

## 1. Application

This policy template has been developed by Queensland Baptists to help churches in formulating their own policy about Minister's Sabbatical Leave. It is designed as a template that churches can customise to their own contexts or be adopted and used as is.

The provision of Sabbatical leave is not a legal entitlement or obligation under Queensland Employment law like superannuation or annual leave. However, Queensland Baptists believes that Sabbatical Leave is vital to the longevity and the longterm health of pastors and the churches in which they serve in. We therefore, encourage every QB member church to consider to develop a Minister Sabbatical Leave policy and incorporate provisions for Sabbatical Leave within their remuneration guidelines and the terms and conditions of a pastoral call.

This sabbatical policy primarily applies to Senior or Solo pastoral roles but churches may adapt it for associate or other roles as they see fit.

## 2. Background

Queensland Baptists strongly believe that a pastor's formation does not end when they leave Bible college or when they complete their supervision and formation period as a new minister. A Minister's formation is an ongoing, day by day process as they study and serve. However, there is benefit also in having the ability to take a step back from the constancy of a pastor's regular duties and the demands it brings and intentionally take time to study, reflect and pray. Doing this can enrich a pastor's ministry, make it more effective, help a pastor rekindle their vision or passion, provide necessary upskilling or equipping or help bring clarity to a pastor's mind as they seek to lead a church into God's divine will and purpose. Sabbatical leave provides such an opportunity and is designed as an intentional period of time away from the pastor's regular duties, offered to its pastors by the church, for the mutual benefit of the pastor and the local church. Sabbatical leave seeks to apply the Biblical principles of the Sabbath rest that God ordained for his people individually and as a community to our pastors and churches.

A sabbatical is not a vacation, not a reward for good work, nor simply a perk to keep the pastor happy. It is time invested to bless the pastor who is constantly giving out physically, emotionally and spiritually to others. Time that gives a pastor the opportunity to rest, revive, refresh, reflect, rethink, recreate, rework, renew, retool, revision, refocus and reconnect. Time that allows the teacher to become a student again and the professional minister to become simply a worshipper. The benefits of improved health, longevity and ministry effectiveness that come to pastors who take sabbatical rest will in turn benefit our churches as the pastor returns better equipped to lead and minister into the church.

### 1. Eligibility

- 1.1. To be eligible to apply for Sabbatical Leave, a minister must
  - a. be serving in a pastoral position as a Registered Minister with a Queensland Baptist church, and
  - b. be a pastor in good standing with the church, and
  - c. have served seven continuous full time equivalent (FTE) years of pastoral ministry in a single ministry context, and
  - d. have made formal application for leave at least 3 months prior to wanting to start their leave.
- 1.2. Exceptions to these criteria are
  - a. Consideration of an application may be made after five FTE years of service for a pastor who has had led a church through a season of high change or high conflict. This acknowledges the extra toll of such circumstances on a pastoral leader.

- b. After an initial sabbatical leave has been taken (after the seven years of service), a pastor will be eligible for their next sabbatical between five and seven years after the completion of their last sabbatical period at the discretion of the local church leadership.

- 1.3. Normally sabbatical leave is restricted to Senior or Solo pastoral roles but churches may grant it for associate or other roles as they see fit.

## 2. Timing & Duration

- 2.1. It is recommended that a pastor eligible for sabbatical leave will be granted 12 weeks leave after completing the required service period of seven years initially and every five years thereafter.
- 2.2. The sabbatical leave cannot be taken pro-rata. It must be taken all at once and not segmented in order to maximise the possibility for rest, refreshment, revitalisation and renewal.
- 2.3. While sabbatical leave can be left and taken later than the time recommended, it cannot be taken earlier unless negotiated otherwise. Unused Sabbatical leave cannot be accrued or transferred.
- 2.4. The granting of sabbatical leave will normally be in addition to normal annual leave entitlements but in any year that a sabbatical leave is taken, the sabbatical leave will replace the normal professional development leave allowance normally provided to a pastor.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.5. Pastors might find it helpful to take 1, 2 or even 4 weeks annual leave at the beginning of a sabbatical to help them to rest and reconnect with family in preparation for the sabbatical leave. Taking Annual Leave in combination with Sabbatical Leave will always be by negotiation with church leadership and should not normally be taken at the end of the sabbatical leave period.
- 2.6. Sabbatical Leave should never be taken in conjunction with Long Service Leave.
- 2.7. If possible, the Sabbatical should be scheduled at a time that will minimise the disruptive effect on the normal operation of the church (including ministries, staff schedules and budgetary cycles). It is each pastor's responsibility to plan and schedule their own Sabbatical leave in coordination with the demands of the ministry at the church. However, the ongoing demands of the ministry at the church do not constitute an adequate reason to prevent a pastor from taking Sabbatical leave.
- 2.8. A request for sabbatical must be provided with sufficient notice (typically 3 months) to allow appropriate planning to take place.
- 2.9. Scheduling shall be based on seniority at the Church. In the event of multiple Pastors being eligible for sabbatical leave, only one Pastor may take their sabbatical leave during a given calendar year. The exception to this is where a pastor's spouse is also a pastor and both are eligible for a sabbatical at the same time.
- 2.10. For pastors approaching retirement age, sabbaticals should only be taken in good faith and only if the pastor plans to continue in ministry for at least another 2 years.
- 2.11. The Sabbatical leave may not be taken as terminal leave (i.e. as leave at the end of employment).
- 2.12. Because the Sabbatical leave is unlike annual leave in that its purpose is expressly for the future benefit of the employing church as well as for the present and future benefit of the employed

