



M I C H I G A N M I N I S T R Y N E T W O R K

SABBATICAL GUIDE

## THE CONCEPT OF A SABBATH/SABBATICAL

A sabbatical is intentional time away from normal everyday work and life. Taking a break to rest is not a new concept. God first showed us the concept of Sabbath all the way back in Genesis after the creation of the world. Rest is a crucial part of our lives that can be overlooked if we are not careful.

According to the Book of Exodus, the Sabbath is a day of rest on the seventh day, commanded by God to be kept as a holy day of rest. This is demonstrated as God rested after six days of creating.

Genesis 2:2-3

<sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (NIV)

The practice of observing the Sabbath (Shabbat) originates from a biblical commandment.

Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (NIV)

Based on the weekly practice of Sabbath, a sabbatical is an enlarged version of this. Taken every seven years, a sabbatical is a time of rest and restoration.

## THE NEED FOR A SABBATICAL

Former AG Michigan District Superintendent William Leach once preached on the implications of “observing the Sabbath” and how that can be applied to ministers. He made the following observations:

“Pastoring certainly requires long hours of work that can be mentally, emotionally and spiritually draining, and many people have jobs that require very large amounts of time, energy, effort and personal investment. However, I do think there are some things that make “pastoring” different from a “non-pastoral job”

Typical “normal job” is/has:

- 40 to 60 hours a week; typically, with 2 days off.
- pay commensurate with responsibility, level of education, experience, and merit.
- typical benefits (may include some of the following): medical, dental, life, education, and pension.
- defined responsibilities.
- days off/vacation; personal days (if hourly); “sick-days”

Typical “pastoring job” is/has:

- 50 to 70 hours a week; typically, with 1 day off.
- pay lower than what can be earned in the marketplace.

- benefits *may* include medical (typically no life/education/pension/retirement).
- non-defined or at least not *easily* defined responsibility; pressure of congregational expectation
- days off/vacation (“salaried” so can take days off when ill)
- no disconnecting— “on call” 24/7 (ex. “Does Pastor do marriage counseling on his vacation?”)

In addition to the above, it would be wise to recognize the different relationship patterns a pastor has within their local congregation. Non-Pastoral church attenders find a wonderful and needed separation from their vocation when attending church. This is very important to find life giving times of refreshing on a regular basis. Pastors may not have those same levels of relationships within their local church due to the nature of their role.

There are some startling statistics regarding clergy health. A survey regarding these kinds of issues was published a few years ago.:

### ***Survey of Pastors conducted by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth***

90% worked more than 46 hours per week.

80% believed that pastoral ministry is affecting their families negatively.

33% said it was an outright hazard to their families.

75% reported a significant crisis due to stress at least once in their ministry.

50% felt unable to meet the needs of the ministry.

90% felt they were inadequately trained to cope with the demands placed on them by ministry.

40% reported a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.

70% of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend.

70% say they have a lower self-image after they have pastored than when they started.

## **THE PURPOSE/BENEFITS OF A SABBATICAL**

### **REST**

Rest is an important part of life. Rest allows for better brain function, more productivity, better mood, and reduced stress and anxiety. Without rest, burnout is inevitable. Our world regularly does things to the extreme. We either work extremely hard with no breaks or we tend to rest to the point of laziness. We need to learn to live with life balance, where we find an appropriate balance of work and rest.

### **CONNECT WITH FAMILY/FRIENDS**

Time with family and friends is important to grow and develop strong and deep relationships. This is a good opportunity to spend time with these important people and a good way to step out of the “fishbowl” that is “the pulpit”. A good relationship with your family and friends helps you stay connected with each other.

## REJUVENATION OF SOUL

This time should be especially beneficial to grow in a deeper connect with God. It is a time of focusing one-on-one with Jesus to replenish one's soul without the responsibility to fill others.

