



The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

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Description: The 1990 General Conference called for the creation of a taskforce to study and report on the possibilities of a Sabbatical leave for credential holders, and that this report was to be brought back to the next General Conference. The General Executive appointed a study committee and a report of their findings was brought to the General Executive. It was reported to the 1994 General Conference that the conclusion of the General Executive was that it was not possible to institute a national policy in these matters. The 1994 Conference carried a motion to refer (so that more information could be gathered and circulated concerning the possibility of Sabbaticals). The General Executive in response to this motion appointed this committee to bring a report back the General Executive to help them in this matter.

PASTORAL SABBATICALS

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to outline the issues of Sabbaticals under the following headings: ***Definition, Need, Biblical Foundation, Limitations, Objections, and Determining a Sabbatical Policy.***

1. DEFINITION

David Ellingston defines sabbatical as "*a time to relearn and rehearse that critical capacity to reflect, which transforms dreams of vacation to new visions of vocation*". It is understood that in most professions a sabbatical is an opportunity to pursue advanced degrees or other career options. Sabbaticals normally extend over a range of time usually between six months to a year.

This narrow understanding is not the only context for pastors seeking a sabbatical and the concept needs to be broadened. Perhaps a different name, or term, that would better convey the larger purposes, a Pastoral Sabbatical, without the preconceived notions that this term brings with it, would be appropriate. It is important that the idea of sabbatical is not narrowly defined as relating to academic pursuit, nor is it in the context of a rigid length of time.

A sabbatical is not to be viewed as an extended vacation, but to be an opportunity for a pastor to step away for a period of time, in order to renew vision and hope, as well as life and soul searching.

The Pastoral Sabbatical is intended to provide pastoral staffs that have served for an extended period in a church, a gift of time away from normal responsibilities and routines, to pursue a plan of personal renewal and growth in cooperation with the Holy Spirit that may include study, travel, relaxation or education.

The sabbatical is not just a reward for longevity of service. More importantly it is an opportunity for those who have given consistently of themselves in teaching and ministry to refill their own hearts and resources in order that they might continue to lead the congregation and serve the Lord in this calling.

2. THE NEED FOR SABBATICALS IN MINISTRY

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" Mark 2:27-28

Renewal

A sabbatical is first of all pro-active in that it is a preventative measure that in some forms it to be a part of ongoing renewal and health for people in ministry. It appears the church and ministry today is very much involved in crisis management and one of the goals of leadership is to do all it can to not see these life crisis experiences result in personal and professional destruction.

A sabbatical is viewed as a nourishing pilgrimage, and provides an opportunity for sharpening of focus before a crisis situation develops. It does not guarantee that personal or ministry crisis will not happen, but that when it does, there is a strength and health that will help the pastor deal with these issues more clearly and wisely.

Restoration

There can be no denying the fact that one of the most pressing issues among pastors is that of "Burn-out". While there is a great deal of misconception, generalization and abuse of this term, the fact remains that it is a real issue to be dealt with. Our districts have recognized the problem and are making attempts to address pastoral burn-out.²

It is an area that cannot be ignored. The pressures and expectations of pastoral ministry are intense and often destructive. The church at large including The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada is facing conflict, both in terms of personal conflict with pastors and congregations and in issues of theology that are intensified by the cultural pressures in Canada.

G. Nelson stated in an article in *Resource* that ...

"Congregations often hold unrealistic expectations relative to pastoral care, time, performance, visibility and availability ... Three of every four ministers endure a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their lives. Feeling helpless and cut off, many of them are overwhelmed by emotional overload ... many of them do, quietly and meekly, resign from their posts ... but most ministers continue to endure the hazards ... they continue because there is no option."¹⁸

There can be no denying the fact that excessive prolonged stress can reduce alertness, create errors in judgment, distort one's ability and capacity to cope with the complexity of ministry and interpersonal relationships. Often pastors are left to struggle through with little or no help. This further creates anger, resentment and guilt. A sabbatical will not be the cure all to this issue; however, it can be met as a major step in the healing of burn-out.

Longevity

The issue of longevity applies to two areas. First, there are increasing social and economic factors that are encouraging pastors to look at longer ministry commitments to a church. It is recognized that while these must not replace a theological foundation for pastoring, or a calling to another pastorate, they cannot be ignored. There are always going to be situations where a relatively short pastoral stay in a church may be necessary and right, but there is a growing trend towards long-term pastoral situations. It is felt that Sabbaticals can help to facilitate the possibility for long-term ministry.

