

The Diocese of Iowa's Sabbatical Policy

Definition

In the Diocese of Iowa a sabbatical is understood to be a time utilized by clergy and/or lay employees of congregations for the purpose of spiritual and vocational renewal, study, theological reflection, and strengthening of skills and ministries according to a well-defined plan developed by the person taking leave in concert with their vestry (or the bishop). A normal sabbatical leave is typically about three months.

Sabbatical leave is beneficial and expected for the congregation and the clergy person or lay employee, and the decision of when the sabbatical is to be taken must be made in consultation and mutual agreement with the vestry, bishop, and the person taking the sabbatical. In the Diocese of Iowa, standard letters of agreement now include a provision to accrue two weeks of paid sabbatical leave per year of service in the congregation.

Guidelines

1. Full time and part-time clergy or lay employees (at least 20 hours a week) who have completed five years of service in a congregation of the Diocese or in the bishop's office are eligible to take a sabbatical. It is recommended that the length of the sabbatical be between 10-14 weeks, and that sabbatical be taken every five to seven years. At a minimum, the time between sabbaticals will be 5 years and unused sabbatical time cannot be rolled over and taken at a later time. 14 weeks is the maximum amount of sabbatical time that can be accrued.
2. The clergy or lay person shall waive eligibility for continuing education leave for the year in which the sabbatical is being taken.
3. Sabbatical time does not replace vacation time. Clergy and lay employees can and should take the vacation time, sick time, and personal leave time as outlined in their Letter of Agreement in a sabbatical year, in addition to the sabbatical time. These can be added to the sabbatical time in some combination for a lengthier time away, to be determined in conversation with congregational leadership and/or the bishop, or taken at another point in the year.
4. The congregation will pay the salary and benefits during the sabbatical, and provide the usual amount of continuing education funding. The congregation is also responsible for paying for supply coverage as needed. The congregation is strongly encouraged to set aside money in the

budget each year in an interest-bearing account to be added to the normal clergy support budget during the sabbatical leave. These funds may be used to offset the cost of supply clergy. Beyond that, the individual can obtain funding for their specific sabbatical expenses from a variety of sources--self-funding, the Diocese of Iowa Development Leave funds, or grants.

5. No later than six months prior to the beginning of the anticipated sabbatical leave, a clergy or lay person planning to take sabbatical leave shall, after conversation with the vestry, prepare a proposal that identifies the time requested and describes a plan of study, rest, action, training, or reflection, together with a financial statement of all anticipated expenses to be incurred by the congregation during the sabbatical, and the desired results that they hope to realize from this leave. In the case of multiple clergy or lay people wishing to take sabbatical leave at the same time, priority should be given to the person who has gone the longest without a sabbatical.

6. In the case of a lay person, the vestry and clergy must agree to the timing of the sabbatical leave, agree to continue salary and benefits, and agree to find other ways to cover the lay person's work responsibilities in their absence, including the possibility of hiring someone to perform their duties while they are on sabbatical.

7. During a rector's sabbatical, the wardens assume canonical authority of the congregation. Responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, the administration of its programs, and the maintenance of its grounds and buildings rests with the wardens and vestry/executive committee of the congregation. If there are other paid clergy at the congregation, the roles and responsibilities of the other clergy in the absence of the rector should be agreed on by the rector, vestry, associate, and bishop. The Bishop's Office will work closely with the congregation and its leadership to ensure that the pastoral and sacramental life of the community is maintained during the sabbatical leave.

8. The clergy or lay person shall agree to serve for at least one year in their congregation upon completion of their sabbatical leave. Should the clergy or lay person depart from the congregation during the first twelve months following sabbatical leave, they will be required to reimburse the congregation and/or diocese for any costs incurred in support of the sabbatical. Sabbaticals are intended for refreshment, and not as severance. Unused sabbatical time is forfeited upon retirement, resignation or termination.

9. This Policy does not itself establish terms of employment for any person. Rather, it constitutes a directive that this diocese and all congregations of this diocese shall make available sabbatical leave consistent with this Policy.

Preparing for a clergy sabbatical

Once the clergy sabbatical plan is approved by the vestry and then by the bishop, the clergy and vestry should jointly develop a plan for communicating and preparing the congregation for the clergy's leave.

The clergy should take primary responsibility, in consultation with the vestry, for making satisfactory arrangements for worship services, pastoral care, and parish administration during their absence, including:

- Securing a priest for regularly scheduled sacramental worship;
- Arranging for lay readers for morning prayer as needed
- Lay committees for pastoral ministry and new member greeting and visitation;
- Supply clergy for pastoral emergencies
- Staff assignments, roles and responsibilities
- Outlining and clearly communicating before the sabbatical if and when they are to be contacted in the case of any significant or critical event during the sabbatical, and she/he shall define what comprises such events.

After the Sabbatical

Upon completion of the sabbatical, the clergy or lay person will develop a format for sharing with the congregation the observations, realizations and growth produced by the sabbatical leave and share a copy with the Bishop. This reporting should specifically relate the insights gained to the life and ministry of the person's local and diocesan community. The congregation should be prepared to share with returning clergy and lay staff its experiences of the community's life during the person's time away.