## DISCONNECT

Unplugging from life and technology can be very difficult in a culture where being connected is seen as a must. Communicate with church leaders before leaving to make sure any questions anyone may have can be directed to the right person. This ensures you will not be disturbed with work-related issues during your time away. Another idea on how to disconnect would be to limit your social media. When you use it, be aware of how you do so and how it affects your mood, mental state, and your ability to relax.

## ENGAGE/DEVELOP A HOBBY

A sabbatical is a great time to be able to take time to personally develop your interests, hobbies, and use this time away to grow. Hobbies are important as they can increase your energy, provides enrichment, good for your emotional health, and can help prevent bad habits and time-wasting. Hobbies help you feel engaged and gives you a sense of accomplishment. Some hobbies you can do almost anywhere include hiking, drawing, photography, playing music, etc.

## RELEASE STRESS AND TENSION

Stress can be emotional, mental, and physical. One way to help release stress and tension is to engage in hobbies as discussed above. Physically, tension can be addressed through stretching, taking a walk or being outside, and/or breathing exercises to help calm your heart rate. This time away from work is the perfect opportunity to focus on yourself and how you can manage stress and tension on a daily basis, even when it's time to return to work.

## TRAVEL

Physically distancing and disconnecting yourself may be helpful in order to take a break. Traveling can give you different perspectives on many different matters. This can be a wonderful time of creating memories for the pastor and their family.

## THE PROCESS OF CREATING & COMMUNICATING A SABBATICAL TO YOUR CHURCH

1. The pastor and board should discuss and approve a sabbatical policy for pastoral team. The template in this document can be of assistance in doing so.
2. The church board may also want to consider any reasonable financial gift that they may want to bless the pastor with. This usually ranges between \$500-\$1,500.
3. The pastor may want to schedule a Network official to come and speak regarding the concept of a sabbatical. This may or may not be necessary based on each local church.
4. The pastor/board should communicate to the church regarding the pastor taking a sabbatical. This should be communicated both during weekend services and in a letter from the board. This letter should include all the important information related to the sabbatical. A sample letter has been given later in this document.

5. The pastor should reach out to the Network Office if there is a need for pulpit fill in while the pastor is on sabbatical. If that is not needed, then the pastor should set up speakers well in advance of his/her sabbatical.
6. In the weeks leading up to the sabbatical the pastor should hand off their responsibilities to other capable individuals who can lead in the pastor's absence. This will allow the pastor to truly get away and not have to worry about things at the church.
7. An announcement should be made on the final Sunday before the sabbatical begins stating that the church should honor the time away and allow the pastor and the pastor's family to truly get some time away. Also, the board should lead in prayer over the pastor and spouse.

## POTENTIAL SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

1. The AG Michigan Ministry Network urges local churches to adopt a sabbatical policy for all their pastors.
2. A sabbatical may be taken after six consecutive years of continuous ministry as a pastor in the same church and may only be taken during consecutive years of service (during the seventh, fourteenth year, etc.).
3. It is recommended that a sabbatical may be supported for up to two months. The ideal time for a sabbatical would be a minimum of one month up to two months.
4. The sabbatical should not replace normal vacation time. This is in addition to the vacation policy the church currently utilizes.
5. The local church is expected to continue full salary and benefits (if any) during the sabbatical.
6. The sabbatical should be used for personal renewal and/or spiritual development, quality rest, and time to enhance family relationships.
7. The sabbatical should not be a time to preach or teach. It is meant to be a time away from the normal ministry responsibilities.
8. The pastor is expected to commit to serve on the church staff at least one full year after the sabbatical is completed.
9. If possible, the pastor should request the sabbatical one year in advance, thus allowing for budget considerations for pulpit substitutes.
10. The AG Michigan Ministry Network is committed to filling the pulpit (if desired by the church/pastor) during the sabbatical. While a church should compensate guest speakers in a reasonable manner, please note that, if necessary, arrangements can be made to fill the pulpit for no cost to the church.