Marlin Saarinen points out that congregational life must be understood in some way within the context of a cycle. This cycle is not so much tied to chronology, but is factored by relationship and balance within congregational life.⁴ One of the keys to longevity in pastoral ministry is the recognition of this cycle by leadership and being able to appreciate and respond appropriately to this fact. Sabbaticals offer an opportunity in the cycle, of congregational life for congregational renewal and conflict resolution that if left unattended will often result in a major crisis.

They also provide for longevity in pastoral calling. The lack of opportunity for personal renewal and stress relief has led many PAOC pastors to "leave the ministry" to take up work in other job markets. The provision of a sabbatical may provide the means for pastors to spend the necessary time renewing their calling and allowing them to continue in pastoral ministry.

¹ Ellingston, David. *Remember the Sabbatical to Keep it Holy Where Word and World Engage: Campus Ministry Communications*, Chicago IL, May 1980

² Eastern Ontario & Quebec District devoted an entire *Conference on the Ministry* to this subject in May 1994, and invited Rev. Richard Exley to address the conference on this topic.

³ Nelson, G. Edward. "Ministry May be Hazardous to your Pastor's Health." Resource. March/April 1994.

⁴ Saarinen, Martin F. The Life Cycle of a Congregation. Washington: Alban Institute 1994.

3. THE SABBATICAL PRINCIPLE: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

No ministerial sabbatical is commanded in the Bible. Scriptures, nonetheless, uphold the sabbatical principle for renewal. Richard Bullock makes the observation that “over and over the stories of scripture point to the renewing power of ‘Sabbath time’. The Sabbath is more than an after thought of God’s action in creation. It’s a gift of rest from God, of renewal and hope”.¹

It is important to provide a short biblical survey of the Sabbath principle.

Sabbath rest

Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. (Ex. 20:8-11)

The Hebrew word “Sabbath” means to “cease or rest”. Its biblical context is the Genesis account of creation. The Sabbath is the seventh day in which “He (God) rested (or ceased) from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:3 NIV). From the beginning God gave the command to rest.

David wrote “He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul” (Ps. 23:2—3 NAS). A literal translation of “quiet water” is “waters of rest”.

After a prolonged period of ministry Jesus called his disciples to “come apart and rest”. Robert Randall commenting on this verse says: “Come apart and rest or simply come apart”.² Jesus proclaimed “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mk 2: 27-28)

The Old Testament records Sabbath rest as a normal pattern in Israel’s history even before the Ten Commandments were given (Ex.16:22, 29-30). The observance of the Sabbath:

- demonstrated Israel’s faith in God. The Israelites trusted God not only to provide food miraculously but to also provide enough to eat on the Sabbath,
- became a reminder of how God delivered them out of captivity in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15),
- became a uniquely Jewish memorial distinguishing them from other nations. It became a sign of their covenant with God (EX. 31:16—17).

God established not only a day of rest but a sabbatical year as well every seventh year (EX.23:10-12, Lev. 25:1-7). ...“the land would rest” (Lev. 25:2 LSG). After seven observances of the sabbatical year came the year of jubilee (Lev. 24:8-25).

As a nation Israel was directed by Sabbath guidelines. Their disobedience led to captivity which allowed the land to rest (II Chron. 36:20—21, Jer.17:27).

Sabbath rest and renewal

Just as the sabbatical year was a biblically based provision to restore a farmer’s depleted field after six (6) years of planting and harvesting, a sabbatical period for those in the ministry provides time for rest and renewal.³

The created world affords an example of the renewing process in the seasons of the year. Before new life can begin, the cycle of rest needs to be observed.

The pace of modern society and pressures of contemporary ministry can blind us to see the need for this rhythm of rest and renewal. Eugene Peterson explores this sense of rhythm in life:

“As we re-enter that sequence of days when God spoke energy and matter into existence, we repeatedly come upon the refrain ‘and there was evening and there was morning, one day... and there was evening and there was morning, a second day... and there was evening and there was morning’ on and on six times.

