



Our Mission

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Our Vision

Grow in Love of God and Neighbor
Reach New People
Heal a Broken World

Aspirational Expression of Our Vision as Lived Out Values

Rooted in Jesus
Grounded in Wesleyan Theology
Inclusive of All Persons
Engaged in the Work of Justice and Reconciliation

2021 Clergy Time Off Guidelines and Considerations

A recent survey of our clergy revealed many are struggling with the need to take time off – especially after coming out of a season of new and difficult challenges related to the pandemic. Responses generally highlighted how difficult it was to not only find the right periods of time, but to obtain the support needed by church leadership.

The Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee is charged with multiple tasks related to clergy and staff – one of which is to ensure that compensation and benefits are fairly and consistently administered. Succinctly put – to make sure your pastor takes the time off available as part of their compensation and benefits package. Time off helps pastors with what we all need – a chance to rest, relax, recharge, and renew. Pastoral ministry is difficult and the last 18 months have been no exception.

Review the guidelines below. Keep in mind that pastors are reluctant to take time off due to the challenges in finding others to fill in the gaps. Pastors spend significant time each week on:

- Worship planning and preparation
- Sermon planning and preparation
- Pastoral care and visitations
- Outreach and community connection
- Leading staff and ministry teams

Add the unusual demands of a pandemic that include both in-person and virtual aspects of almost each of the items listed, thus amplifying the time commitments of clergy. Who will tend to these key responsibilities and other ministries while a pastor takes time off? Not having a plan or support to fill these roles increases the pastor's reluctance to take the needed time off.

The SPRC can assist the pastor (and eligible church staff) to take time off by:

- Being familiar with the guidelines for time off
- Encouraging the pastor to develop a schedule and a plan for time off
- Working with church leadership to assist in filling the gaps
- Advocating for the pastor when other leaders or the congregation resist the time off

Time Off Policies

Vacation

The vacation policy can be found in the Policy and Procedure Manual located on the Annual Conference under Administration. The church is responsible for paying for the pulpit supply or someone to deliver the sermon during worship. The pastor, in consultation with the SPRC and church leadership, should provide for services in the church when the pastor is on vacation. Minimum guidelines are noted below. It is important for the SPRC to know these are minimum requirements. Additional vacation or time off may be granted by the local church. (Always document any additions to the time off policy.)

- Upon hire and/or appointment, full-time pastors are eligible for an annual vacation of at least four weeks with pay including at least four Sundays.
- Upon completion of ten years of service in the annual conference, full-time pastors are eligible for an annual vacation of at least five weeks with pay, including at least five Sundays.

Eligible vacation days for one year shall be counted from July 1 to June 30, to correspond with the annual conference appointment process. Exceptions, as in cases of midyear or special appointments, are negotiated through the district superintendent and the SPRC. The pastor shall be given the privilege of dividing his or her vacation into two or more periods of time. Vacations should be scheduled with discretion in relationship to camp and/or conference responsibilities. Any pastor who moves may feel free to take his/her vacation during the first summer on the new charge.

Professional Formation Leave

Your pastor is encouraged to pursue continuing education and/or a spiritual growth program for professional formation each year. The leave of one week per year, including a Sunday, should not be considered as part of vacation, and may be taken in single day increments.

New Parent Leave

Up to 13 weeks of maternity or paternity leave is available for a pastor who becomes a new parent following the guidelines of The Book of Discipline. Full compensation – salary and benefits – are to be maintained for at least 8 weeks. Pulpit supply fund to cover the period of leave is available with the district superintendent's involvement. For more detail, refer to [Policy and Procedure Manual](#) (page 16) on the Annual Conference website under Administration.

Conference Commitment

Each pastor is encouraged to devote time to work at a conference, district, and/or conference camp experience each year. The leave commitment of one week per year, including Sunday, should not be considered as part of vacation time.

Renewal Leaves

Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Leave

The Book of Discipline (Par 350.2) directs full-time clergy who are members in full connection of the Minnesota Annual Conference (Deacons, Elders, or Associate Members) to take a sabbatical or short-term leave for Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Leave of four weeks every four years. The time away is *in addition to* vacation time. The local church continues providing compensation and benefits during the pastor's leave. Financial help for pulpit supply and pastoral care coverage is available from the Board of Ordained Ministries.

