

GUIDELINES FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE

Church documents strongly urge the need for a continuing priestly formation especially from the Second Vatican Council's document "**ON PRIESTLY FORMATION**" to the more recent 1990 Synod of Bishops' "**INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS**" bearing the title "**THE FORMATION OF PRIESTS IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PRESENT DAY**". In Section 45, Chapter Four, of this document appear these words, concerning, "The Ongoing Formation of Priests".

"The ongoing formation of priests is the normal extension of the process of developing a truly priestly personality, a process which began in the formative years leading to ordination. Ongoing formation extends throughout the priestly life and is intended to develop further the human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral aspects of formation to the priesthood."

Ongoing formation assumes many forms: conventions, workshops, lecture series, "mini" courses, and a variety of other forms of communication beneficial to the presbyterate and enabling the members to be more effective in their ministries. Of special benefit to priests in parochial ministry is an extended program of well-planned and organized time away from regular priestly duties called the "**SABBATICAL**". Modeled after the academic practice of a period of time, usually one or two semesters, spent away from the classroom and in pursuit of the enrichment of an individual professor in his/her academic field or classroom technique, a sabbatical is looked upon as both a reward for good performance in academics as well as enticement to enhance one's professionalism and personal development.

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A. DEFINITION OF SABBATICAL LEAVE FOR DIOCESAN PRIESTS

For a priest parish ministry (or in any other diocesan ministry), the sabbatical is a period of time away from his regular assignment for the purpose of enriching his ministerial skills. Thus a sabbatical is for a priest's personal, spiritual and professional development, and consequently it will require some structure, goals and a plan of action.

B. WHAT A SABBATICAL IS NOT INTENDED TO BE

- An extended vacation or period devoted to relaxation or recreation.
- A personal leave or leave of absence from ministry for health or any other rehabilitative reasons.
- A relatively short workshop or conference.
- A post-graduate program of studies leading to a degree.

C. KINDS AND LENGTHS OF SABBATICALS

There is a wide range of sabbatical options. Some are self-contained and structured, especially designed for priests and religious on sabbatical, such as programs offered at North American College, Rome; Catholic Theological Union, Chicago; and St. Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, California. Such programs provide an intensive and comprehensive personal, spiritual, and theological update.

If the priest desires, he may propose an alternative to the structured program. For example, he may propose to follow a reading course at a university or seminary. In preparing his proposal, the priest should ensure that it contains: a clear focus on enrichment of ministerial skills and professional ministerial development; a plan for housing in a religious house, monastery, seminary, or rectory during the major components of the sabbatical; and a directed retreat component at a retreat house or monastery.

Sabbaticals are generally classified as:

- *Regular*, usually of three to six months duration, and typically involving participation in a self-contained and structured sabbatical program, or
- *Extended*, i.e. between six months and one year in duration. For an extended sabbatical, it is understood that the priest will be returning to a new assignment thereafter.

D. ELIGIBILITY

1. A priest of the Diocese of St. Petersburg is eligible to apply for a sabbatical after ten years of priestly ministry in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. Any priest who has taken a sabbatical leave is eligible for another sabbatical after an additional ten years of ministry in the Diocese.
2. Priest who has never taken a sabbatical leave has priority over a priest who has previously experienced a sabbatical.
3. A sabbatical leave is granted to a priest of the Diocese of St. Petersburg always with the understanding of the priest's intent of returning to active ministry in the Diocese at the end of his sabbatical leave.
4. Because of the pressing need of priestly ministry with the Diocese, ordinarily no more than four priests may be on sabbatical leave at any one time.

