

## West Michigan District

Dear Pastor,

We care deeply about the long-term care of your soul. Ministry is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Those who complete it well are the ones who come to the end of their paid ministry career with a well-developed soul and a passionate commitment to ongoing personal leadership development. Yes, as Paul says, we want to be "poured out" but at the same time we are living the type of life that grows in intimacy with Christ and a deep desire to be better leaders.

I am convinced, given the demands on pastors in today's culture that the only way to reach the ministry "finish line" with those two priorities being lived out in our lives is to have taken well-thought out, well-designed and well-timed sabbaticals along the way.

Sabbaticals are critical for long-term pastoral health. Period.

- There is a reason why God initiated the Sabbath. (Exodus 20:8)
- There is a reason why God commanded that "the land should rest" every seven years. (Exodus 23:11)
- There is a reason why He also initiated the "year of Jubilee." (Leviticus 25:10)

God in his infinite wisdom clearly knows that all of creation, including mankind, functions best when there are seasons of work and seasons of rest. (*There is a season for everything* – Ecclesiastes 3:1)

When it comes to pastors in our District taking sabbaticals here's what I believe:

- Sabbaticals will greatly increase your ability to "stay in the game" in a healthy manner long-term.
- After seven years of being in full-time ministry – you deserve and should take a sabbatical; and then on regular intervals (somewhere between every 3-7 years after that).
- The church should fund a pastor's sabbatical to the greatest degree possible.
- Talking about sabbaticals with your board can be a very awkward/difficult subject to talk about.
- Most laypersons do not understand the weight that a pastor carries and therefore easily misinterpret a "sabbatical" for nothing more than a long-vacation as opposed to soul and leadership replenishment.
- The sooner we begin to plan for a sabbatical, the smoother it tends to go.

Because of this, I also believe it is the District's responsibility to come and meet with your board to help educate and where necessary advocate for you to take a sabbatical.

Our hope is that this packet of information will help you begin to have the conversation with you board about sabbaticals. WE have done our best to put together information here that is as helpful and practical as possible. But please understand, we **fully expect and are willing to come and sit with your board and help them think and work through a sabbatical plan. We want to serve you in this way!** Please do not hesitate to reach out to us and plan a time when we can come and meet with your board.

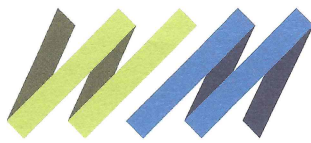
My prayer is that part of the culture of the West Michigan District is that it will be filled with pastors who take their soul development and their leadership development seriously enough that included in their overall life-routine are "regularly scheduled" and well thought-out sabbaticals.

We stand ready to help make that happen.

Believing in you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Conrad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chris Conrad  
District Superintendent  
West Michigan District – The Wesleyan Church



## West Michigan District

Dear Board Members,

Thank you so much for serving on the leadership team of your local congregation. The Bible says that leaders are worthy of “double honor” and so I pray you sense that you are honored by me in that way.

One of the subject matters I think we both are passionate about is the health of your pastoral staff, starting with your Sr. Pastor but including also the other pastors on your staff. We care deeply about the long-term care of their souls. And to be honest, their souls are continually being both attacked and weighted down.

I have the deepest respect for business leaders and other professionals who serve in the marketplace. In fact, I spend a good amount of time both learning from and trying to pour into marketplace individuals who have high-demanding jobs because I want to both learn from and add value to their lives whenever I can. Beyond that, I am the husband of an incredible wife and together we have two children. I have absolutely no doubt that the weight my wife carries as a mom eclipses the leadership challenges I face every day in overseeing 60+ churches throughout West Michigan. Stay at home moms and dads are amazing.

Because I am blessed to spend so much time with:

- Marketplace individuals
- Church Leadership Teams (Boards/Elders, etc.)
- Pastors

I have noticed that there is often ignorance in the area of the emotional and spiritual weight that automatically comes with the role of being a pastor; a weight that is not removed through a “two or three week vacation” every year (which is pretty rare anyway). Because of their deep love for their congregations and the sense of calling on their lives from God, the pastors I know simply are not able to fully disengage with their pastoral responsibilities when they are away on vacation like my marketplace friends are able to “turn off their email” and disengage from their responsibilities. It's the difference between being responsible for a job and being responsible for a congregation of people who you love.

One fantastically gifted pastor recently said to me, “I am blessed to serve with an incredible board who love me and are committed to Christ and our church. But at the end of the day, I just don't think they fully comprehend the weight of knowing that so-and-so is headed for divorce or that so-and-so just got an abortion or that so-and-so has cancer or that so-and-so is facing significant financial challenges. When people who I love on my congregation come to me with these things, it's not like I can turn that off during a day off or even a vacation.”

I am convinced, given the demands on pastors in today's culture, that the only way to reach the ministry “finish line” with a healthy, robust soul and an ongoing commitment to grow as a leader, is to have taken well-thought out, well-designed and well-timed sabbaticals along the way.

