Prairie View
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

SABBATICAL POLICY

Proposed June 2025

Rationale

Full-time ministry is a unique calling. For those who pursue it - especially for an extended length of time in a single place - this vocation includes uncommon blessings and benefits, along with unusual stresses and challenges. Therefore, the Elders of Prairie View Christian Church believe that a regular sabbatical for long-tenured, full-time pastors is in the best interest of the pastor, his family, and the church at large.

Purpose

A sabbatical should be understood as a reward for one's faithful service to PVCC. Additionally, we pray that it will grow the pastor's appreciation for the church, and the church's appreciation for the pastor. It is also given with the hope of decreasing the pastor's potential burnout and increasing his potential longevity.

Practice

A pastor at PVCC is eligible for a sabbatical after his first seven years of full-time service to the church, and after every subsequent seven years of full-time service. The scheduling of a sabbatical is approximate, and is to be coordinated with the Elders and other staff.

The sabbatical is to last one month. This should include no fewer than four Sundays off, and no more than five. Days off during the pastor's sabbatical do not count as designated vacation or sick days, and his usual number of vacation or sick days can be allocated throughout the rest of the year. Vacation and sick days should not be purposely added to the front or back ends of the sabbatical in order to "extend" it.

The pastor will receive his regular salary and benefits during his sabbatical. The Elders may also designate additional funds to support the pastor's sabbatical activities. The pastor should be able to substantiate the use of these funds for the sabbatical, rather than using those funds for other purposes.

Before his sabbatical, the pastor should have a basic plan for how he intends to spend his time away, and share this plan with the Elders. This plan does not need to be exhaustive; however, the Elders should have some awareness of where the pastor will be and what he will be doing during his time off.

Additionally, the pastor should do everything in his power to ensure that the ministries he oversees are well cared for during his absence. Responsibilities that cannot be adequately addressed before he leaves should be delegated to others in advance.

During his sabbatical, the pastor is called to:

1) Rest from his regular labors.

    - While a Christian never takes a break from following Jesus, we believe there is merit to the pastor taking a dedicated period of time to rest from the unique responsibilities of full-time vocational ministry.

2) Nurture his relationships outside of the church.

    - Many of the pastor's relationships occur within the church he serves, which may make it difficult to maintain relationships with those outside of it. The sabbatical is an opportunity to focus on family and friends.

3) Reflect on his calling from the Lord.

    - The sabbatical is an excellent time for the pastor to evaluate the Lord's work through him in the past, examine the current state of his heart and mind, and consider how he can best serve the church in the future.

4) Care for himself spiritually.

    - During his sabbatical, the pastor is expected to worship elsewhere on Sunday mornings. He is also expected to maintain his own spiritual disciplines (prayer, devotional reading, study of Scripture, etc.). This is for his own spiritual wellbeing and that of his family (if applicable) during his/their time away.

The pastor should limit his interaction with Elders, fellow staff members, and the congregation at large. While this may be difficult - after all, these are his friends and siblings in Christ - it is wise for the pastor to maintain healthy boundaries during this dedicated (and limited) period of time.

- This does not mean that the pastor is required to COMPLETELY avoid people from the church. Nor does it mean that the Elders are prohibited from contacting the pastor in case of an emergency within the congregation. However, one of the goals of a sabbatical is to train the pastor to recognize that the congregation can continue to function without him, and to train the congregation to recognize that

it can continue to function without one particular leader. Therefore, reasonable boundaries should be established and honored by both the pastor and the church at large.

After his sabbatical, the pastor shall dedicate his first Sunday back (and the days leading up to it) to reintegration into the life of the church (i.e., the pastor should be present on that first Sunday, but should not dive back in to a full Sunday workload).

- This should allow the pastor to rest for the duration of his time away, rather than worrying about Sunday morning responsibilities before his sabbatical is complete. Additionally, he should have adequate time to adjust as he returns to his most basic work and reestablishes helpful routines before taking on other significant projects.

The pastor should also expect "debriefings" with both the Elders and his fellow staff members. This will allow him to catch up on any significant happenings during his sabbatical. He should also be prepared to discuss what he did and what he learned during his time away.

Conclusion

In our day and age, full-time vocational pastors often have a short shelf-life. This is true in terms of their time in ministry more broadly, as well as their time serving at one specific church.

Additionally, many American churches function as a "cult of personality," where a pastor or congregation comes to believe - to their peril - that a church is built upon one fallible leader's charisma or competence.

PVCC would like to avoid becoming a church where pastors are overly worn down or too highly exalted. In the end, the church's broader culture will play a bigger role in this than one pastor's temporary absence. Nevertheless, this sabbatical policy is one part of our effort to reduce such risks.

We institute this policy out of care and concern for the pastor's wellbeing, to teach the church not to depend too much on one particular leader (albeit for a short period of time), and out of a desire to glorify God.