This is the Hebrew way of understanding day and not ours; evening and morning, one day. More than idiomatic speech is involved here. There is a sense of rhythm. Day is the basic unit of God's creative work; evening is the beginning of that day. The Hebrew evening-morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace. We go to sleep, and God begins his work. We wake and are called out to participate in God's creative action. Evening: God begins without our help. His creative day. Morning: God calls us to enjoy and share and develop the works he initiated."(4)

A principle observed

As a principle, a year of rest is allowed for deacons on The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada church boards after having served two three-year terms. This principle of sabbatical leave is also followed in many Christian organizations and secular institutions.

In keeping with the biblical principle of Sabbath rest and renewal, opportunity for Pastoral Sabbatical should be thoughtfully considered.

¹ Bullock, A. Richard. Sabbatical Planning for Clergy & Congregations An Alban Institute Publication.

² Randall, Robert. Time of Your Life. Victor Books 1986 1825 College Ave., Wheaton Ill 60187

³ Peterson, Eugene. Desert & Harvest A Sabbatical Journey Leadership Journal, Winter Quarter 1988, VOL.VIII, No1

⁴ Peterson, Eugene. God Gives to Us Even in Our Sleep Leadership Journal, Spring Quarter 1985, Vol. No. 2

1. LIMITATIONS AND OBSTACLES TO A SABBATICAL LEAVE

Even though the need and its biblical basis for sabbaticals may be established, it is recognized that there are obvious obstacles to a sabbatical leave that need to be considered and addressed.

An essential consideration would be ample advanced planning:

- the financial considerations need to be taken into account many years ahead, and
- the plan (retreat, study, travel, etc.) should be planned one year in advance. Family, church members and board need time to enter into the spirit of a sabbatical rest. Denominational leaders need to be consulted and advised for counsel and practical concerns of the local church

Generally there are two main obstacles in establishing sabbatical leaves: finances and security. These two obstacles apply both to the sabbatical applicant and the local church.

Finances

Questions arise such as:

- How will a minister receive a salary during his time off? How can a church fund an extended leave?
- How, with an already tight budget, could the church afford an interim pastor?

The following section, "Determining a Sabbatical Program" will suggest solutions for these concerns with various funding options. Generally speaking, three months of sabbatical leave will require an accruing of money over a period of years to prepare for the leave.

Security

Questions arise such as:

- Who will take care of the church while the pastor is gone?
- Will the pastor still have a position upon his return?

Guidelines would need to be established:

- the selection of the interim pastor should be a mutual agreement between the senior pastor, the board and the district superintendent;
- in the case of support staff (associate, assistant, youth, music, etc.) the board and the senior pastor should secure the interim pastor in consultation with the member taking leave;
- the duration of the interim appointment should correspond to the leave of the member;
- an availability list of credentialed pastors for interim positions would have to be consulted; candidates could be Bible College Faculty (summer months), retired pastors, retired general and district officers, missionaries... a compiled list could be accessed through district offices.

It is important that due communication and understanding for all sabbatical preparations in order that both the pastor and the congregation benefit from, and not bemoan the sabbatical leave.

5. DETERMINING A SABBATICAL POLICY

Issues to Be Addressed

Developing a Sabbatical Program will vary from situation to situation. A review of policies from three different professions; Education, Civil Service and Church provide a summary of the issues to be addressed:

- Purpose & Parameters of the Sabbatical

- Eligibility
- Length
- Scheduling & Priorities
- Accountabilities
- Financial Issues
 - Funding Options
 - Taxation
- Administration of Funds
- Sabbatical Policy
 - Policy Document
 - Sabbatical Contract

The following is intended to prompt the designers of the local sabbatical program through a series of statements and questions in reference to key issues that a should be detailed in a Sabbatical Program Policy.

Purpose & Parameters

The policy needs to detail the specific purpose of the program. The sabbatical is intended to allow the individual to pursue a plan of personal renewal and growth that may combine study, travel, relaxation, education and research. It is a time to refill their own life and calling after having given of them consistently so they might continue to be effective in service to the Lord and their constituents. It is not to be used to extend a vacation. It is not an opportunity to work another job during sabbatical to supplement personal income. Personal renewal, refilling inner resources is the focus.