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God in his infinite wisdom clearly knows that all of creation, including mankind, functions best when there are seasons of work and seasons of rest. (*There is a season for everything* – Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Too often, I think it is easy to slip into the mindset that a sabbatical is simply a long-term vacation. If that’s the mindset, then everyone sitting around the church board/elder meeting is going to be thinking, “I wish I could take a sabbatical from my job. I’d love 8-13 weeks off!”

The purpose of a sabbatical is to:

- Refresh
- Rejuvenate
- Renew
- Revitalize

the pastor who has been serving you and your local congregation for the last several years.

Therefore it is expected that the church would help pay for the sabbatical and the expenses surrounding it. In fact, I would strongly encourage you to add into your annual budget a “sabbatical fund” that grows over the years so that it is there and can be used by the pastor(s) on staff.

Because this subject tends to be new to most leaders who serve on a church board/elder team we have put together this packet of information which we hope will help you begin to have the conversation about sabbaticals. We have done our best to put together information here that is as helpful and practical as possible. But please understand, we **fully expect and are willing to come and sit with your board as you think and work through a sabbatical plan. We want to serve you in this way!** Please do not hesitate to reach out to us and plan a time when we can come and meet with your board about it.

Thanks so much for caring about the health and vitality of your pastor.

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Chris Conrad  
District Superintendent  
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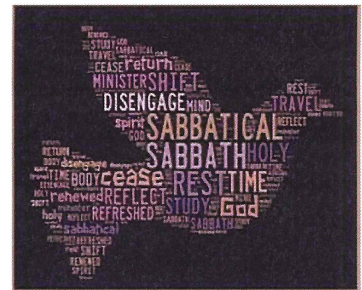
## Pastoral Sabbatical Suggested Leave Policy West Michigan District - Wesleyan Church

Recognizing that normal routines often do not provide the reflection and renewal of the vision and mission of the pastor's ministry, and that the nature of pastoral ministry opens the door to burnout, it is recommended that each local church establish and implement a sabbatical policy for the pastor (pastoral staff).

### I. Introduction

A. The purpose of the sabbatical would be to provide a time of special renewal for the pastor that will bring personal nourishment to his/her soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord, and a clearer understanding of God's vision for the church. It is further recommended that this policy contain the following provisions.

1. The length of the Sabbatical would be based on years of service (example: 7 weeks or 7 years of service)
2. The sabbatical would not reduce the pastor's vacation time.
3. The pastor and/or staff would receive regular salary and benefits during the sabbatical time.
4. The District Superintendent would review and approve each sabbatical.



### II. Implementation of the Pastoral Sabbatical Leave Policy – the district board of administration has adopted the following:

Recognizing that normal routines often do not provide for reflection and renewal of the vision and mission of the pastor's ministry, it is recommended that each local church will provide a sabbatical for the pastor (pastoral staff).

### III. Benefits of the sabbatical for the pastoral staff and congregation are to:

Provide a time of special renewal for the pastor that will bring personal nourishment to his/her soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord, and a clearer understanding of God's vision for the church. A sabbatical helps prevent ministry burn-out and may give the pastor a fresh perspective for his/her ministry.

### IV. Each local church is encouraged to develop its own individual policy using the following as a guide.

A. Sabbatical Defined: An extended time away from routine ministry for the purpose of renewal, retooling, and receiving a fresh vision.

B. Length of Sabbatical: Sabbaticals vary in length from 8-13 weeks and longer in unique situations. This time is to be taken in successive weeks.

C. Timing of Sabbatical: The timing of the sabbatical should take into consideration the church calendar and the needs of the local church.

D. Vacation Time: The sabbatical leave will not be counted as vacation time nor should vacation time be used to extend it. There should be a reasonable time period between the Sabbatical and vacation time (example: a few months).

E. Local Church Responsibilities: To extend full compensation and benefits to pastor during the sabbatical and provide for the cost of interim ministry.

F. Pastor's Responsibilities:

1. To present a sabbatical plan to the church board for input and approval.
2. To present a copy of the sabbatical plan to the District Superintendent for review and approval.
3. To share the highlights of the sabbatical with the church upon completion.
4. The pastor will be expected to remain in the employment of the local congregation for a period of at least one full year after the conclusion of the sabbatical or make arrangements for repayment of expenditures during sabbatical.



G. Important Sabbatical Preparations:

1. Lines of authority while pastor is gone.
2. Pastor's responsibilities cared for.
3. Procedures for dealing with any crisis (conflicts, counseling, etc.).
4. Recruitment of people to fill pulpit during absence.

H. Types of Sabbaticals:

1. Continuing education at an accredited institution.
2. Traveling sabbatical to visit other churches and get some fresh ideas.
3. A mountain retreat area where prayer and a planned reading program could take place.
4. A trip in the U.S. or abroad to a spiritual renewal center.

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