Formational and Spiritual Growth Leave

The second opportunity for a renewal leave is found in The Book of Discipline (Par 351.3). Clergy who have held full-time appointments for at least six years may request a Formational and Spiritual Growth Leave *up to* six months in duration while continuing to hold an appointment in the local church. The time away is *in addition to* vacation time. The local church continues providing compensation and benefits during the pastor's leave. Financial help for pulpit supply and pastoral care coverage is available from the Board of Ordained Ministries. A formal plan of learning and growth is usually part of the leave experience.

Pastors are extremely hesitant to seek the renewal leave benefits available to them. The SPRC is charged with knowing when their pastor is due for renewal leaves as directed by The Book of Discipline and encouraging and assisting with the planning process. The detailed policy with directions can be found within the applications but the general steps are as follows:

1. The pastor is encouraged to discern the purpose of the leave and to plan at least 6 months in advance for longer leaves, but no less than 60 days prior to the desired time away.
2. Once the pastor discerns the appropriate time and purpose for the leave, the pastor discusses their intention with the SPRC to ensure support of timing on the part of the church and approval from church leadership.
3. The pastor contacts the district superintendent to obtain support and completes the appropriate application to begin the formal process.
 - a. [Continuing Education and Spiritual Growth Leave](#) is approved by the DS.
 - b. [Formational and Spiritual Growth Leave](#) is approved by the DS and the Board of Ordained Ministry.
4. The pastor and church complete the application for [Grants to Churches for Approved Clergy Leave](#) which the Board of Ordained Ministry reviews to determine if sufficient funds are available to provide pulpit supply during the pastor's absence.

Other renewal leaves for clergy are available through Lilly Endowment's [Clergy Renewal Program](#) and the [Louisville Institute](#).

While careful planning and preparation is necessary to successfully apply for renewal leaves, these factors should not impede or stand in the way of a pastor's opportunity to take time away as directed by the Book of Discipline. Unfortunately, this is often the case. The SPRC is the needed advocate to smooth the pathway forward.

Shmita

In the Hebrew tradition there is the concept of the sabbatical year called Shmita (or Shemitah) - which means release and is known as the jubilee year where land be left fallow, debts are released, and the perennial harvest redistributed and accessible for all. For our pastors, it is an intentional year of learning, reflection and regeneration focusing on an in-depth look at health and well-being. Shmita is required boundaries and ethics training for all clergy, along with the new eight-year assessment process mandated by the 2016 Book of Discipline, Paragraph 349.3.

This experience includes at least five 1-to-2-day gatherings, virtually and in person depending on the season; gatherings with a small clergy cohort group at least 3 times; and a meeting with the district superintendent. A two-week paid sabbatical time – scheduled at a time mutually convenient for the pastor and church – is included to spend time away tending to the soul, listening to God, investing in key relationships, and working on a developmental plan.

This *Shmita* year is required. Pastors need to participate once every seven years. The SPRC is charged with knowing when their pastor is approaching their next opportunity for an invitation to participate. They should also work with their pastor to ensure they are able to take the time away needed to participate in the sessions along with the additional two-week sabbatical. Shmita is another opportunity for pastors to obtain the much-needed rest and renewal combined with developmental and discernment strategies for managing a stressful and challenging leadership role.

Time Off Considerations

Weekly Rhythms

It is important for pastors to take regular days off with an expectation to take holidays and *at least* one day off each week. Clergy unable to take a day off need to take an extra day off during another week. Ministry time demands are relentless. Leading mission trips, conference camps, and church retreats are not “days off” or vacation time. It is important for the SPRC to be watchful of a pastor’s work patterns to ensure the ability to take regular time off. Asking any exempt staff to track time off is an important practice to encourage.

Sick Leave

A formal sick leave policy is not currently in place. A pastor who is sick and home recovering is to be paid for the day off. The day at home is not to be considered vacation. If the pastor is unable to work for more than 2 consecutive weeks due to recovery from an injury, illness, surgery, or other medical treatments, then the SPRC and pastor consults with the district superintendent to move to a formal medical leave. The medical/incapacity leave, found in the Policy and Procedure Manual, is not to replace a sick leave policy. NOTE: *It is the intent to bring a more defined sick leave policy providing 14 days of sick leave annually to annual conference session in 2022.*

Part-time Clergy

Parttime clergy are eligible for all time off benefits described above but compensated according to their parttime employment status. (For instance, a halftime or .50 pastor would still be eligible for the full 4 weeks but paid their normal halftime salary.) Exception: parttime clergy are not eligible for the longer Formational and Spiritual Growth Leave.