

What is a Sabbatical?

A sabbatical is simply a period of rest, a break from work, typically following a set number of years of service. In churches that offer sabbatical leave, the leave is typically for a period of five to seven weeks, for five to seven years of service. This type of leave is separate and apart from vacation leave and other types of leave.

Every church will approach a sabbatical leave differently with varying degrees of expectations for the pastor while on sabbatical. Sometimes a church will leave it to the pastor to determine what he/she would desire to accomplish while on leave. Typically, a sabbatical will be utilized by a pastor for any of the following:

- ✔ Personal retreat for spiritual renewal and theological development
- ✔ Intentional focus on marriage and family
- ✔ Writing projects or other academic pursuits
- ✔ Professional development
- ✔ Additional rest/leisure/recharge
- ✔ Counseling/coaching for emotional and/or spiritual maintenance

The church also benefits by offering a period of significant rest and renewal to the pastor. Hebrews 13:17 instructs the church to *“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”* The author seems to indicate that the church can be responsible for making the pastor’s job a joy or a burden. The latter is of no benefit. Whereas, there is benefit in making the pastor’s job a joy. This is not directly speaking of sabbatical leave. But, it does speak to the burdens that a pastor can carry within his/her church. The benefit to the church comes in a heightened relationship with the pastor and a renewed sense of passion for the ministry as he/she recognizes the encouragement and support received from the congregation by the gift of this extended period of leave.

Church Hope will assist, as desired, a pastor/church in evaluating those expectations and developing desired outcomes, as agreed upon with the pastor/church leadership. In some instances, churches may choose to place no expectations on the pastor, other than that he/she be diligent in resting and getting refreshed. In other churches, the pastor may be required to address any of the options listed above, with intentionality, and to report on various performance measures outlined. In any event, Church Hope will assist pastors and churches to achieve their stated objectives.