**Rivermont Evangelical Presbyterian Church (February 20, 2018)**

**Sabbatical Policy Statement and Overview**

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (Pastors) shall be granted a compensated Sabbatical of no more than 12 consecutive weeks after each 6-year period of service to the Church. A Sabbatical is intended for the mutual benefit and growth of both the Pastor and the Congregation. The timing for the Sabbatical is an important consideration and should be determined in the light of and be compatible with, the Congregation’s present needs and programming. Therefore, the exact timing, its funding, and pastoral care for the Congregation during the Sabbatical is to be approved by the Session in consultation with the Pastor. The guidelines of this policy include the following key points:

1. This policy is for full-time Pastors; but it may be used at the discretion of the Session as a guide for other employees. [[1]](#endnote-1)
2. Eligibility for a Sabbatical begins after the completion of each 6-year period of service to the Church.
3. Except (a) in extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of the Session, or (b) in the case of full-time Pastors who have completed 6 years in service to the Church prior to the adoption of this policy, Sabbaticals should be granted before the 8thyear in a particular ministry.
4. Sabbaticals are to be up to 12 consecutive weeks in duration and are to be in addition to the terms of call for vacation. Two weeks study leave will be taken within the Sabbatical.
5. Sabbaticals are to be taken only after a plan prepared by the Pastor in consultation with the Personnel Committee has been submitted to the Session.[[2]](#endnote-2)
6. Pulpit supply and pastoral care during the Sabbatical is to be approved by the Session. Funding for the interim care is the responsibility of the Church.
7. Pastors returning from a Sabbatical are to make a report of the Sabbatical to the Session and Congregation.[[3]](#endnote-3)
8. REPC will provide payment of salary and all benefits to the Minister for the duration of the Sabbatical.
9. Except in extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of the Session, a Minister returning from Sabbatical is required to continue serving in their particular ministry for at least 18 months. [[4]](#endnote-4) Revisionthe Session expects a mimimumme. addition to this time. e
10. Sabbatical expenses, separate from the Professional Expenses item per the minister’s terms of call, may be reimbursed as a professional expense up to the amount of $3,000.00. Any exceptions must be approved by Session. [[5]](#endnote-5)

**Rationale and Purpose**

The purpose of a Sabbatical (derived from the word “Sabbath”) is to enable a Pastor to be renewed through an extended time away spent in spiritual formation and rest, the vital pursuit of continuing education and/or academic research and writing, and/or receiving fresh mentoring by respected teachers. A Sabbatical enables a Pastor to return to the responsibilities of the ministry with new energy, spiritual vision, and effectiveness. Sabbaticals give the Congregation an opportunity to minister to their Pastor, an opportunity to develop greater congregational involvement in the ministry of the Church and an opportunity to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of their congregational labors. Sabbaticals also have the potential benefit of guarding against unnecessary ministerial changes that often occur when a pastor and/or a congregation believe that such a change is the only way to achieve a “fresh start.”

Stated in terms of alliteration, a Sabbatical is an extended period of leave given to pastors who have served well for the purpose of:

* **Rest and Renewal**: a rare but biblical practice in our achievement-oriented culture. Deliberate rest protects our bodies from wearing out and our souls from burning out.
* **Relationship**: Building deeper connections with God, family, and friends.
* **Reflection**: Reviving the neglected art of meditation. In the words of Billy Graham Evangelical Association, “Sometimes you need to stop for directions before you can show others the way.”
* **Reading and Research**: Pursuing topics of particular interest that will inevitably enrich one’s teaching.
* **Refocusing**: Seeking greater vision and purpose for the future.

And, ultimately:

* **Returning**: Bringing all the benefits back into ministry. The benefits of a sabbatical extend far beyond the pastor to the congregation and the world they seek to reach for Christ.

A sabbatical will give pastoral staff both an incentive for staying long and built-in points of renewal. It is not a vacation, academic leave, or an escape. It is a time for spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational renewal for the purpose of becoming an even better pastor. [[6]](#endnote-6)

**Guiding Principles for REPC Sabbatical**

God’s covenant people are called to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and mind. God's people are also called to know the mind of Christ, rest in His work and experience His love. The Psalmist calls all believers to be like a tree firmly planted in streams of living water. The apostle Paul, even in the midst of his great hardship and trials, wrote that he had learned the secret of how to be content in all things. Ministry work requires a firm commitment and close relationship with Christ.

REPC is committed to the spiritual health and well-being of the congregation, ministry workers and the pastoral staff. We know that spiritual blessing and wisdom flows from maintaining a close relationship with Christ. The session at REPC desires to put in place a sabbatical policy that will enable our pastoral staff to maintain and enjoy close communion with Christ. We recognize that successful ministry is an outgrowth and overflow of a close relationship with Christ.

Our pastoral staff faces numerous pressures from outside the church as well as from within the church. Shepherding a congregation requires sacrifice and perseverance. Our pastoral staff are stationed on the front lines of a very real, very active, spiritual battle. It is the church's duty to provide support for that battle. There are many avenues in which to support our pastors in this battle, and as a Session we believe that a robust sabbatical policy will help give our pastors the strength necessary to successfully run the race, not grow weary and ultimately experience true joy in participating in God's plan for His kingdom.

