

Sabbatical Planning

This document is intended to initiate a conversation about planning for a pastoral sabbatical. It identifies those areas that need to be considered and raises questions that should be answered in advance. It is our hope that church leaders, in conjunction with their pastor(s), will have open and honest discussion surrounding this vitally important aspect of ministry life. PIR Ministries is happy to assist pastors and church leadership in working through the planning of a sabbatical.

PART 1 – Starting the Conversation

I. Reason and Value

A. Explore the Biblical support for sabbath and sabbatical

B. What are the reasons for a pastoral sabbatical?

1. The nature and weight of ministry life

2. Is this an escape or a response to God's call to rest?

"I don't get a sabbatical why should he get one? He needs to work harder to make the church grow!"

Pastoral sabbatical defined by academic standards, i.e. research for publishing and/or a project to advance church ministry.

"I am too valuable and indispensable to people and the work of the church."

"They will replace me while I am gone!"

C. What is the value of a pastoral sabbatical?

1. For the pastor and family

2. For the church

II. Purpose

A. General rest, renewal and reconnecting with God, self and family.

B. Is there a "theme" that can be explored?

C. What are the specific goals and expectations of the pastor, the leadership and the church?

PART 2 – Creating the framework

- I. **Plan** (The pastor and leaders will need to work on this, but the primary effort to address these should fall to the leaders.)
 - A. Timeframe - How will the pastor enter and exit the sabbatical time? How long will the sabbatical be for?
 - B. Finances - How will the sabbatical be paid for? Is it part of the salary package? If there are extra costs (counseling, coaching, etc.), how will these be covered? Will there be costs associated with bringing in pulpit supply?
 - C. Church leadership – What will the church leaders be expected to do during this time to cover the shepherding duties of the church? What will the leaders be working on together – an area of study or discussion? How will the teaching and preaching responsibilities be covered?
 - D. Church engagement – How will the church body be involved in the sabbatical experience? Will there be a common focus during this time? (Book Study, theme?)
 - E. Accountability – Who will the pastor check in with during the sabbatical? A coach or spiritual director? What kind of reporting will be expected at the end of the sabbatical? How will we share what we have learned together during this time? Is there agreement that this is NOT a time for candidating for another position? Would a statement of commitment to a certain term of continued service post-sabbatical be appropriate? If the pastor will travel alone, would additional accountability parameters be helpful?

- F. Family – How involved, and when, will the pastors spouse and children be in the sabbatical time? What support will the spouse need during times when the pastor is on his own?
 - G. Communication – What will be communicated to the congregation about the sabbatical? What will be said prior to the start? Will updates be provided by the pastor that can be shared with the congregation? What will be said at the end of the time? How will the insights learned be shared with the leaders and the congregation?
 - H. Re-entry – What will the church leaders do to help a gradual re-engagement with ministry for the pastor? What schedule will be created to ensure a slow ramp up of responsibilities?
- II. Structure** (This will be crafted primarily by the pastor and shared with leaders.)
- A. Specific activities and goals – How will the pastor design a sabbatical time that re-creates him? How will the theme of the sabbatical be worked out?
 - B. Events – Will there be certain events that are important to experience during the sabbatical? Will time at a retreat center be a part of this?
 - C. Counseling and/or Coaching – What specific area(s) should be addressed during this time? Who can provide the appropriate input that will help address these?
 - D. Transitions – There are very distinct periods of time that comprise every sabbatical. How will these be planned for. The following timeframe is suggestive only.

1. *Pre-sabbatical* (2 weeks prior) How will the ministry schedule be ramped down?
2. *Dis-engage* (weeks 1 -2) How will I unplug? What can I do to off load the weight of daily and weekly ministry requirements and activities that occupy my mind? How will I give Jesus back the responsibility for His Church?

