to crisis (i.e. burnout).
- Sabbaticals are a way that congregations can minister to their pastors.
- Granting sabbatical leave is an opportunity to show support and care for a beloved pastor and his family.
- Sabbatical leave is cost effective. When an experienced pastor leaves due to burnout, the congregation loses finances due to loss of momentum, expenses of an interim pastor, cost of moving expenses of a new pastor, lost efficiency while new relationships develop, etc.
- A sabbatical benefits the pastor by providing a much-needed break from the long hours, high pressure, personal sacrifice, and the 24/7 nature of the ministry.

**Financial arrangements:**

- A continuation of full salary and benefits will be given during sabbatical leave.

**Upon completion of sabbatical leave:**

- Evaluations of the sabbatical leave and its impact on the pastor and the congregation are helpful and an important means for planning such further opportunities. Evaluative reports from the returning pastor should be shared with the congregation within thirty days after the leave is completed.

**Continued employment following the completion of sabbatical leave:**

- In order for the congregation to benefit from the personal and professional renewal of its pastoral leadership after a paid sabbatical leave of absence, the pastor shall remain in the employment of the congregation for at least one year following his return from the sabbatical.
  - Failure to maintain employment for at least one year following sabbatical leave may require that the pastor repay the salary that was paid during the entire sabbatical leave period. Special considerations are allowed due to unforeseen events like illness, death in family, etc.

*Approved by the RGBC Elders January 19, 2015*