

## What is a pastoral sabbatical?

A pastoral sabbatical is a strategically planned time of rest from ministry demands. Its aim is generally the revitalization - physically, spiritually, and emotionally - of the pastor, and also recalibration of the congregation itself.

## Why do some churches offer sabbaticals?

Pastors who have served in ministry for long periods of time without any kind of significant reprieve tend to enter into a ministry "fog" where vision and energy depletes and "burn out" often sets in. Let's face it, pastors are human and congregational leadership is demanding and draining.

## How frequent and how long are pastoral sabbaticals?

Churches that provide sabbaticals do so generally as often as every 5-7 years. And sabbaticals are usually three months long or longer. Length varies with the size of the church, the size of the staff, and the length a pastor has served without a reprieve.

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# Pastoral Sabbaticals



Jesus said to them:  
Come away by yourselves  
to a remote place  
and rest for a while.  
Mark 6:31

## Where does the concept come from?

The Bible clearly establishes the rhythm of work and rest. Rooted in the Ten Commandments we hear God's principle of rest:

**Exodus 20:8-11**, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

**Exodus 23:10**, For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow...

**This Sabbath year** was not only a year of rest for the land but an act of faith and rest for God's people.

## Benefits to your pastor and your congregation

### For the pastor:

- Refreshes and replenishes the pastor spiritually.
- Infuses new life, energy and vision into the pastor.
- Refocuses the minister's calling and mission.
- Deepens the minister's appreciation of the congregation.
- Creates in the minister a new resolve to serve the congregation and the Kingdom of God.

### For the church:

- Focuses and engages the ministry of the laity.
- Creates a renewed appreciation of the minister.
- Returns a pastor who is energized and refocused.
- Retains a pastor who is invested and knowledgeable of your community.
- Provides fresh input into the church through guest preachers.
- Enhances the church's reputation of generosity.

## Why give your pastor a sabbatical?

**It will make your pastor more productive.** Rest prepares leaders for the ever-growing demands of spiritual leadership like few other activities.

**It will extend your pastor's current ministry.** He will come back to your place of ministry refreshed and renewed. He'll be more likely to stay at your church longer.

**It may add months or years to your pastor's life.** Regular sabbaticals can help ministry leaders deal with the additional stress of ministry in a healthy way.

**It will revitalize him spiritually.** Getting focused time alone with the Lord remains the most important reason for a pastor to take a sabbatical. This extended time with God will allow a pastor to get a renewed vision for God's unique purpose for his life and ministry.

Source: Michael Lewis, pastor4pastors, NAMB, Baptist Press, May 28, 2015.