

Sabbatical and Severance Policy

EMC Board of Leadership and Outreach

Introduction

This is recommended policy for local EMC congregations with respect to their pastoral staff.

The application of this policy will need to be flexible. Situations in local congregations may vary. For example, the need for a sabbatical leave may vary. The ability of a local church to make the adjustments regarding financial cost of interim leadership may also vary. (Churches and pastors are encouraged to plan ahead in anticipation of a sabbatical leave in terms of financial budgeting and securing interim leadership.) Therefore, the policy is designed, not as a legalistic requirement, but as a starting point for discussing the matter. Hopefully the policy will assist churches in caring for their pastoral leaders and thereby facilitate long-term fruitful ministry.

This policy also has application for use in transitional funding between ministry assignments or upon retirement. This transitional funding issue will be referred to as “severance policy.”

Purpose

1. Education and Training

A sabbatical leave for education purposes is one significant way for churches to help grow and develop their leaders.

2. Rest and Renewal

Intense pastoral ministry can lead to significant spiritual, emotional and physical depletion. A well planned sabbatical can be a time of renewal and replenishment.

3. Service and Work

Renewal and growth can also happen through a change in work, rather than the cessation of work. This could include things like short-term missions, social service, and teaching assignments, or a host of other options.

4. Blessing

A sabbatical leave is one way churches can bless and thank their pastor after a period of fruitful ministry.

Guidelines for EMC Sabbatical and Severance Policy

1. **A dual focus:** This policy addresses both the need for a sabbatical leave during an extended ministry assignment for EMC pastors, as well as the need for rest and readjustment between assignments. Normally, benefits will be realized both in sabbatical time away from ministry and in a severance package between or following ministry assignments.
2. **An appropriate severance/transitional package has similar benefits to a sabbatical.** It would allow pastors to experience some of the same benefits between assignments as those experienced during a sabbatical leave. There is often a need for personal reflection, rest, family adjustment and addressing other transitional issues when moving from one ministry assignment to another or upon retirement from a ministry position. A severance package makes this possible without undue financial pressure on ministering persons and their families.
3. **Length:** Three weeks of sabbatical/severance is granted for each completed year of ministry.
 - a. Sabbatical/severance benefits begin to accumulate during the first year of a ministry but can only be activated following the fourth year of employment.

- b. The maximum severance benefit given is equivalent to 16 weeks of sabbatical pay. Accumulated sabbatical/severance eligibility beyond 16 weeks, not taken as a sabbatical, are forfeited.
- c. Sabbaticals should be granted at regular intervals, preferably within four to seven year cycles, rather than after prolonged periods of ministry. The purpose of a sabbatical will be better realized if sabbaticals are taken at regular intervals. Furthermore, a sabbatical leave more than six months in duration may create too big a gap (discontinuity), making it more difficult for both the church and the pastor to resume the previous relationship.
- d. Vacation time should not be considered as part of the sabbatical/severance benefit, however vacation time could be added to a sabbatical or severance agreement.
- e. Participation in short seminars or conferences should not normally be considered a part of the sabbatical/severance time granted.

Example A: After serving six years, Jim is eligible for a 16 week severance package should he terminate. However, he is given a 16 week sabbatical. Upon returning, he serves for one more year, making him eligible for a five week severance package (at two-thirds regular salary—see #5).

Example B: Tom serves for six years and then is granted an 18 week sabbatical. Upon returning he serves for two years and resigns. He is then eligible for a six week severance package.

- 4. **Return:** It is expected that a person receiving a sabbatical will return to the ministry left behind, or another assignment agreed upon by the church or conference leaders, for a minimum of one year. Persons failing to complete this minimum requirement must pay back half of the salary received during the sabbatical and forfeit any accumulated severance benefits.
- 5. **Specific Agreements:** Persons interested in a sabbatical should make application to the boards to which they are directly accountable at least six months prior to the anticipated absence from ministry. This application should include a statement of goals for the intended sabbatical, an outline of proposed activities, and a rationale as to how these activities will help them reach their goals. The boards will process such applications with the view toward coming to agreements with such ministering persons. The local board responsible may or may not include the entire congregation in giving approval, depending on the length of the sabbatical and the varying mandates given to local boards. However, regular communication and reporting from the board to the congregation is always important.
- 6. **Remuneration:** During any agreed upon sabbatical or severance time, monthly salary will continue at two-thirds of the regular salary. Any monies received from other assignments during the *sabbatical* leave that goes beyond the remaining one-third salary should be forwarded to the sponsoring church.

Monies received from other sources during a *severance* period need not be forwarded to the sponsoring church. Additional financial support for expenses incurred on a sabbatical may be negotiated. For example, expenses like travel costs or education fees might qualify for this kind of additional remuneration.

- 7. **Implementation:** This sabbatical/severance policy shall normally become part of the salary and benefits package negotiated at the time the ministering person is engaged. The maximum number of years that can be credited toward the sabbatical/severance program retroactively at the point at which the program is adopted is six years.