E. FINANCING AND PROCUREMENT OF A REPLACEMENT DURING A SABBATICAL

1. **Salary & Benefits during the sabbatical.** While he is on sabbatical leave pursuant to this policy, a priest continues to receive salary, car allowance, auto insurance premiums, and health insurance and pension coverage, in accord with the terms of the prevailing diocesan clergy compensation policies. During the sabbatical, the priest will be paid at the salary rate (i.e., at the pastor or parochial vicar rate) corresponding to the salary rate he was receiving immediately prior to the sabbatical. These costs will be borne by the parish or institution to which the priest is assigned prior to beginning the sabbatical, even

if he is not planning to return to that parish or institution after the sabbatical. The parish or institution is to budget accordingly. During the sabbatical leave, the priest is also entitled to receive the “Supplement” given to those in full-time non-parochial assignment according to diocesan compensation policies; the parish or institution to which he is assigned prior to the sabbatical is also responsible for this payment.

2. **Cost of attending approved sabbatical program.** In order to encourage applications for sabbaticals, and in order not to place too great a financial burden on any one source, it seems that an equitable arrangement for financing the actual cost of attending a sabbatical program (e.g., the fees and costs charged by the Institution for Continuing Theological Education at North American College) should be according to the following schema:
 - A. One half (1/2) of the expense of the program shall be borne by the Diocese of St. Petersburg;
 - B. One fourth (1/4) of the expense of the program shall be borne by the parish or institution to which the priest is assigned before beginning the sabbatical, even if he does not plan to return to that parish or institution at the conclusion of the sabbatical;
 - C. One fourth (1/4) of the expense of the program shall be borne by the priest himself.

The cost that shall be covered by this section includes registration fees, tuition, and room and board at the approved program. The cost of travel to and from the program site (e.g., Rome, Israel, Collegeville, etc.) as well as expenses otherwise incurred during the sabbatical are to be borne by the priest himself; provided, however, that the priest may apply to the said parish or institution for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses to and from the program site (actual cost up to \$1,500.00) and for reimbursement of book or comparable expenses incurred in connection with the sabbatical program (actual cost up to \$350.00) to the extent that funds are remaining in the parish or institution’s budget line items in that same fiscal year for that priest’s “Continuing Education” and “Books & Periodical” expenses. Receipts must be presented by the priest to the parish or institution for reimbursement.

Notwithstanding the above, if the priest participates during the sabbatical in a side trip sponsored and conducted by the approved sabbatical program and located away from the program’s principal site and integral to the approved program (e.g., the North American College program’s side trip to the Holy Land), the cost of such trip (including travel, room and board) shall be paid according to the schema set out above in this section, with the priest responsible for one fourth (1/4) of the cost thereof.

3. The priest seeking a sabbatical leave is encouraged to provide a replacement for himself with the assistance and approval of the Personnel Board, unless a replacement be not necessary due to a sufficiency of available priests in the parish.

F. PROCEDURE FOR APPLYING FOR A SABBATICAL

1. Application for a sabbatical should be a minimum of one year in advance. This is necessary not only to provide sufficient time for securing a suitable replacement, but also because many sabbatical programs have limits on admissions.

2. The “Continuing Formation Committee” will serve as a resource for the various available sabbatical programs and welcomes additional input concerning such programs.
3. Applications for sabbaticals are made to the Personnel Board together with suggestions of replacement possibilities as well as financial arrangements. The parish pays for the replacement priest. A brief statement of anticipated benefits of the program for the priest should likewise be furnished with the request.
4. Priests should apply for sabbatical leave during the course of their assignments or at the end of them rather than at the beginning of an assignment.
5. After the Personnel Board has received and approved a sabbatical leave, the request together with the Board’s recommendation is forwarded to the Bishop for final approval. It is the Bishop himself who makes the sabbatical assignment.

G. ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW-UP

When a priest returns from a sabbatical leave, he should provide a report to both the Personnel Board and the Continuing Formation Committee giving an evaluation of the programs, listing its strengths and weaknesses, and whether he would recommend the program to other priests. Likewise of critical interest to all would be whether the priest felt that he profited personally, spiritually and whether he acquired a great degree of professionalism and ministerial skills. This, after all, is the main purpose of a sabbatical.