



Diocese of the Rocky Mountains Customary on Sabbath and Sabbatical

SABBATH DAY

Sabbath is a key identifier of the people of God: we trust God enough to rest, to stop from our scrambling. In our fast-paced world with a pressure to perform, it is even more important that clergy take a day of rest – a day where they cease from all activity related to their work. The temptation in ministry is to be always available and always “on.” There are always more things to do. The Parish Council needs to work with clergy to make sure that they are taking a day off (as well as their vacation time each year).

Not only is this important as a counter-cultural modeling for the congregation, it is necessary for the life and health of clergy and their families. This day off is an invitation to live into a different rhythm – and to have the rhythms of God then shape us every day.

SABBATICAL

A sabbatical is a planned period of time in which the Pastor is granted leave away from his normal responsibilities in order to spend an extended period of time in rest, renewal, and refreshment. It is to be a time to receive spiritual nourishment, a change of perspective, to deepen the Pastor’s relationship with God, himself, and his family. It is to be a time of rest and cessation of his regular pastoral duties and activities.

A sabbatical is a time for the Pastor to shift gears in order to rest, disengage, study, reflect, or travel in order to return to the ministry renewed and refreshed in body, soul, and mind. This is not a vacation, nor is it continuing education.

A sabbatical provides the Pastor an opportunity to reflect on his call to ministry, his relationship with God, and with the church that he is shepherding. It is expected to benefit both the Pastor and the congregation.

Parish Councils are encouraged to adopt the following sabbatical policy:

- 1) For full-time clergy.
- 2) After 4 to 7 years of ministry (recurring).



- 3) Minimum Sabbatical time is 3 months (payment of all salary and benefits in this time).
- 4) May be extended using vacation.
- 5) Planned in consultation with parish council of the Church.
- 6) After a sabbatical, the pastor is expected to return to service for a minimum of one year following the sabbatical.
- 7) There is a minimum of 6 months of preparation for the sabbatical.

SABBATICAL IS NOT STUDY LEAVE

Eugene H. Peterson

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The **sabbatical** is an entrenched tradition in academia. University professors, committed to the life of the mind, get them regularly every seventh year. And well they should. This life of the mind, teaching and thinking, is strenuous. The mind tires, grows stagnant, begins to repeat itself. The annual invasion of students, their curious and questioning minds strangely mingled with ignorance and sloth, constitutes a formidable challenge to a professor.

Academia exists to protect and develop knowledge, but knowledge is not a dead thing in a book. It's a living dialectic; it requires fully alive professors to maintain it. If knowledge disintegrates into cliché or soddens into data, intelligence is betrayed and the mind dulled. And so the schools provide for regular renewal of the professorial brain cells by providing **sabbaticals**.

But pastors, committed to the life of the spirit, a life at least as strenuous, if not more so, than the life of the mind, rarely get **sabbaticals**. I wonder why, for the spirit also tires, grows stagnant, begins to repeat itself. The weekly assembly of Christians, their hungry-and-thirty-after-righteousness lives strangely mingled with sin and sloth, constitutes a formidable challenge to the pastor. The sanctuary exists to protect and develop holiness, but holiness is not a packaged attitude that can be sold to Sunday god-shoppers. It is life at risk before God, dangerously and awesomely at risk, and it needs fully alive pastors to represent it. If the life of faith is reduced to a church program or into jargon, the gospel is betrayed and the spirit dulled. Yet churches make little provision for renewal of spirit in those they set as overseers for the renewal of their spirits.

The omission impoverishes the church's spiritual vitality. Pastors enter their ordained work centered in prayer and alive to grace; after ten, twelve, thirteen years they find they simply don't have the energy for a life of prayer, of spirit. One after another and year after year, they abandon the terms of their ordination and settle for running churches.

A curious irony has occurred in the midst of this. Churches have, of late, been giving pastors study leave. In my denomination it is required—two weeks each year. But why "study"? That,



surely, is not my central work. I stand before a congregation each week not as a lecturer in dogmatics but to lead them in prayer, bring them the sacraments, and guide them in listening to God. Intelligence, and the cultivation of intelligence by study, is not to be slighted in this work, but it is the life of spirit that is my forte. It is the prayer, contemplation, and proclamation to which I am guardian. The sanctuary, not the classroom, is my demesne.

I think I know what happened. Several centuries ago, the university took the practice of the **sabbatical** from the church and then altered it to suit its purposes. Recently, the church glanced over at the university and noticed this wonderful practice and thought a **sabbatical** might be a good idea for pastors, too. And so we started taking it back. But instead of taking back what they took from us, a time for renewal of spirit, we are taking back what they turned it into—a renewal of mind. The all-but-universal practice is for pastors to go to universities and seminaries for these bastard **sabbaticals** and take academic courses. They return to their congregations with starched and in-fashion ideas, but their spirits as baggy as ever.

If we are going to take **sabbaticals**, let them be real **sabbaticals**: a willed passivity in order to be restored to alert receptivity to spirit-prayer, silence, solitude, worship. It is outrageous that we acquiesce to the world's definition of our word and let our unique, biblical **sabbatical** be put to the use of career advancement, psychological adjustment, and intellectual polish—with all the prayer and contemplation laundered out. The original intent of Sabbath is a time to be silent and listen to God, not attend lectures; a time to be in solitude and be with God, not "interact" with fatigued peers. If help is to be given to the pastor in midcourse, it is not going to come by infusion of intellect but by renewal of spirit.

- Eugene H. Peterson

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