

# NMBC Sabbatical Policy

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## ***Biblical and Theological Basis***

Sabbath is a biblical concept rooted in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1–2:4 and expanded in the law of Moses (Exod 16–23). The cycle of rest and rejuvenation is holistic, embracing people and land (Lev 25:13), one's time and finances. The practice of Sabbath is also reiterated by Christ (Mark 2:27–28). In our current society in which mental health, overworking, and consumption have become the norm, the practice of Sabbath by the Christian community is a counter-cultural practice — an intentional living into the practices that mark the Kingdom of God and a living confession of the faith. The practice of planned rest is God's creational design.

## ***Purpose***

A sabbatical is a period of paid leave away from normal responsibilities and locations to pursue a plan of personal renewal and refreshment, granted to a full-time pastor of the church. It releases the pastor from full-time pastoral duties to pursue activities of restoration, rest, and renewal in the context of release from ministry obligations. Sabbaticals are conducive to the pastor's mental and spiritual replenishment and provide the pastor with opportunity to seek God's leading and guidance in order to be effective in service to the Lord and the Church. Sabbaticals are not a vacation, an escape, a medical leave, nor time granted for an individual's education — all of which may be requested through other channels. A planned sabbatical may encompass personal study, travel, counselling, mentoring, personal retreat, and marital retreat.

## ***Rationale***

In addition to the biblical basis for sabbatical practice, NMBC recognizes the reciprocal long-term benefits that will accrue for our community and collective ministry when we purposefully support pastoral sabbaticals. Full-time pastoral ministry is an emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically demanding vocation with the necessity of an increasingly wide skill-set. A 2018 study of North American pastors (Manners, 2018) indicated that pastors are retiring early at a pace exceeding replacement rate due to career burnout, and a recent [Barna survey](#) indicates that 38% of (US) pastors have seriously considered leaving ministry altogether.

Providing our full-time pastors with the opportunity for extended refreshment and renewal signals our commitment as a community to their well-being and flourishing, and helps to foster longevity and effectiveness in their ministry.

## ***Eligibility***

All full-time pastors (normally 30+ hours/wk) who are ordained with the CBAC shall be eligible to apply for a sabbatical after completing 6 years of continuous service at NMBC. Considerations for sabbatical shall account for years of ministry prior to the formal adoption of this policy, but years shall not accumulate. At the conclusion of any sabbatical, the 6-year count begins afresh.

Sabbaticals shall not be considered as part of an individual's vacation and must be a continuous block of time. When possible and if feasible, the sabbatical may directly precede or follow one's vacation time, but is subject to the approval of the sabbatical committee.

Because sabbaticals represent a time, faith, and financial commitment by the church in support of the pastor, the applicant must recognize that sabbaticals can only be granted if the Governance Board in consultation with the Senior Pastor (and possibly the pastoral team) and Property and Finance team deems it feasible for the community. Sabbaticals express our community's desire to support our pastors, but they are not normally contractual obligations.

Normally, no more than one pastor will be granted a sabbatical leave in a calendar year. In the case where multiple applications might be received by the Board, deference will be given first to the Senior Pastor, and second to the applicant with the most continuous years of full-time service at NMBC.

## ***Duration***

A sabbatical may be granted to an individual upon completion of the minimum eligibility period of 6 years. Approved sabbaticals will be for a period of no less than 7 weeks to a maximum of 12 weeks (as defined in the eligibility grid below).

<b>number of years of full-time ordained ministry</b>	6 yrs	7-14 yrs	15-21 yrs	22-28 yrs	29-35 yrs	35+ yrs
<b>Maximum duration</b>	7 weeks	8 weeks	9 weeks	10 weeks	11 weeks	12 weeks

At least six years must have elapsed since a previous sabbatical leave for an individual to apply for another sabbatical leave.

An individual's vacation may immediately precede or follow the sabbatical when submitted and approved as part of the sabbatical application.

## ***Salary, Benefits & Funding***

NMBC will continue to provide the individual's salary, benefits, and any allowances as normal throughout the period of the approved sabbatical leave. Additional funds, to a maximum of \$1,500, may be requested in the submitted Sabbatical Plan that accompanies the application.

The acceptance of a sabbatical leave carries the commitment to remain at NMBC for at least one full year following the successful completion of the sabbatical.

