

## **SABBATICAL LEAVE: OVERVIEW AND PROCESS**

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Diocese of East Carolina has instituted a program in which congregations are strongly encouraged to join in a covenant with their clergy to provide for periods of a more stimulating and regenerative experience than is possible during short periods of continuing education. The parallel is biblical: the seventh year in which the land lies fallow, the seventh day on which all rest in order to refresh. (Exodus 23:10-12)

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of a sabbatical leave is to promote spiritual, intellectual, and emotional renewal and growth of the clergy. Sabbaticals are also a time for the clergy person to reflect on his or her life, parish, mission, call and goals for the future.

### **ELIGIBILITY:**

All full-time paid clergy, including bishops, and ordained staff who have served a minimum of five (5) years in one parish or at the diocesan level are eligible for a sabbatical leave.

### **DURATION AND COMMITMENT:**

Sabbatical leaves will extend for a minimum of eight (8) weeks, to which may be appended any annual accrued vacation, educational or paid sick leave, not to exceed a total sabbatical leave greater than twelve (12) weeks in duration.

Following a sabbatical leave, the cleric is required to commit to a minimum of one (1) more year of service in their present position.

### **STRUCTURE:**

No specific structure is recommended for a sabbatical leave. It should be structured by the cleric in consultation with bishops, mentors, spiritual directors, friends, and family. Assistance to clergies and vestries can be gained from the Commission on Ministry and the diocesan sabbatical resources.

### **BENEFITS:**

Sabbatical leaves provide several benefits to the parish (or diocese):

1. Renewed and reinvigorated clerical and lay leadership.
2. Time to evaluate the ministry of the parish in terms of lay and clerical leadership, and existing programs.
3. Opportunities for new leadership, new roles for other staff and parishioners, and for new methods of ministry to arise, since ministry is much more than just what the bishop, priest or deacon does.

### **GUIDELINES FOR SABBATICAL PLANNING:**

These guidelines are not a "lock-step" method, but a flexible process whereby clergy and their congregations work out the many issues concerning sabbatical leave.

Most of **these issues are more easily dealt with when:**

- a) The sabbatical leave is agreed upon when the cleric is called to a parish, and;
- b) Money is set-aside on a monthly basis to cover sabbatical costs.

### **PRE-PLANNING:**

Eighteen (18) to twenty-four (24) months before the proposed time of the sabbatical, the clergy person should meet with the Senior Warden to discuss issues and questions involving a sabbatical leave. A preliminary timetable for the sabbatical should be presented, indicating proposed dates of departure and return.

The Senior Warden should then discuss the proposed sabbatical with the vestry. With vestry approval, announcement to the congregation should be made. Subsequently, the clergy person should appoint a Sabbatical Planning Committee to work in the following three areas:

#### **1) PARISH OPERATION:**

- (a) Delineate clearly additional duties and responsibilities of the wardens, assistance, associates, deacons, vestry and staff.
- (b) Ensure clear oversight and follow-up to all programs and activities.
- (c) Provide for good communication within the parish during the sabbatical.
- (d) Provide for sacramental and pastoral care, including roles for laity.

**2) FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT:**

- (a) Provide for continuing salary and benefits.
- (b) Provide for the cost of supply clergy.
- (c) Parish support for costs incurred by the clergy person.
- (d) Discuss actual costs to the cleric during the sabbatical.
- (e) Decide what portion, if any, the parish will support, eg; books, tuition, travel, etc.
- (f) Plan for additional budget items before the Every Member Canvas.
- (g) Publicize and provide opportunities for congregational response.

**3) EXIT AND RE-ENTRY:**

- (a) Set a firm timetable for the beginning and end of the sabbatical.
- (b) Publicize the clergy person's plan for the sabbatical.
- (c) Publicize changes in roles and expectations for:

- Supply clergy
- Wardens
- Staff
- Committee chairs

- (d) Preceding the clergy person's re-entry, wardens should prioritize urgent questions and concerns.
- (e) Celebrate re-entry of clergy person into the community.

**Resources:**

Sabbaticals from Action Information  
The Alban Institute  
4125 Nebraska Avenue  
Washington, DC 20016

*(Commission On Ministry)  
(1997)*