

**PASTORAL SABBATICALS**  
**NCA Guideline Proposal**  
**Adopted September 17, 2011**

PASTORAL SABBATICALS

1. DEFINITION AND RATIONALE

According to Webster's Dictionary, a sabbatical is a recurring period of rest. The root word is old Semitic in origin, meaning "to cease, rest from or interrupt labor" (R. Laird Harris, Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 404). The concept of a sabbatical is based on the seventh day rest from creating the heavens and the earth taken by God (Gen. 2:2). In Exodus 20:8-11 the Lord commands His people to work six days each week and to rest on the seventh. In Deuteronomy 15:12-18 the Lord commands that slaves were to be set free after six years of service. The concept of a sabbatical leave for pastors is based on these Bible passages.

God designed us in such a way that we need a time to cease from our normal activities in order to reflect on God. A sabbatical gives a pastor an extended time away on retreat or renewal, or to be involved in other activities that would renew him and increase the effectiveness of his ministry. A pastoral sabbatical is a time for reading, reflection, restoration, and especially "renewal of spirit" (Eugene Peterson, Leadership Journal, Winter 1988, p. 74). Burnout among pastors is becoming an increasing problem. Often effective pastors leave churches because they need to be personally and spiritually renewed. Long-term pastorates tend to be healthier for churches. A renewed and refreshed pastor will be more effective in pastoral ministry. By making an investment in the pastor's future, the bond of trust and mutual esteem may be enhanced between pastor and congregation.

2. GUIDELINES

- a. Sabbatical leave should be granted for two to four consecutive months following six full-time years of continuous ministry in a local church.
- b. While on sabbatical leave, the pastor should receive full salary and benefits.
- c. Application should be made in writing to the Board of the Church at least three months ahead of the anticipated beginning of leave. This application should state the pastor's desire to receive a sabbatical, and include details of how the time will be spent, and the benefits expected. The Church Board and/or congregation should approve the application.
- d. The pastor should assist the Board in planning for the continuation of the Church's ministry during his sabbatical.

e. The pastor should commit to serving the Church for at least two years following his return from a sabbatical.

f. When practical, the pastor's wife is encouraged to accompany him, so that both can experience spiritual renewal and a strengthening of their marital relationship.

g. Where there are two or more pastors serving a church, only one should be on sabbatical leave at a time.

### 3. SABBATICAL GOALS

a. To cease from all regular professional activities in order to be restored spiritually, physically and emotionally.

b. To study God's Word and other Christian literature and media, not for the purpose of preaching or teaching, but for personal edification and renewal.

c. To be renewed spiritually through reflection, prayer and journaling.

d. To develop a meaningful plan for future growth and service in his home, community and congregation.

e. To report the outcomes of the sabbatical to the congregation.

f. To return to pastoral ministry in the same local Church with new joy and perspective.

4. BE IT RESOLVED THAT EACH NCA CHURCH BE ENCOURAGED TO ADOPT GUIDELINES FOR A TIME OR MEANS OF SABBATICAL TO BE OFFERED TO EACH OF THEIR PASTORAL STAFF.