## ***Application Process***

Adequate preparation for a sabbatical leave is important and requires intentional planning to ensure that the individual experiences the maximum benefits. It may take a number of months to review and approve a sabbatical, which properly prepares the church leadership and ministries for their absence.

To apply for a sabbatical leave, pastors will submit a 1-page Sabbatical Plan, which should normally include the following:

- A statement of purpose for the sabbatical, clearly indicating what will proactively be done for (1) rest, (2) renewal, and (3) reflection.
- Preferred start date and a secondary start date
- A request for any additional funding
- A sabbath accountability partner (normally someone outside of the church)

It is recommended that pastors read/consult book(s)/sources read to aid them in the sabbatical planning (see recommendations at the end of this document)

## ***Approval Process***

The request and application for a sabbatical leave should normally be submitted by April 1 of the preceding year to the Chair of the Board and the Senior Pastor — with the application being done in consultation with the Senior Pastor. In the case of the Senior Pastor applying for sabbatical, consultation will be done directly with the Chair of the Board.

Upon receipt of an application for sabbatical, the Governance Board and Senior Pastor shall serve as the approval committee. The board shall review the application, determine feasibility in consultation with the Property and Finance Committee, meet with the candidate if necessary, and if approved will inform the church (normally at the year-end business meeting).

The Governance Board will also work with the pastor to determine the key contact person for the individual. The key contact person will be designated as the sole person that should contact the individual during the sabbatical for time-sensitive issues related to church matters. In many cases this will be part of the pastoral team.

If approved, the Governance Board will provide the announcement to the congregation (normally at the year-end business meeting) with the following information:

- A reminder of NMBC's sabbatical policy
- The dates of the individual's sabbatical
- A brief description of the individual's sabbatical plan
- A description of how the church will handle the individual's absence, highlighting especially how the major areas of the individual's ministry will be fulfilled
- A reminder for the church to refrain from contacting the individual for church-related issues, specifics on who to contact during the individual's absence, and identification of the key contact person for the pastor (designated by the sabbatical committee).

### ***Completion Report***

Upon completion of a sabbatical, the individual will submit a brief 1-page written report for the next Governance Board meeting. The individual may be asked to meet with the Governance Board to share insights and experiences gleaned from their sabbatical leave. Opportunity may be given to share a report with the congregation at an appropriate time. The purpose of the report will be to:

- Identify how the objectives set out in their Sabbatical Plan have been met
- Comment on any specific difficulties or opportunities encountered;
- Indicate/share outcomes such as renewed commitment of calling, ministry and mission viewed from a new perspective, and any other directives identified

This reporting will assist with the funding assessment and recommended improvements for future sabbatical applications. Subsequent applications for sabbatical leave will be considered in the context of any received reports as well. Failure to submit this report will jeopardize the individual's opportunity to be approved for any subsequent sabbaticals.

### ***Recommended Resources***

#### *For Sabbatical Planning*

- Bullock, A. Richard and Richard J. Bruesehoff. *Clergy Renewal-The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. The Alban Institute, 2000.
- Sevier, Melissa Bane. *Journeying toward Renewal. A spiritual companion for pastoral sabbaticals*. The Alban Institute, 2002.
- Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God. Restoring your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*. Thomas Nelson Inc., 2006.

- <https://www.themuse.com/advice/the-ultimate-guide-to-taking-a-sabbatical> (first in a series of 3)
- <https://makeyourbreakaway.com/articles/sabbatical-suggestions/>
- <https://www.crcna.org/SPE/resources/sabbaticals>
- <https://www.dts.edu/download/alumni/placement/DTS-Alumni-TheSabbatical.pdf>
- <https://www.ncfp.org/knowledge/creative-disruption-sabbaticals-for-capacity-building-and-leadership-development-in-the-nonprofit-sector/>
- Eugene Peterson, "Desert and Harvest a Sabbatical Journey." *Leadership Journal* 9/1 (1998).

#### *Recommended Sabbatical Reading*

- Dawn, Marva. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Eerdmans, 1990.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Eerdmans, 1993.
- See further recommendations by topics at [www.acadiadiv.ca/mentored-ministry/#resources](http://www.acadiadiv.ca/mentored-ministry/#resources)

#### *Starting Places for Finding Retreat Spaces*

- <https://www.crcna.org/SPE/resources/sabbaticals>
- <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/march/free-or-discounted-getaways-for-pastors.html>
- <http://thechn.org/About/about-chn>