Eligibility

Who in the organization will the sabbatical program be made available to? What time frames are involved before a person is eligible for sabbatical? Will there be time of service commitments required after sabbatical? If the staff member leaves before taking sabbatical, will there be any compensation or portability (will vary according to funding plan)? If the staff member leaves the organization after the sabbatical, but before the required time commitment is completed, what obligations will the individual have to the institution?

Length of Sabbatical

What is the maximum length of sabbatical offered by institution? How will the time off for sabbatical be accrued? How will vacation time be scheduled in relationship to sabbatical time? Who will be responsible to make that determination? After taking a sabbatical when will the staff member become eligible again?

Scheduling & Priorities

If there are multiple individuals eligible for sabbatical, who will be scheduled first? Those with the longest tenure would most logically be eligible first. How many sabbaticals will be allowed per year in a multiple staff situation? What congregational impacts must consider? Only one staff member at a time being absent would be a reasonable expectation.

Accountabilities

How will the individual and the decision makers assure themselves that the sabbatical reflects the stated purposes? Who must approve the application? What are the time frames for submission of application and approval and start time of Sabbatical?

Financial Issues

Funding Options

There are several ways that may be considered. Options range from self-funding by the individual to a sabbatical that is fully funded by the institution. One option is not recommended over another. Determination must be made in each local setting which option will work best.

Self-Funded Plan

An individual may choose to set aside a registered fund to provide for a Self-Funded Leave Of Absence (SFLOA). Revenue Canada recognizes such a fund. Some guidelines are outlined in an article in the May/June issue of "Financial Planning Report" which include...

"You must enter into a written arrangement with your employer for a leave of absence of at least six months.

You must finance your leave by savings up to one-third of your salary.

You must return to your job for at least the same period of time you were away or on leave.

Tax on money you contribute to a SFLOA is deferred for up to seven years. Interest on your contributions is taxed as it's earned."

The following issues should be detailed in the sabbatical policy and contract.

- where will the funds be deposited?
- when will they be deposited?
- who assumes responsibility for the funds"
- who arranges method of payment during the sabbatical?
- will benefits be retained during sabbatical?
- how will individual's share of benefit costs be paid to the institution?

Financial feasibility of a self-funded leave may seem unattainable unless a reachable goal is perceived. Let's assume an individual has been serving in their capacity for two years. They would like to take a six-month Sabbatical. For the next five years they could deposit 10.0% of their salary. At the conclusion of that period, there would be enough funds to draw a full salary for the six-month sabbatical. From the chart below any number of scenarios could be calculated. Tax considerations should be kept in mind (re. funds) during the accumulation period and during the sabbatical salary period. Consultation with a tax accountant should be considered a must in developing the Sabbatical Policy.

| Duration of Leave | Self Funded Plan | | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 1 Year | 2 Year | 3 Year | 4 Year | 5 Year | 6 Year |
| 6 weeks | 11.54% | 5.77% | 3.85% | 2.88% | 2.31% | 1.93% |
| 8 weeks | 15.35% | 7.69% | 5.13% | 3.85% | 3.08% | 2.56% |
| 12 weeks | 23.08% | 11.54% | 7.69% | 5.55% | 4.62% | 3.85% |
| 16 weeks | n/a | 15.38% | 10.26% | 7.69% | 6.15% | 5.13% |
| 6 months | n/a | 25.00% | 16.66% | 12.50% | 10.00% | 8.34% |
| 8 months | n/a | n/a | 22.24% | 16.68% | 13.40% | 11.11% |
| 10 months | n/a | n/a | 27.80% | 20.85% | 16.68% | 13.89% |
| 12 months | n/a | n/a | n/a | 25.00% | 20.00% | 16.67% |

Institution or Church Funded Plan

This option is very similar to the Self-funded plan. The major differences are that the institution/church funds the sabbatical and administers all funds. The institution/church may opt to set aside funds in a Sabbatical Reserve fund leading up to future sabbaticals, It may choose to include a line item during the fiscal year's that the sabbatical/s are implemented. The manner in which the sabbatical is funded will of course be determined by the institution/church at its sole discretion. This option creates a natural incentive favoring the institution for the individual to remain in service after the sabbatical. Should the individual not remain for the required time and the individual is solely responsible for their leaving, the institution/church could include in its policy a requirement to be reimbursed on some pro-rata basis. The table for the Self-funded plan may be helpful with the calculations for determining costs.