

Diocese of Western North Carolina
Sabbatical Policy
Adopted by the Executive Council October 4, 2012

The Diocese of Western North Carolina encourages priests to take sabbaticals for the renewal and refreshment of the priest and the benefit of the parish. Standard Sabbatical Leave is as follows: ten weeks after five years, or eleven weeks after six years, or twelve weeks after seven years. Priests can add one year of annual vacation time to their Sabbatical Leave. In order to encourage priests to take sabbaticals, if the Sabbatical Leave is not used by the end of the seventh year, it will be lost unless other arrangements are made and approved by the Bishop.

Sabbaticals are to be a period of rest, renewal, refreshment, and study for the benefit of the parish as well as the priest. Therefore,

- Priests will not take a sabbatical if they intend to leave the parish within six months after returning.
- Priests may not use sabbatical time to look for another call.
- Except in extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of the Bishop, priests returning from sabbatical are required to stay in the parish for at least six months.
- Sabbatical reserve funds belong to the parish, and priests who leave a parish without having taken a sabbatical are not entitled to any monetary compensation. The parish, however, may take this factor into consideration when considering a departing gift, or “purse.”

The Vestry will plan for the sabbatical by annually budgeting an amount equal to at least 1.5 weeks of the Rector’s salary and benefits to be placed in a reserve fund for the benefit of the parish. These funds are to be used first to offset the expenses the parish incurs as a result of the priest’s absence (supply, sabbatical replacement, pastoral care on call, etc.) Parishes should be careful not to understaff during a sabbatical. (For example, it is probably not wise to replace a full time rector with supply only.) If funds remain after paying the costs incurred by the priest’s absence, such funds should be used to pay for legitimate continuing education during sabbatical, such as courses, etc. (For tax purposes, it is best for the parish to pay those funds directly to the provider.) Continuing education does not need to be directly related to the priest’s work. Any activity that inspires creativity or new perspectives can benefit the priests’ work in unexpected ways.

If additional funds are available, the parish may (but is not required to) use them to fund other elements of the sabbatical (such as travel, etc.) Funds given to the priest which are not for legitimate continuing education, however, are income to the priest.

The priest will inform the vestry of sabbatical plans well in advance, and the priest will assist the wardens in finding an appropriate sabbatical replacement. The priest should provide the parish with:

- A summary statement describing the overall character and purpose of the sabbatical,
- A clearly articulated rationale for engaging in the sabbatical,
- A thorough narrative description of the priest's activities and timeline during the sabbatical,
- A statement of the intended benefits to both the clergy and the parish,
- A description of the congregation's plans for covering the necessary pastoral and liturgical functions during the sabbatical,
- A plan for how the priest and congregation will communicate and share insights from the sabbatical with one another after the priest's return.

The priest and wardens should explore whether sabbatical funding might be available through the National Clergy Renewal Program funded by the Lilly Foundation (see <http://www.clergyrenewal.org>). Note that deadlines are well in advance of the intended sabbatical.

Any deviation from this policy must be communicated to applicants very early in the process for discerning the call of a priest, and any such deviation must be reflected in the Letter of Agreement.