

Del Ray Baptist Church | Memo on Sabbaticals

Background

In an article by Thom Rainer (<http://thomrainer.com/2014/02/five-reasons-your-pastor-should-take-a-sabbatical/>), he estimates that only 5% of churches offer sabbaticals, and makes the cry that this should be much higher. He outlines 5 reasons why pastors should take sabbaticals:

1. A pastor has emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations.
2. A pastor is on 24-hour call.
3. Pastors need time of uninterrupted study.
4. Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches.
5. Pastors who have sabbaticals view the time off as an affirmation from their churches.

Matt Schmucker also writes (<http://9marks.org/article/caring-pastor-sabbatical/>) of the importance of sabbaticals so that the pastor doesn't "ring just one bell week in and week out". He gives 10 short things to consider when moving toward sabbaticals:

1. Start out small – duration may only be 1 week per 1 year at first
2. Start out small (again) – may involve just a preaching sabbatical instead of a "radical sabbatical"
3. Care for the flock
4. Plan for the sabbatical
5. Involve the congregation
6. Consider the season
7. Communicate
8. Set parameters
9. Be accountable
10. Plan for the return

Across the small number of churches that have sabbaticals, there is actually a wide range of expectations and accrual rates. Expectations range from: rest, time with family, studying, travel, coursework, writing, or many other projects. Accrual rates for sabbaticals range from: 1 week per year, 1 month per year, 3 months every 5 years, 3 months every 7 years, or (a questionable Biblical interpretation) every 7th year as a sabbatical year.

Sabbatical Leave Policy for DRBC

For the care and love of our senior staff and the good of the church, we will pursue a two-phased approach toward sabbaticals, one that implements sabbaticals immediately and retroactively, while allowing for more robust sabbaticals in 3-4 years.

For the immediate phase, it is recommended that the elders adopt the following sabbatical leave policy:

DRBC provides the lead pastor and associate pastors with paid sabbatical leave to take an extended break from normal work duties for the purpose of resting and refreshing the soul. The primary purposes for a sabbatical should be 1) resting and spending time with family to help provide long-term stability for the pastor and his family for life in the church, and 2) refreshing the soul and having focused study, reflection, and devotion to strengthen the pastor spiritually. A distant secondary purpose for a sabbatical should be spending time on certain projects (i.e. improving skills, course work, writing, etc.). Additionally, this secondary purpose should only be time permitting and should aim to be

completed within the sabbatical. The lead pastor and associate pastors will begin accruing sabbatical leave upon commencement of employment and receives two weeks of sabbatical leave for every year of employment completed. Up to one month** of consecutive sabbatical leave may be taken at any one time.*

*In a few years, it is recommended this be increased to 1 month per year.

**In a few years, it is recommended this be increased up to 2 months consecutive at any one time.

Sabbatical Recommendations

Below is a list of additional recommendations for those planning and going on sabbatical:

- Use them. Instead of long, extended sabbaticals, which can be hard on the staff and church, we encourage a regular rhythm of work and rest.
- Sabbaticals are not vacations (that's what vacation days are for). Give emphasis to the primary purpose and only then consider secondary projects. It would be unfortunate, for example, if a pastor took a sabbatical, started 15 projects, partly finished some of them, and then felt new pressures to keep them going post-sabbatical. Taking on a project often has a long-tail effect of follow-up activities (editing and speaking engagements on writing, training up people to handle new ministry projects, etc).
- While on sabbatical, the staff member does not need to report to work, attend staff or elder meetings, do member interviews, or preach/teach. Generally, if they are around, they will attend services and be a normal member.
- Timing will be up to the staff member, but should take into consideration coverage for pastoral duties, absences, and life of the church.
- Another staff member or lay elder should communicate appropriate expectations to the church for the person going on sabbatical.
- Before the sabbatical, the staff member should communicate to the church what he will be doing. During the sabbatical, he should try to share on a Sunday evening how the sabbatical is going (if he is around). After the sabbatical, he should share how God used the sabbatical for his good and God's glory.
- Read "Ten Steps to a More Fruitful Sabbatical" by Brian Croft.
<http://9marks.org/article/ten-steps-to-a-more-fruitful-sabbatical/>

Additional Resources

- <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/should-every-pastor-get-a-sabbatical>
- <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-i-learned-about-sabbaticals-by-finally-taking-one-2>
- <http://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/brian-croft/should-a-pastor-take-a-sabbatical.html>