Suggestions:

- Do a daily “brain dump” of all the to-do’s that come to mind and normally fill my mind.
- Begin to spend time each day with Jesus, and consciously give over control of the church to Him.
- Turn off your phone and put an automatic response on it and your computer indicating you are unavailable and who to contact.
- Don’t engage in any social media.
- Limit your email use to only those that are related to sabbatical activities or plans, or the people who you have invited into this time. Check it once a week at most. If you can disconnect completely...do it!
- Take walks, visit nearby parks, take long drives with your spouse.
- Sleep.
- Worship at another church.

3. *Decelerate* (weeks 3 - 5) How will I become human again? What kind of pace do I want to begin to set for my life?

Suggestions:

- Sleep
- Exercise – whatever works for you
- Read – but only those books that are aimed at soul-care, devotion to Jesus and to areas of interest that you haven’t had time to explore before. NO work-related reading! Read “The Imperfect Pastor” by Zack Eswine (Crossway)
- Events or activities with family. This is the time to do any travel together. It is strongly suggested that you do not put this at the end.
- Reconnect with friends and people who can build into your life.
- Spend time with spouse – listening, praying and reconnecting. Dating them is a good idea!
- Begin exploring the kinds of daily and weekly rhythms that will sustain your soul and which you can carry into your ordinary ministry life once the sabbatical is done.
- Worship at another church and make Sunday a true Sabbath.

4. *Discernment* (weeks 6 – 9) What is God saying? Who can help me hear Him?

Suggestions:

- Spend time with a counselor, coach or spiritual director to address a specific life or ministry challenge.
- Take part in an intensive soul-care/spiritual formation retreat. There are several opportunities available to pastors for this. This could also be self-directed with some help in planning.
- Volunteer in a community service project – something unrelated to ministry.
- Plan regular days of Solitude and Listening Prayer.
- Read the Gospel of John – slowly – and begin journaling regarding what the Gospel means for you, personally.
- Discuss with your spouse the patterns of family and ministry life that have been a challenge, and ideas to do things differently.
- Read “The Listening Life” by Adam McHugh (IVP)
- Continue to sleep, exercise and engage with key relationships.
- Worship at another church.

Note: Some pastors choose to include educational opportunities in their sabbatical. While this is not highly recommended if it is strictly ministry related, some opportunities that involve gaining different perspectives on the Gospel or ministry life can be helpful. This should be done with care.

5. *Determine* (weeks 9 – 10) How will we sustain the rest we have experienced? What are the key areas that need to be addressed going forward that will contribute to a healthy ministry life?

Suggestions:

- Begin to implement the patterns/rhythms that you have discovered provide rest and a healthy perspective on ministry.
- Explore one or two areas of ministry that need to be adjusted or eliminated.
- Practice letting God and your spouse have the first crack at your calendar.
- Continue to sleep, exercise and engage with key relationships.
- Worship at another church.
- Continue to sleep, exercise and engage in key relationships.

6. *Debrief* (weeks 11 -12) What have we learned? How will the ministry schedule be re-started?

Suggestions:

- Review the key insights and discoveries made during this time.
- Prepare a report for your leaders on what has taken place during the sabbatical, and the things you have learned. Include any changes you would like to make in your schedule or the expectations for ministry going forward.
- Take a final retreat for prayer and rest.
- Plan your new daily and weekly patterns of life and ministry with your spouse.
- Read “Ministry Mantras” by J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt (IVP)

7. *Re-entry* (2 weeks post-sabbatical)

Suggestions:

- Work with your leaders to slowly ramp up the ministry demands – visiting, counseling, responding to administrative issues.
- Focus on implementing the insights and patterns you have discovered during the sabbatical.
- Communicate to your leaders and church the things you have learned.
- Do a “check-in” with a friend, accountability or coach once a week to discuss the challenges of re-entry.
- Refuse to work more than 40 hours.
- Continue to sleep, exercise and engage with key relationships.

Please contact us for further information, resources and helps in the sabbatical planning process.

PIR Ministries

info@pirministries.org

(757) 853-7889