**Church Sabbatical (Ministry Renewal Leave) Policy**

**Sample**

**SABBATICAL (MINISTRY RENEWAL LEAVE) POLICY**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ BAPTIST CHURCH**

**DESCRIPTION:**  
**What is a ministry renewal leave (sabbatical)?**

A ministry renewal leave is an extended time of unplugging from ministry responsibilities that allows a pastor or member of the ministerial staff to recharge his or her spiritual batteries and get new energy and focus for the next years of a church’s ministry.

**What does the Bible say?**

1. The Scriptures teach God’s plan for His people to take time for rest and renewal:  
   God stopped His work on the seventh day after creation and blessed the day of rest (Genesis 2:2).
2. God passed on the principle of stopping work when He established “Sabbath rest” (Exodus 20:8-11, Leviticus 23:3)
3. Jesus took time to get away from His daily ministry for spiritual refreshment: “But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” (Luke 5:16)
4. Jesus invited His disciples to “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (Mark 6:31).
5. The Apostle Paul encouraged the New Testament churches to be a blessing to their pastors: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17).

**Why is a “ministry renewal leave” important?**  
The Gospel ministry is spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically demanding like few other occupations.

1. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual fatigue occurs without proper times of rest and renewal.
2. Satan will attack weary and wounded shepherds.
3. Caring well for those who serve the church vocationally demonstrates to them that they are valued and usually results in longer tenures, more established and fruitful ministries, and healthier churches.
4. What a ministry renewal leave is not:
   1. It is not vacation. Unlike vacations, ministry renewal leaves involve a plan, a goal and accountability. Ministry renewal leaves should be taken in addition to vacation time.
   2. It is not time away to pursue additional study. Although renewal may include reading and study, pursuing formal theological education is taxing and often does not allow for spiritual, mental, and emotional renewal.
   3. It is not an escape. A ministry renewal leave is not a way for a pastor to escape a troubled ministry, nor is it a time to search for a new place of ministry.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. **Qualification:** Ministerial staff will be eligible for ministry renewal leave every seven (7) years of service. A ministry renewal leave is not a right but a privilege. It is not automatic as a condition of employment unless agreed upon at the time of hiring. Only one ministerial staff member may be on ministry renewal leave during any 12-month period.
2. **Term:** The duration of the ministry renewal leave is flexible depending on needs and objectives, with a minimum of one month, up to a maximum of three months. Most will be 4-6 weeks. The ministry renewal leave will not affect vacation time.
3. **Activities:** The activities, during ministry renewal leave, will be for the improvement of the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of the ministerial staff member as well as the church. Suggested activities include:
   1. Cross-cultural experiences. This may involve a short-term missions experience.
   2. Marriage enrichment activities with or without a trained counselor.
   3. Engaging in an extensive physical examination.
   4. Studying a topic of interest. This may be an area of interest only to the individual, like taking an art class, learning to play an instrument or learning to parasail. It also may be something that will benefit the congregation, like learning about church history or an in-depth study of a book of the Bible.
   5. Times of extended solitude.
   6. Visiting other churches and interacting with people in a similar role.
   7. Visiting family members, mentors, or former colleagues.
   8. Resting, relaxing, and exercising.
   9. Keeping a journal.
4. **Status after ministry renewal leave:** It will be understood that the ministerial staff member is expected to continue in his or her position for at least one year after his or her ministry renewal leave is completed. Otherwise, the ministerial staff member may be expected to repay the church, part or all costs incurred for, and during, the ministry renewal leave.
5. **Request:** The ministerial staff member may request a ministry renewal leave, giving ample time for needed planning and education of the congregation. The request for ministry renewal leave and a written plan must be submitted to the church leadership no less than four (4) months before it is to begin.
6. **Plan:** Proposals for ministry renewal leaves shall be presented by the ministerial staff member to the church leadership and should include the following:
   1. Proposed date
   2. Plans/goals
   3. Activities/learning that will take place
   4. Outline of benefits for the ministerial staff member
   5. Outline of benefits for the church
   6. Detailed explanation of how the ministerial staff member’s work will be carried out during their absence
   7. Cost to the church (if any)
7. **Finances:** Normal compensation will continue during the ministry renewal leave (salary, housing, medical insurance, staff development, expenses and books). If additional expenses are to be incurred during the ministry renewal leave these must be approved by the church.
8. **Approval:** The ministry renewal leave will be approved by the church. They will consider these factors:
   1. Needs of the individual and/or church
   2. Relevance of the staff member’s plans to the ministry of the church
   3. Prior job performance
   4. Satisfactory provisions for carrying out the staff member’s responsibilities during their absence
9. **Education / Communication:** It is the responsibility of both the ministerial staff member and the church leadership to educate the church about the ministry renewal leave and why it is being considered. This should include, at minimum, the rationale for a ministry renewal leave, the plan for the ministry renewal leave, and the proper response of the church’s members to the ministerial staff member during ministry renewal leave.
10. **Reporting:** An analysis/report will be given to the church no more than two (2) months following the ministry renewal leave completion.

**EXPECTATIONS:**

The person taking ministerial renewal leave is expected to:

* Communicate well before and after the leave to ensure the congregation is informed and supportive.
* Work with church leaders to make sure his or her responsibilities are covered while on leave.
* Steward his or her time well. The church is investing in a time of rest and renewal, so it is important to honor that trust. Allow sufficient time in the final days of the leave to rest in preparation for returning.
* Disconnect from regular ministry tasks. Put email on auto-respond, delegate important tasks, and allow calls to go to voicemail.
* Allow others to invest in his or her well-being. Visit other churches to listen to others preach, take advice on a marriage retreat, give others the chance to minister to you.
* Spend extended times with the Lord.
* Return to the church well-rested and with renewed purpose.

The church is expected to:

* Refrain from contacting the pastor or staff member who is on leave unless there is an extreme emergency that cannot be handled without him or her.
* Serve one another well in the absence of your pastor or staff member. Be willing to step into roles and responsibilities so that ministry continues seamlessly while he or she is gone.
* Encourage one another to maintain peace. This may seem like an odd expectation, but unfortunately there are times when a pastor returns from leave to find a church in conflict. Recognize that Satan may look for opportunities to sow discord and choose to be the voice of peace and encouragement.
* Publicly and privately support your church’s decision to care for your pastor and staff well.
* Remain faithful to attend worship and participate in regular church ministries while the pastor or staff member is on leave.
* Joyfully and sacrificially continue to pay the salary and benefits of the person on leave while also covering additional expenses like pulpit supply.
* Pray that this time of ministry renewal will be fruitful.