

**UNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Fort Mill, SC**

**Sabbatical Leave Policy**

**Approved by Session – December 13, 2021**

**Effectivity**

This policy replaces and supersedes any and all previous policies regarding sabbatical leave for Unity Presbyterian Church staff. Specifically, it replaces the policy statement dated June 28, 1999. This policy will be effective on the date it is approved by the Session of Unity Presbyterian Church. The provisions and benefits of this policy shall not be retroactive.

**Definition and Purpose**

Sabbatical leave is an extended period of time granted to a staff member for the purpose of disengagement from the regular tasks and routines of their positions allowing the opportunity for rest, travel, study and reflection. Sabbatical leave is qualitatively different from “time off” or “vacation.” The purpose is personal and professional renewal for the staff member and the congregation.

Sabbatical leave is an extension of the biblical concept of the Sabbath year of renewal. It is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and an occasion for the renewal of vital energies. The goal of the sabbatical leave is to allow the staff member to return to the responsibilities of ministry with renewed energy, spiritual vision, and effectiveness.

Additionally, sabbatical leave allows the church to benefit from fresh resources developed during a period of renewal, to hear from new voices brought to the congregation during a sabbatical leave, and for gifts and talents to emerge from within the congregation itself.

The goals and understanding of sabbatical leave expressed above are to be a shared expectation of the church and the staff member.

## Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to aid the staff member and Session in preparation of sabbatical leave proposals and are not a guarantee that a particular proposal will be granted.

- a. Eligibility - Currently, the following staff positions at Unity Presbyterian Church are eligible for sabbatical leave: Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education, Director of Youth Ministries, and Director of Music.
  - i. If sabbatical leave is included in his or her Terms of Call, a **Pastor or Associate Pastor** may apply for sabbatical leave of up to ten (10) weeks to be taken after the end of seven years of continuous service at Unity Presbyterian Church, unless otherwise stipulated in the installed pastor's Terms of Call. If sabbatical leave is not included in his or her Terms of Call, the congregation shall be asked to amend the Terms of Call to include sabbatical leave. The use of vacation and/or study leave may be combined with sabbatical leave to extend the leave time. In any event, the length of the Sabbatical leave time may not exceed a total of fourteen (14) weeks.
  - ii. A **Certified Christian Educator** may apply for sabbatical leave of up to ten (10) weeks to be taken after the end of seven years of continuous service at Unity Presbyterian Church, unless otherwise stipulated in his or her employment contract. The use of vacation and/or study leave may be combined with sabbatical leave to extend the leave time. In any event, the length of the Sabbatical leave time may not exceed a total of fourteen (14) weeks.
  - iii. **Other eligible staff members** may apply for sabbatical leave of up to six (6) weeks to be taken after the end of seven years of continuous service at Unity Presbyterian Church, unless otherwise stipulated in their employment contract. The use of vacation and/or study leave may be combined with sabbatical leave to extend the leave time. In any event, the length of the Sabbatical leave time may not exceed a total of ten (10) weeks.
  - iv. Eligible staff members may apply for sabbatical leave under the terms listed above following each increment of seven continuous years of service at Unity Presbyterian Church.
  - v. A staff member who fails to take the sabbatical leave within two years of eligibility will ordinarily lose the right to sabbatical leave for that seven-year period. Session may choose to waive this provision due to significant extenuating circumstances.
  - vi. A staff member who resigns or is terminated prior to taking sabbatical leave for which he or she would normally be eligible will lose the right to that sabbatical leave. No financial compensation for the lost sabbatical leave will be offered.

- b. Application – At least twelve months in advance of the anticipated leave of absence, the staff member shall submit a sabbatical proposal in writing to the Pastor/Head of Staff and the Human Resources Ministry Team (HRMT). Clergy staff shall also communicate their plan to the Committee on Ministry (COM) of Providence Presbytery.
  - i. The proposal shall include:
    - a) Inclusive dates of the proposed leave of absence
    - b) The type of ministry-related activity planned for sabbatical
    - c) Other plans for physical rest, personal recreation, family responsibilities, intellectual stimulation, and spiritual renewal
    - d) A detailed plan for interim coverage of the staff responsibilities during the sabbatical leave
    - e) A summary of how the sabbatical plan will benefit Unity Presbyterian Church's ministry
  - ii. The proposal should be developed in collaboration with the ministry team(s) for which the staff member provides staff resourcing.
  
- b. Approval – Award of sabbatical leave requires that the individual fulfills the eligibility requirements for seeking leave and also requires the approval of the Session. The proposal should demonstrate that the planned activities of the sabbatical meet the professional and spiritual needs of the individual as well as the needs of the church. Maintaining the total functions of the church and the budget will also be primary factors in considering the granting of sabbatical leave. Approval of all requests for sabbatical leave is dependent upon the availability of funds and the approval of Session at the time of request.
  
- c. Expectations of Applicants
  - i. To work with the Session to provide the necessary coverage for ministry responsibilities and enrichment activities for the congregation during the sabbatical leave.
  - ii. To apply for full or partial grants from denominational and philanthropic organizations to cover anticipated expenses. The staff member is urged to investigate application deadlines for grants at least one year in advance in order to accommodate Unity Presbyterian Church deadlines.
    - a) The staff member may include a request for funding from Unity Presbyterian Church in his or her proposal for sabbatical leave.
    - b) The request will be considered by HRMT and the Session with the proposal. Such funding will ordinarily be limited to funds budgeted for Continuing Education.
  - iii. To assure the Session of the intent of continued service at Unity Presbyterian Church for at least one year from the conclusion of the sabbatical leave.
  - iv. Upon return, to share a report summarizing development activities and expected benefits with the Session and the congregation.

c. Expectations of the Session

- i. To continue full pay and all employee benefits for the staff member while he or she is on sabbatical leave.
- ii. To bear the cost of a short-term interim replacement for that period of time (if needed) and other approved congregational enrichment activities.
- iii. To communicate to the congregation the importance and value to the church of the sabbatical and a summary of the approved sabbatical leave proposal, including plans for coverage of ministerial and program responsibilities during such leave.
- iv. To ensure the staff member is relieved of routine responsibilities and will not be on call for weddings, funerals or other duties while on sabbatical leave.

**Conclusion**

Sabbatical leave is an important event in the life of the staff member and the congregation. If it is to be successful for all, the church must “own” the sabbatical. It is not healthy when the sabbatical is thought of simply as something the congregation “gives” staff members to do with as they please. Nor should the time be given grudgingly. The sabbatical is a church program and should, therefore, be carefully planned and funded as any other program of the church, and be designed to benefit the congregation as well as to enrich the staff member’s ministry.