## SAMPLE SABBATICAL POLICY

### [Church Name] Sabbatical Policy for Full-Time Pastoral Staff (Adopted by Official Board [date])

Due to the unique demands and requirements of Pastoral Ministry, the Official Board has adopted the following policies regarding the normal schedules of its Pastors:

1. Each pastor will set a sustainable schedule that includes no more than 13-14 work segments per week.

Each waking day can be defined by three work segments— morning, afternoon, and evening. In a typical week, most individuals work ideally two segments each day. In that kind of schedule, a total of 10 segments are expended in work per week.

For the busy leader in a local congregation, a commitment of no more than 13-14 segments in a week should be scheduled for the responsibilities associated with pastoral ministry. When emergencies occur and sacrifices are required, a return to a normal schedule should occur as soon as possible.

2. Each pastor will schedule one “real” day off (Sabbath) per week.
3. In addition to the above, each pastor will take the amount of yearly vacation that he/she is designated under the vacation policies determined by the Official Board.
4. After every seven years of service, each pastor will have a paid 30-day Sabbatical.

\*Note: All of the above will be scheduled on the master calendar under the supervision of the lead pastor.

## SAMPLE CONGREGATIONAL LETTER

Dear Congregation,

On Sunday, [date] [board member name] and [board member name] shared with the congregation regarding the upcoming sabbatical for Pastor [pastor’s name] taking place on [dates] (45 days).

In 2022 our Deacon Board, at the suggestion of our then Assemblies of God Michigan Ministry Network Superintendent Aaron Hlavin, created a Sabbatical Guide for the Pastors of churches in Michigan. [Board secretaries name], shared (last Sunday) that the Deacon Board passed a policy stating the following:

### **[church name] of God Sabbatical Policy for Pastoral Staff**

Due to the unique demands and requirements of Pastoral Ministry, the Official Board has adopted the following policy regarding the normal schedules of its Pastors:

“After every six years of service and in the seventh year, each Pastor will have a paid 45-day Sabbatical.”  
(Adopted by Official Board [date])

[Name of board treasurer], who currently serves as the Treasurer of the board, also shared (last Sunday) how the current Board is supportive of the policy and reinforces the intent and health of it.

So, we are writing this to make sure we are all on the same page as well as to clarify **that nothing is wrong with Pastor and this is not due to any other reason.** It is simply meant to be a refreshing time for Pastor [pastor's name] and his/her family.

We wish this were something every business did for its employees, because you all deserve it as well!

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Typical "non-pastoral job:"

- 40 to 60 hours a week; typically 2 days off.
- They have "defined" daily responsibilities.
- More time for "disconnecting" from the job.

Typical "pastoring:"

- 55 to 70 hours a week; typically 1 day off.
- "Non-defined" or at least "not easily defined" responsibilities.
- Pastors carry the pressure of congregational expectation.
- No "disconnecting" – "on duty" 24/7.

Taking this preventative measure to encourage emotional, spiritual health and welfare is a healthy and wise decision. Churches need to make it a high priority to care for their Pastors who provide care for them in life's most difficult moments.

We ask that during this Sabbatical you direct all communications that would normally go to Pastor [pastor's name] through the church office for assistance. We have put the necessary steps in place to be able to accomplish all that is needed for our congregation during this time.

Pastor [pastor & spouses names] have expressed their gratefulness to this congregation by allowing this time for refreshing and renewal. They feel your love and support.

Pastor [pastor's name] has scheduled a great set of guest speakers that will challenge and encourage us in his/her absence.

Thanks for your support,

The Official Board of Deacons  
[church name] Assembly of God

## MINISTER RETREAT & RENEWAL RESOURCE

Based on supplied information, this listing of get-away locations / retreat opportunities, is compiled and maintained by the National Office. These are not recommendations, but are supplied for informational purposes only, based on descriptions provided by venues. Many offer discounted rates to ministers. Listed in alphabetical order by state:

<https://ag.org/Resources/Resources-For/For-Ministers/Renewals-Retreats-and-Vacations>

## BOOK RESOURCES ON SABBATICALS

This is a book resource you may desire to read called: The Art of Rest by: *Adam Mabry*

