

Oakwood Community Church

Sabbatical Guidelines

Approved, 9-4-03

The spiritual, emotional and physical demands of pastoral ministry are notoriously draining. Pastors often work six days a week and seldom get a weekend off. Holidays are often their busiest times. Although they may have office hours, they must be ready to respond to the needs of members when they arise, so pastors are often on call 24 hours a day. In the midst of these demands, pastors must find time for sermon preparation that addresses the spiritual life of the church. The cumulative effect of all these demands is that many pastors become less effective over time, suffer some form of burn out, or leave the ministry all together.

The elders of Oakwood Community Church do not want any members of the pastoral staff to become casualties of the demands on them. We know that pastors who last for the long haul stay faithful to the ministry God (not fellow humans) has called them to, recognize their limits, and regularly seek times of rest. At times, however, a more prolonged period of rest, or Sabbatical, is appropriate.

A Sabbatical rest has Biblical precedent. God created the world in six days, and then rested on the seventh:

On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work., And God blessed the seventh

day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation (Genesis 2:2-3).

This weekly time of rest was reaffirmed in the law God gave to Moses:

"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; then he rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

The law also called for a more extended time of rest, in this case for the land:

For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land will enjoy a Sabbath year of rest to the LORD. Do not plant your crops or prune your vineyards during that entire year (Leviticus 25:3-4).

In the New Testament we see that Christ took time to rest after periods of intense ministry or before new phases of his ministry. For example, he goes off alone to pray after he hears of the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:13) and after he feeds the 5000 (Matthew 14:23). Jesus also encourages his disciples to take a time of rest after intense ministry:

The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and what they had taught. Then Jesus said, "Let's get away from the crowds for a while and rest." There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat. They left by boat for a quieter spot (Mark 6:30-32).

These Biblical examples support the practice of giving pastoral staff Sabbatical time, a time of rest, restoration and renewal for ongoing ministry. A sabbatical is not a vacation, not an escape, not a time of retooling for a different ministry. Instead, a sabbatical is time pastoral staff intentionally take off from regular ministry duties to refill their own hearts and resources for continued effective service to the Lord.

The benefits of a sabbatical are many. The pastor can return to ministry with renewed energy, insight, humility, understanding, and vision. The pastor's wife and family will be refreshed with the opportunity for uninterrupted time with the pastor as husband and father. And the church demonstrates to the world that it is a community of love and trust that does not exploit its leadership.

Accordingly, the Elders of Oakwood Community Church will offer major times of rest, refreshment and renewal for full-time ministerial staff. These Sabbaticals will provide an extended time away from immediate ministry needs and can be used for the purposes of improving skills, completing a project, education, refreshment, research, writing or a combination of the above.

The elders and staff of Oakwood are not to regard these sabbatical guidelines as an obligation or commitment on the part of Oakwood to a staff member (as is usually the case with salary, benefits and vacation). The elder team will determine what is best for Oakwood and the ministerial staff and there may be occasions when the elders will deem it prudent to alter one or more of these guidelines.

The Sabbatical guidelines are as follows:

1. After five years full-time service staff will be eligible for two months of sabbatical.
2. Sabbatical will not to be taken prior to five years of consecutive service. Exceptions will be considered on an individual basis. Previous full-time service may be considered under exceptional circumstances. Eligibility for two months of sabbatical is renewed after each five years of service. Sabbatical time does not accrue.
3. The senior pastor will submit a sabbatical proposal to the elder team outlining in general terms how the sabbatical time will be

- invested. Other staff will submit proposal first to the senior pastor and then to the elder team. Scheduling of sabbatical will need to be made considering needs of church and other staff schedules.
4. Sabbatical time is separate from vacation time and in general should not be taken consecutively with sabbatical unless cleared by the elder team.
 5. The senior pastor will report to the elder team after the completion of the sabbatical to indicate how the time was invested and the benefits realized. Other ministerial staff will report to the senior pastor who will in turn report to the elders.
 6. Full wages and benefits will be provided during the sabbatical. No compensation will be made for unused sabbatical time.
 7. Staff will be asked to commit to two more years of service at Oakwood prior to taking sabbatical leave.
 8. The church should give appropriate public recognition at the beginning and ending of a sabbatical period.
 9. During a sabbatical ministerial staff are relieved from all routine and emergency duties (even if they are still in town attending at Oakwood). The other staff and elders will handle routine and emergency matters.
 10. Travel, education, living and other costs incurred in a sabbatical may be considered for reimbursement by the church on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon pre-approval by the elders.

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