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<sup>1</sup> While local churches are encouraged to consider providing sabbatical leave in addition to the annual provision of Professional development leave, where circumstances would prevent this, an alternative position would be for local churches to negotiate with pastors that one week of their annual two weeks of professional leave be banked every year and be put towards sabbatical leave.

pastor, the pastor agrees upon commencing his sabbatical leave that as far as it depends on him/her, he/she intends to continue in his full-time service to the church for at least one year from the date of his/her return from Sabbatical leave. It is considered unethical for a pastor on sabbatical leave to be looking for other job or ministry employment elsewhere.

If during a sabbatical, the Pastor senses that God may be leading them to conclude their ministry in that context, they should be encouraged to engage with key support and accountability people such as their mentors, Professional Supervisors, QB Contacts or their nominated church contact person to help them continue to process this. In this situation, the Pastor should consider the needs of the local congregation and seek to avoid the shock and disappointment that may result from returning from your sabbatical simply to announce your resignation.

### **3. Financial Support During Sabbaticals**

- 3.1. Normally the pastor's full salary and benefits will be provided during the Sabbatical leave. However, this may be negotiated to a lower level (suggest 80% of normal salary) if there is a need for an interim minister to be appointed during the period of leave or significant other expenses that the pastor is requesting as sabbatical expenses.
- 3.2. Cash, or other forms of compensation, may not be offered or accepted in lieu of Sabbatical leave.
- 3.3. Travel, education and other costs incurred during a sabbatical may be considered for reimbursement by the church on a case-by-case basis and dependent upon church approval through normal budgetary processes. The final amount available for expenses will be determined upon review of the plan, budget, and actual expenses. Such costs should be considered as an investment in ministry that will enhance the quality of service offered in the cause of Gods kingdom.

It is strongly encouraged that the church creates a Sabbatical fund as part of their annual budget allocations to fund the potential cost of employing an interim minister during the leave of absence or to fund costs incurred during the sabbatical activities.

- 3.4. Pastors are encouraged to spend some of their sabbatical leave away from home. Costs of this should be factored into the Sabbatical expense requests.
- 3.5. If requested funds are not available to fully cover the amount of the sabbatical expenses, the pastor may raise additional support and/or apply for scholarships to aid in paying for the expenses that will be incurred.

### **4. Planning and Communication**

- 4.1. The pastor applying for Sabbatical leave is expected to submit a detailed Sabbatical plan to the elders at least three months prior to the scheduled Sabbatical as part of their application request. This plan should include
  - a. A clear statement of the rationale for and goals of the leave;
  - b. An outline of the key components and activities to be undertaken during leave and how the leave time will be scheduled / allocated.
  - c. The envisioned benefit of this time and these activities to the pastor's personal and professional development;

- d. The envisioned benefit of this time and these activities to the local church and the congregation's ministry;
- e. Proposed beginning and end dates;
- f. Details of key support people (e.g. mentor, Professional Supervision, spiritual director, church contact person) that will be accessed and the frequency of contact planned with them.
- g. Suggestions of how current job responsibilities will be handled during the leave;
- h. Budget outlining any costs for proposed expenses such as travel, classes, retreats, counselling, etc that the pastor is asking the church to fund
- i. What will be the re-entry plan after the sabbatical; and
- j. any other issues the church deems important.

Input into this plan should be sought from the pastor's spouse, mentor, professional supervisor and church leadership. It should be submitted to the leadership of the local church for review, feedback and approval. A summary of this plan should be provided to the congregation for their information.

- 4.2. Due to the heavy loads on the family from pastoral ministry, the pastor's family should be included in the planning process and in the experience of the Sabbatical. Down time and sabbath for the pastor's spouse must also be included in the plan since they carry a heavy load too as a pastor's spouse.
- 4.3. The leadership of the church should educate the church about what a Sabbatical is and why it has been granted - especially that it is not an extra holiday. The congregation should be informed about the arrangements for pastoral care and the ongoing leadership and ministry during the pastor's leave.
- 4.4. The church (including staff and leadership) should agree that it will honour the leave of their pastor and agree not to contact him/her with church business except in case of emergency.
- 4.5. It is recommended that the pastor during their sabbatical will maintain regular communication with key support people such as mentors, Professional Supervisors and colleagues as well as a nominated church representative. The pastor should choose one of these support people to be a primary contact and should schedule a call to that person at least every 3 weeks. The purpose of these calls is to encourage the pastor; to provide accountability in keeping to the Sabbatical plan, and to help him/her process what the Lord is teaching him/her.
- 4.6. At the conclusion of the Sabbatical the Pastor, within a period of 1 month, must provide a report to the church leadership reporting on how the time was spent and reflecting on how the goals and purposes of the sabbatical were achieved. Key learnings, insights about personal and the church ministry as well as recommendations for ongoing ministry practice should be included. It is recommended that the Pastor also provide meaningful feedback directly to the church congregation about their sabbatical and its benefits.

#### **Acknowledgements**

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