The Session at REPC recognizes that pastoral care is essential for building a long-term legacy of ministry. The purpose behind the sabbatical policy is to ensure our pastoral staff are securely connected to the source of our strength, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we value long-term ministry, because we find comfort in God's Word, because ministry flows from a close relationship with Christ, because we lose sight of the One we love, because we are prone to wander, because we want to participate in the joy of ministry the Session has determined that a sabbatical policy is necessary.

A time of sabbatical is a chance for our pastoral staff to reconnect with our loving Savior. Sabbatical is not an escape, a time to disconnect from ministry or a chance to forget the struggles of day-to-day obligations, it is a purposeful and deliberate opportunity to spend time with God and enjoy His blessings. When you spend time with God, the cares of this world will be swept away, and ministry will once again be put in its proper perspective.

Because sabbatical is not intended as a prolonged vacation but a time to encounter our Lord and Savior the Session encourages the pastoral staff to consider the following guiding principles when preparing their proposals for how they will spend their sabbatical.

* 1. **Enjoy God:** There is great joy in being able to participate in God's gracious gospel.
     1. Take time to reflect on the beauty of God's kingdom plan.
  2. **Reconnect with Christ:** Sabbatical is a time to reconnect with Christ, draw near to Him and rest in His work.
     1. Be deliberate and intentional about your time while on sabbatical. While it may be time away from ministry obligations do not think that by simply disconnection you will find the rest you seek. The only source of your strength is from God.
  3. **Rest in His Promises.** Make a plan to reflect on what God has done, see what He is presently doing and study what He has promised to do.
  4. **Remember:** Ministry is an overflow of the heart.
     1. During your sabbatical spend concentrated and deliberate time in God‘s word.
  5. **Purposeful:** Make a plan prior to your sabbatical; failure to plan is planning to fail.
     1. Rest comes after times of work and accomplishment, be purposeful with your time.
  6. **Participate:** Paul writes to the Corinthians that he is filled with great joy in every remembrance of them.
     1. The Session and congregation will benefit from your time with Christ while on sabbatical. We want to participate in that joy. Be prepared to share your experience in a meaningful manner with both the session and the congregation.
  7. **Re-connect - Don't Disconnect:** Sabbatical is a time to reconnect with your first love, Jesus Christ.
     1. Don't believe that merely removing yourself from the situation will give you the rest you seek. The Apostle Paul was joyous and content in all situations. Burnout and stress comes from being disconnect from God. As believers, we are more than conquerors because we derive our strength from above.
  8. **Reflect on Your Calling:** Ministry is not an easy path.
     1. You have signed up for a spiritual battle; but remember, that you are connected to Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit and Scripture you have all the support, tools and resources necessary to fight that battle. God will never leave nor forsake you, even though we are prone to forget that in the day-to-day struggles of ministry.
  9. **Eternity is set in Your Heart**: The rest you seek will never be found here on earth.
     1. We long, and the earth groans, with expectation for the day that Christ will return and take His church home. We yearn for the eternal rest that only God will provide in heaven. Use your Sabbatical to rest and remember the promise of eternal rest.
  10. **Finally**, your sabbatical is for you.
      1. Your sabbatical proposal should address your particular needs, desires and situation.

**Responsibilities**

***Pastor Responsibilities***

1. Bring the sabbatical proposal before the Session a minimum of six months before the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
2. Secure the approval of the Session for the Sabbatical proposal and work with the Session on a plan for the necessary coverage of pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.
3. If necessary, appoint a moderator of the Session for the length of the Sabbatical with the approval of the Session.
4. Bring up to date all pending responsibilities as determined in consultation with the Session before departing on a Sabbatical.
5. Upon return, present an overview of the Sabbatical experience to the Session and Congregation.[[7]](#endnote-7)

***Session Responsibilities***

1. Receive “for approval” the Pastor’s proposal for a Sabbatical, at least 6 months in advance of the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
2. Grant approval of the finalized plan no later than 3 months in advance of the intended commencement of the Sabbatical.
3. Continue terms of call commitments to the Pastor during Sabbatical leave.
4. Communicate to the Congregation the importance and values to the Church of a Sabbatical.
5. Request a written overview of the Sabbatical from the Pastor upon return.

1. **Endnotes**

   The Sabbatical policy is written for the regular practice of ordained pastors. The Session reserves the right to consider the Sabbatical benefit for all staff at its discretion. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The pastor and the Personnel Committee will prepare the Sabbatical plan to be submitted to Session for approval. The pastor should prayerfully incorporate **Guiding principles for REPC sabbatical into his Sabbatical plan.**  [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The pastor will present to Session the key takeaways of the sabbatical and consider expressions of thanksgiving to the congregation, unique to each experience. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ordinarily, Session and Staff understand the eighteen-months of service upon return from the Sabbatical. However, the Sabbatical policy does not supersede the discerned call of God and the response of conscience. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Potential Sabbatical costs include travel plans for the pastor as studies abroad, resources for educational development, counseling, and/or retreat expenses. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Adapted from River Oaks Community Church, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Clemmons, NC. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The pastor will present to Session the key takeaways of the sabbatical and consider expressions of thanksgiving to the congregation, unique to each experience. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)