

# Ottawa Presbytery Pastoral Relations Ministry Team

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## United Church Sabbaticals

### Defining a Sabbatical:

An academic sabbatical has as its primary purpose, study. Its usual length is at least one year. In contrast, a *United Church sabbatical* is much shorter (usually only three months in length), and is meant to be *an opportunity for rest, reflection and rejuvenation centered on the practice of ministry*. Formal studies may, but are not required to be part of the sabbatical.

### Advantages of a Sabbatical:

The United Church has long recognized the value that fresh thinking can bring to a congregation, keeping it active, enthusiastic and engaged. One way to accomplish this is to encourage ministers to move on after a few years, so that a fresh face may arrive with new ideas. Many congregations, however, value their pastors, and would like to retain them longer. From this arose the idea of a sabbatical, wherein a minister could withdraw completely but only temporarily from the congregation, and return with a new outlook, new insights, and renewed enthusiasm. At the same time, congregations would have an opportunity to experience different worship styles brought in by replacement service leaders, with the understanding that their regular pastor would return shortly.

A sabbatical should be viewed as an exciting adventure on the part of both minister and congregants. It is a leadership opportunity for members of the congregation who might not normally have participated. It is a chance to become more involved in the running of the church, even if only temporarily. It is a time of renewal for both congregation and minister—a win-win situation.

### Frequency of Sabbaticals:

Sabbaticals may be taken every five years. Any minister associated with the United Church who has completed five or more (consecutive) years in service with the same congregation is entitled to a sabbatical of at least three months, provided that minister agrees to return for *at least* one year following the break. Normally, a sabbatical is three months in length; ministers often choose to add their vacation time and/or study leave to this. Some ministers choose to waive their study leave during a sabbatical year, but this is not a requirement.

### Organizing a sabbatical:

As much time as possible and at the very least one year, should be given a congregation to prepare for a sabbatical.

1. First, *funds* need to be set aside to pay for the break, and this is most easily accomplished over an extended period of time. Five years in advance is not too soon to start saving, as small amounts set aside each month hurt less.

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2. *Coverage* of all duties normally carried out by the minister must be provided. If a supply minister is not appointed for the interim period, tasks will have to be identified and covered separately. Duties may include, but are not limited to:
  - Sunday service leadership. Ways to cover this include:
    - Hiring Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (the same leader may cover a maximum of 2 services in any one month).
    - Asking a member of the congregation to lead the services. There is no limit to the number of services a congregant who is not a LLWL may lead in the home church.
    - Assigning each committee of the church a particular Sunday where they will be asked to lead. Sermons are available on the internet.
  - Pastoral Care
    - If the congregation has a trained pastoral care committee, these members may serve.
    - The minister may arrange coverage on a quid pro quo basis with another member of the clergy.
    - Another member of the clergy or a suitably trained lay person may be contracted for this purpose.
  - Pastoral oversight of meetings of council / official board
    - Ottawa Presbytery can appoint someone to serve as a pastoral charge supervisor for the purpose of quorum at a meeting.
  - Weddings and funerals
  - Baptisms
  - Confirmation classes for younger members
  - Administration of emergency benevolent funds

### **Who makes the arrangements for a Sabbatical?**

Normally the Ministry and Personnel Committee, with input from the Worship Committee, is responsible for arranging suitable sabbatical coverage, but the responsibility may be shared in other ways. What is important is that coverage be agreed upon by a group of people rather than by any one individual, to eliminate the possibility of bias.

While the minister may assist by arranging coverage for certain functions, ultimately responsibility for enabling their pastor's sabbatical lies with the congregation.

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Where there are any questions about the arrangements, Ottawa Presbytery's Pastoral Relations Ministry Team (Committee) is happy to help and advise. Consultation at the early stages of the process can eliminate last minute problems.

Once sabbatical accommodations have been finalized and ratified by the Congregation's governing body (Council or Official Board), and *at least two months before the sabbatical is scheduled to begin*, notification of the arrangements must be sent to Ottawa Presbytery's Pastoral Relations Ministry Team (Committee), who will take note of the sabbatical in their minutes.

**Final notes:**

During a sabbatical, ministers are strongly urged to remove themselves completely from the life of their congregations in order to gain the full rewards of this time. They should not be expected to return to handle any emergencies that might arise nor should they intervene in any way in the workings of the congregations while they are absent. Congregations should be very careful to respect this advice, in order that their ministers may return fully refreshed.