

Sabbatical

Scripture: Genesis 2: 1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the **seventh day he rested from all his work.** ³ **Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.**

Exodus 20:8-11: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 23:10-11 ¹⁰ “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, ¹¹ **but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused.** Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

Leviticus 25:1–5 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: **2** Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, **the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD.** **3** Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; **4** but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

Deuteronomy 15: 1-2 **At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.** ² This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the LORD’s time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.

Leviticus 25:20-22 ²⁰ You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” ²¹ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. ²² While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

What does the word mean? A **sabbatical** (from Hebrew: shabbat (שבת) (i.e., Sabbath), in Latin: sabbaticus, in Greek: sabbatikos (σαββατικός)) is a rest or break from work. Comes from Sabbath which mean a day of rest dedicated to God, from the Ten Commandments: Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy, Exodus 20:8; Time off for rest and/or study. Different meanings in different settings- academic, secular and biblical. In PCUSA the Office of General Assembly defines Sabbatical Leave for pastors as “a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission”. Follows the precedents in the academic community. It is qualitatively different from “vacation or days off”. It is an extension of the Biblical concept of a Sabbath day and a Sabbath year for renewal. It is both an act of faith that God

will sustain us through a period of reflections and changed activity and an occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.” The year following the destruction of the second Holy Temple (3829 from creation, equivalent to 68–69 CE-- CE (Common Era) is the **secular** equivalent of AD (anno Domini), which means “in the year of the Lord” in Latin.) was the first year of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle. We continue counting sevens from then. The year 5782 on the Jewish calendar (Sept. 7, 2021–Sept. 26, 2022) is the current Sabbatical year.

Why: Sabbaticals aren’t just another word for vacation. They’re the new word for an **active pursuit of purpose**. The scriptures read show us that God took a Sabbatical and as He led the Israelites into the Promised Land, He advised that Sabbatical years should be observed. Steve Dulin “12 Tips For Taking A Sabbatical”: If you want to develop a better relationship with God, it takes time. If you want answers and wisdom, you need to spend time with God. Thom S. Rainer, Founder and CEO of Church Answers Online Blog reminds congregations that pastors are on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. **Sabbatical allows for uninterrupted time for slowing time, renewing and studying**. He also states that “pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenures at churches because of less burnout”. Sabbatical is now a part of all calls in the Shenandoah Presbytery. **The Sabbatical is already approved by the congregation in her call**. It is for any pastor who has served for six continuous years and is recommended to be three months in length with vacation time and continuing education time being added to the Sabbatical if approved. Upon completion of the Sabbatical the pastor agrees to return to the congregation and serve for a period of at least four times the length of the Sabbatical. **As Leviticus 25:20-25 states allowing the Sabbatical shows how we trust the Lord to care for us and for our Pastor reminding us that God is able to keep things going without us and that the center of the church’s work is GOD, not the pastor, not the members and not the Session or any of the ministries.**

How: The Pastor completes a plan indicating the time to be away and submits it to the Session along with ideas for how the interim ministry may be provided. Westminster has been saving \$2,500 a year in preparation for paying an interim minister. Upon return from Sabbatical the Pastor will “report on activities and experiences and the congregation will report on activities and experiences to be able to use the Sabbatical time as a renewal and discovery process for the Pastor and the congregation to discern the strength of lay leadership, new understanding of mission, and reaffirmation of the call to ministry on the part of Pastor and congregation to be reinvigorated and rededicated to the work of God’s people” (PCUSA. OGA website)

Funding: **The Pastor is responsible for providing for the funds for the Sabbatical.** There are a several grants that support Sabbaticals from the Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program housed at Louisville Seminary , and from the PCUSA Board of Pensions and from the Shenandoah Presbytery’s Strong Minister’s Fund. The Pastor submits the plans for the grant. **Westminster is not responsible for funding the activities of the Sabbatical. Westminster is responsible for finding and paying for the interim minister** who is hired to fill in during the Sabbatical. Westminster has been saving \$2,500 a year in preparation for paying an interim minister and currently has \$15,000 in that fund.

Interim: The Interim minister will be chosen by the Pastor and the Personnel Committee along with the Session. The role of the Interim Minister is to care for the congregation, provide Sunday morning worship, preside over the sacraments and moderate the Session. The Interim will assist the

congregation in living out the mission chosen for the Congregational Sabbatical activity. In other words the Interim will function as the minister during the Sabbatical time and leave when the Pastor returns. At his time no one has been chosen.

When: There is never a good time to go on a sabbatical. Something else will always be happening. Exodus 34:21-24 "Trust God's Word that says if we spend time with Him, He will drive out our enemies and enlarge our borders". Steve Dulin "12 Tips For Taking A Sabbatical" states, "the Pastor chooses the time to be away that best matches the activities of the Sabbatical and the Pastor's personal needs". April has chosen from Memorial Day to Labor Day (May 30-September 5 2022).

Our responsibility: While April is on her Sabbatical it is suggested that the congregation also undertake an activity that mirrors or supports the Pastor's Sabbatical theme. The Session should begin now to discuss how to communicate the Sabbatical to the congregation, how to support April as she plans for her Sabbatical, begin looking and securing an interim minister for the time of Sabbatical and decide what we as a congregation want to participate in as our Sabbatical activity. At this time there is no plan for the Congregational Sabbatical.

April's Plan and Responsibility: April will share her plans as she has them developed. She is seeking funding through the grant sources she has identified. She is also looking for a person who will be a good match for Westminster during the Sabbatical. April is communicating about the Sabbatical and making sure all questions are answered.

Bibliography

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Remote Year: <https://www.remoteyear.com/blog/modern-sabbatical-ideas>

Steve Dulin "12 Tips For Taking A Sabbatical" online "churchintension.com"

Thom S. Rainer, Founder and CEO of Church Answers Online Blog churchanswers.com

Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbatical>