

# **Pastoral Relations Committee Guidelines**



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# Part 1: Description

## **Mission/Purpose of the Pastoral Relations Committee**

The primary purpose of the Pastoral Relations Committee is to do whatever is necessary to insure a vital, healthy, mutually beneficial relationship between the congregation and members of the pastoral staff. It stands in the gap to facilitate communication and mediate between the pastors and the church members.

There are many facets to this primary function. Some of those we have defined include the following:

- The PRC will work to insure that the many needs of the pastor and pastoral family can be brought forward for discussion, consideration, and prayer. These include but are not limited to physical/medical issues, financial issues, emotional and spiritual concerns, continuing education needs, and relationships at all levels (marriage, family/children, friendships both inside and outside the church, professional relationships, interstaff relationships in the church, etc.)
- The PRC will work to set up a periodic official performance evaluation and review process. Evaluation options are included in this packet. They may be used at the PRC's discretion. The feedback forms could be completed exclusively by the church leadership team or broadened to include a portion of the church membership. The PRC may determine who provides feedback.
- The PRC will be the official committee for dealing with specific grievances. Only grievances with the specific intention to move towards restoration and reconciliation will be addressed. These would include any grievances of a congregational member toward a specific pastor or program that is their primary responsibility. It also would include a pastor's grievances toward the church or specific members of the church. It should be the first line of any biblical church discipline toward a specific staff member.
- The PRC will also be a vehicle for kudos, praises, or other forms of positive encouragement and expressions of gratitude or thanks.

- The PRC is therefore especially charged with the duty and responsibility to pray for the pastors and their families.

### **Composition**

The Church Council shall annually appoint 3-5 people to serve on a Pastoral Relations Committee. The committee shall consist of at least 3 members of the council and two others appointed from the church membership. Additionally, the Church Chair shall be an ex-officio member of the committee. Additionally, at the time of their annual review, pastoral staff members may invite a church member to serve as their advocate on the committee. The committee shall meet not less than once a year according to the guidelines established by the church council.

### **Mechanics**

- Quarterly meetings, if possible. Minimum of once a year.
- Publicly advertised – congregational comments encouraged
- If quarterly meetings, topics may include:
  - Discussion of the past quarter: what have you been working on, difficulties, highs/lows, etc.
  - Discussion of the present: what are you working on now, what is before you, what is coming up next, etc.
  - Discussion of next quarter: what will you work on, challenges, excitement, etc.
  - Personal: how is the family, time management, finances, problem parishioners
- If semi-annual or annual, see following document “PRC Questions for the Pastor”

### **Values**

- Openness, honesty, boldness
- TOTAL confidentiality
- Regularity of meetings

# PRC Questions for the Pastor

## A. The Pastor and the Church

1. How do you feel the church is responding to your leadership?
2. Do you feel the church is accepting your ministry?
3. Do you feel you are continuing to build a good relationship with the congregation?
4. Are members following through on their commitments to you and your ministry?
5. How do you feel you are doing with your pastoral/staff team?
6. How have you perceived the worship services?
7. Which aspects of your ministry have been joyful? Which burdensome?
8. How many hours have you been working per week? How does that compare with your expectations?
9. Do you feel adequately resourced to do your job?
10. Are there any problems in your visitation and counseling that you wish to describe?
11. Are you a safe person to whom we can entrust the care of vulnerable people?

## B. The Pastor and the Family

1. How is your family relating to the church/schools/community/your ministry?
2. How has your health and the health of your family members been?
3. How are you managing financially?
4. Has time and fellowship with your family been sufficient?
5. Have you experienced issues of grief and loss in the past year and if so, how have you attended to them?

## C. The Pastor's Spiritual Journey

1. How has your personal devotional time been?
2. Are you growing spiritually?
3. Have you been able to use and develop your gifts?
4. Which fruit of the spirit has been prominent in your life? Lacking?

## D. Other Issues

1. Are there any personal or ministerial issues you wish to share with the PRC?
2. How best can we continue to pray for you?

# Part 2: Evaluation Options

## In the Spirit of Unity

*A few reminders before beginning to evaluate someone's performance...*

1. **Remember that a performance evaluation needs to be balanced.** Make sure that you focus on affirming as much as on improving. Everybody does something well – make sure to communicate that.
2. **A schedule of evaluations should be set up and maintained.** If reviews are done on a regular (preferably annual) basis, it keeps from communicating to anyone that it is being done because there are problems to be addressed.
3. **Calling for a performance review in the midst of a major conflict is not appropriate.** These tools are not to be used as weapons.
4. **Keep it mutually interactive.** Make sure that the pastor is given the opportunity to evaluate how well the congregation is caring for the pastor's family.
5. **Try to schedule the review at a different time of year than when compensation packages are determined.** This prevents the pastor from feeling either punished or rewarded in the pocketbook for areas that sometimes involve a great deal of subjectivity.
6. **Keep it as simple as possible.** Professional ministry has so many dimensions: a congregation may choose to evaluate only a portion of the pastor's work in a given year. This gives the pastor some specific areas to work on without being overwhelmed.
7. **Make sure that a reasonable, but not excessive, number of people are involved in the evaluation process.** Try to enlist a good cross-section of the congregation, not simply those who will likely all come to the same conclusion.
8. **Make sure that everyone is clear about the intended goal and purpose of the review.**
9. **Employ a system that will effectively monitor the decisions made, and to bring some accountability into the process.**
10. **Recommendations for salary increases are best formulated by an active Pastoral Relations Committee.** Too often the budget committee is the only one in the process, and thereby functions like a performance review committee. Building a system whereby recommendations are given to a budget committee helps to preserve the dignity of the pastor.



# **Pastoral Evaluation & Feedback Form**

*(for church leadership team or selected church members to complete.)*

This form is for feedback on \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Pastor's Name)

Directions: Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling the appropriate numbers:

0= Not Applicable                      1= Strongly Disagree                      2= Disagree  
 3= Agree                                      4= Strongly Agree

Some blanks have been included for you to add other personal preferences.

<b>MORNING WORSHIP</b>		
<b>When he/she leads morning worship, I feel he/she:</b>		
1.	Nurtures my spiritual needs	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Challenges me to implement the Christian message in my life.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Enhances my understanding of the Christian faith.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Selects appropriate/interesting topics for the sermon.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Provides variety in the focus of sermons.  (If you disagree, indicate if there is too much (+) or too little (-) emphasis on: ____ issues ____ people concerns ____ Bible ____ Other _____.)	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Effectively conducts the prayers of the people and pastoral prayer.	0 1 2 3 4
7.	Chooses appropriate music. (Hymns, choruses, etc.)	0 1 2 3 4
8.	Effectively administers the sacraments. (Baptism and Communion)	0 1 2 3 4
9.	Communicates and leads worship in a style that would appeal to an unchurched, non-believer.	0 1 2 3 4
10.		0 1 2 3 4
11.		0 1 2 3 4
12.		0 1 2 3 4

### WORKING WITH SMALL GROUPS

**When I have worked with him/her on the Leadership Team and with other ministry teams and small groups in the church, I have found that he/she:**

1.	Regularly attends meetings.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Actively participates in discussion and activities.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Provides leadership when appropriate.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is open to other points of view or suggestions.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Fulfills his/her responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is effective in working with small groups.	0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4
9.		0 1 2 3 4
10.		0 1 2 3 4

### EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH

**From what I have observed, heard about, or been involved with, I feel that he/she:**

1.	Is actively involved in ministry beyond the congregation.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Has selected appropriate groups, issues, or benefits with which to work.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Spends an appropriate amount of time in outside activities. (If you disagree, indicate [ X ] ____ too much time, ____ too little time.)	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is effective in his/her ministry beyond the congregation.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Helps establish a positive image and reputation of our congregation in the community.	0 1 2 3 4
6.		0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4

## TEACHING

**When I attend classes/workshops taught by him/her,  
I feel that he/she:**

1.	Is organized and prepared.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Is knowledgeable about the subject matter.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Is interested/enthusiastic about the subject matter.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is responsive to the needs of the participants.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Utilizes a teaching style appropriate for the subject matter and participants.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is an effective teacher.	0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4

In your opinion, what are his/her strengths?

What are the pastor's growth areas, the ways he/she might change to improve his/her ministry effectiveness?

Other comments:

# **Evaluation & Feedback Form for Staff Members**

*(for church leadership team or selected church members to complete.)*

This form is for feedback on \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Staff Member's Name)

Directions: Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling the appropriate numbers:

0= Not Applicable                      1= Strongly Disagree                      2= Disagree  
 3= Agree                                      4= Strongly Agree

Some blanks have been included for you to add other personal preferences.

<b>MINISTRY FOCUS</b>		
<b>When he/she leads in the assigned area of specialization, I feel he/she:</b>		
1.	Has knowledge in his/her field of specialization.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Translates knowledge into experiences for the congregation.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Provides appropriate leadership.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Works well with volunteers.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Contributes to the whole life of the church.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is a supportive team member beyond his/her specialization.	0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4

<b>WORKING WITH SMALL GROUPS/TEAMS</b>		
<b>When I have worked with him/her on the Leadership Team and with other ministry teams and small groups in the church, I have found that he/she:</b>		
1.	Regularly attends meetings.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Actively participates in discussion and activities.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Provides leadership when appropriate.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is open to other points of view or suggestions.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Fulfills his/her responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is effective in working with small groups.	0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4

**EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH (if appropriate to job description)**  
**From what I have observed, heard about, or been involved with,**  
**I feel that he/she:**

1.	Is actively involved in ministry beyond the congregation.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Has selected appropriate groups, issues, or benefits with which to work.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Spends an appropriate amount of time in outside activities.  (If you disagree, indicate [ X ] ____ too much time, ____ too little time.)	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is effective in his/her ministry beyond the congregation.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Helps establish a positive image and reputation of our congregation in the community.	0 1 2 3 4
6.		0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4

**TEACHING**  
**When I attend classes/workshops taught by him/her,**  
**I feel that he/she:**

1.	Is organized and prepared.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Is knowledgeable about the subject matter.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Is interested/enthusiastic about the subject matter.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Is responsive to the needs of the participants.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Utilizes a teaching style appropriate for the subject matter and participants.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is an effective teacher.	0 1 2 3 4
7.		0 1 2 3 4
8.		0 1 2 3 4

In your opinion, what are his/her strengths?

What are the pastor's growth areas, the ways he/she might change to improve his/her ministry effectiveness?

Other comments:

## **Staff Evaluation & Feedback Form** (for staff members to evaluate senior pastor)

This form is for feedback on \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Pastor's Name)

Directions: Please read each statement and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by circling the appropriate numbers:

0= Not Applicable                      1= Strongly Disagree                      2= Disagree  
3= Agree                                      4= Strongly Agree

Some blanks have been included for you to add other personal preferences.

<b>MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP</b>		
<b>As a ministry colleague and staff pastor, I feel he/she:</b>		
1.	Provides a clear understanding of my responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4
2.	Effectively communicates his/her expectations concerning my performance.	0 1 2 3 4
3.	Makes reasonable demands.	0 1 2 3 4
4.	Allows me to participate in the decision-making process.	0 1 2 3 4
5.	Allows me to work independently.	0 1 2 3 4
6.	Is available when I need help or guidance in carrying out my responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4
7.	Respects and supports my abilities and role.	0 1 2 3 4
8.	Provides constructive feedback on my performance.	0 1 2 3 4
9.	Is sensitive to my personal feelings.	0 1 2 3 4
10.	Is an effective team member and ministry partner.	0 1 2 3 4
11.		0 1 2 3 4
12.		0 1 2 3 4
13.		
14.		

In your opinion, what are his/her strengths as a staff member?

What are the pastor's growth areas, the ways he/she might change to improve his/her ministry effectiveness?

Other comments:

## ***Pastor's Consultive Evaluation***

Kennon Callahan in his book, *Effective Church Leadership*, suggests that one of the most effective tools for evaluation is self-evaluation in which the pastor seeks to discern what he or she is doing well, to recognize what he or she is doing poorly, and to put in place an action plan toward improvement. He believes that this is done best in the context of a supportive relationship with those who want God's best for the pastor and are capable of giving positive and constructive direction. In a typical "top down" evaluation process, the weight of the committee's discussion is on what they think of the pastor's work. Callahan writes that "In a consultive evaluation, the weight of the discussion is on the pastor's evaluation of his or her own strengths and weaknesses of the work, counting on the committee to share its best, excellent consultation." (p. 184) This can be done in the context of a relationship with those that the pastor trusts, respects, and knows are committed to calling forth God's best in his or her life.

### **Self-Evaluation**

1. **Identify your previous year's objectives.** "What did you want to accomplish last year?"
    - Written down
    - Demonstrating strong sense of ownership
    - Specific and measurable
    - Reflecting realistic time horizons
    - Concrete and achievable
    - Complementary and mutually reinforcing
  2. **Review the results that have been achieved for each.** "What were your specific results for each of your objectives?" Be honest, do not overstate or underestimate what you accomplished.
  3. **Describe the principle strengths and weaknesses of your results.**
  4. **Evaluate any new insights and discoveries related to each.**
    - What could you have done differently?
    - What creative idea have you discovered?
    - What new insight has come to you?
  5. **New competency growth objectives.** The goal is to be working toward growing and developing.
    - Choose two or four key, major objectives you plan to accomplish during the year.
    - Select the one or two specific competencies you plan to develop in yourself for the coming year.
- (Try and connect these to your personal objectives, competency growth areas, and your congregation's objectives for the coming year)
- "I will help meet the church's discipleship objective by developing and implementing a ministry that focuses on helping people identify their spiritual gifts, their heart for ministry, and connects them to a ministry."
  - "I will take/attend a school of evangelism"



- “I will continue my work toward my degree, taking 2 classes.”
6. **Identify principal areas for help from your team.** “What are three specific ways your team can help?”
- “The team can help identify ministry opportunities in our church and how to connect people with those ministries.”
  - “Recommend that the annual church budget include funds for continuing education.”
7. **Plan for the coming year.**
- Identify 2-4 key objectives for the coming year
  - Identify 1-12 specific competency growth areas

## ***Pastor's Consultive Evaluation Worksheet***

<b>1. Identify your previous year's objectives</b> These are the key objectives that I planned to accomplish during this past year.	
<b>Objective 1</b>	
<b>Objective 2</b>	
<b>Objective 3</b>	
<b>Objective 4</b>	

<b>2. Review the results that have been achieved for each.</b> As succinctly and accurately as possible, these are the results that have been achieved for each objective	
<b>Objective 1</b>	
<b>Objective 2</b>	
<b>Objective 3</b>	
<b>Objective 4</b>	

<b>3. Describe the principle strengths and weaknesses of your results.</b>		
	<b><i>Strengths</i></b>	<b><i>Weaknesses</i></b>
<b>Objective 1</b>		
<b>Objective 2</b>		
<b>Objective 3</b>		
<b>Objective 4</b>		

<b>4. These are the new insights and discoveries related to each.</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b>	
<b>Objective 2</b>	
<b>Objective 3</b>	
<b>Objective 4</b>	

<b>5. New competency growth objectives.</b> These are the specific competency growth objectives I chose to develop this past year. This is the current status of each.		
	<b><i>Specific Competency</i></b>	<b><i>Status of Development</i></b>
<b>Objective 1</b>		
<b>Objective 2</b>		
<b>Objective 3</b>		
<b>Objective 4</b>		

**6. Help from consultive team**

These are the principal areas in which I would appreciate coaching and support from my consultive team.

<b>Objective 1</b>	
<b>Objective 2</b>	
<b>Objective 3</b>	
<b>Objective 4</b>	

**7. Plan for the coming year.**

These are the competency growth objectives that are important to my growth and development in the coming year.

<b>Objective 1</b>	
<b>Objective 2</b>	
<b>Objective 3</b>	
<b>Objective 4</b>	

## Evaluation of Pastor/Staff by the Local Church Leadership

1. **Pastor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Role:** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Form completed by:** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **What are your impressions about the pastor's personal integrity in the following areas?**

	Above reproach	Needs further help
Confidentiality		
Sexual morality		
Financial responsibility		
Honesty		

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4. **What are your impressions of the pastor's pattern of self control in the following areas? Are any a concern for the leadership?**

	Too rigid	Good balance	Too lax
Time management			
Personal physical care			
Leisure time			

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Describe briefly how the pastor has modeled a healthy spiritual life [i.e.; prayer life, spiritual insight, personal witness, servanthood]**

**Lacking**                      **Noticeable**                      **Contagious**  
**Please rate**            [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. How would you assess the pastor's interpersonal [relational] skills as these surface in his/her personal life and vocation?

	Excellent	Good	Poor
Family			
Church leadership			
Staff			
Members/friends			
Community			
Conflict management			

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

7. In which of the following areas of pastoral ministry has the pastor's current ministry been outstanding or lacking?

	Outstanding	Adequate	Lacking
Leadership (vision-casting)			
Preaching			
Teaching			
Administration			
Evangelism/outreach			
Pastoral care			
Worship, planning			
Worship, leadership			

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. Does the pastor demonstrate attitudes and skills that foster unity, cooperation, and good problem solving?

	Positive influence	Needs help
In the local church		
Inter-church relations		
Conference/Denomination		

Clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Part 3: Compensation Overview

## COMPENSATION WORKSHEET

Pastor/Staff Member \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Ministry \_\_\_\_\_

Education/Training \_\_\_\_\_

Years at Current Church \_\_\_\_\_

A. Considered Compensation	Current	Proposed
Cost of Living Adjustment for Community		
Salary Base	\$	\$
Housing Allowance	\$	\$
-OR-		
Parsonage Value	\$	\$
Parsonage Utility Allowance	\$	\$
FICA (7.8% or 15.3%)	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>

B. Benefits	Current	Proposed
Health/Accidence Insurance	\$	\$
Pension (12.5% of Compensation)	\$	\$
Other (Medical reimbursement account, annuity, Keogh, IRA)	\$	\$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>

C. Business Expenses	Current	Proposed
Auto Reimbursement	\$	\$
Covenant Meetings and Retreats	\$	\$
Hospitality (meals out)	\$	\$
Books/Journals/Continuing Education	\$	\$
Covenant External Orientation Program	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>

<b>TOTAL COST TO CHURCH (A + B + C) =</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
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Other Terms of Call and Benefits	Current	Proposed
Days Off		
Weeks Vacation		
Study and Planning Weeks		
Discretionary Sundays Off (Sundays following denominational conferences and meetings, etc.)		
Ministry Renewal Leave		
Other		

# Part 4: Resources



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCH FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Church staff members are in a unique position of responsibility for the ministry to which God has called them--to be available to serve the congregation as needs arise. Pastors are gifted and called to shepherd the church and extend God's care and proclaim God's Word in a multitude of situations and needs. The work is demanding and fulfilling, stressful and joyful. Therefore, church staff members need help from the church in placing priority on their families. Churches should make provisions for family and medical leave in ways that communicate care and support.

At minimum, it is recommended that the standard of the United State's Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 be adopted as provisions for all church staff members. This allows the staff member, who has been employed at a church for one year, to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave in a twelve month period for the following purposes:

- The birth of a child
- The foster care placement or adoption of a child
- The care of an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent) with a serious health condition
- When the staff member is unable to work because of a serious health condition

Ideally, six paid weeks are recommended for family leave. (See addendum for implementation.) During medical leaves, any sick, vacation, or personal days that a staff member has accrued should be used to pay the staff member for a corresponding portion of the leave. Remaining portions of the leave should be treated as an unpaid leave of absence.

It is recommended that all benefits that are normally provided while the staff member is working be continued during family and medical leaves.

In addition to the above, it is recommended that churches provide five days paid leave for purposes of attending the funeral of an immediate family member.

For churches where resources permit, consideration should be given to providing additional time for paid leave, particularly in situations involving unusual circumstances. The church should be sensitive, flexible and gracious in extending care and assistance to its entire staff. In cases of disability, every effort should be made to safeguard the well being of the staff members and his or her family, coordinating benefits available through Social Security and existing insurance programs.

These provisions for family and medical leave should be included in the church's call of pastoral staff. In all cases, leave should be taken only after discussion with the church's

leadership and appropriate governing bodies, with sufficient notice of intent to allow for the church to make arrangements for supplementing coverage when needed.

### ADDENDUM FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Discussion will need to take place to keep in mind both the needs of the staff's family and the church. The document, "Recommendations for Church Family and Medical Leave Policies and Practice," is intended as a recommendation. Realities of church situations may create a need to implement different scenarios. While ideally leave will be the same for the father and the mother during parental leave, the reality of church situations may bring alterations. While considering implementing paternity leave, it is worthy to note that in addition to other denominations, some industries are beginning to move toward providing paternity leave. For example, Pillsbury currently offers four paid weeks paternity leave that is not considered as vacation.

There are creative ways to help make paternity leave feasible for a church. For instance, where pulpit supply is hard to find, the father may take four days off a week and keep up the preaching during that six weeks leave time. Active involvement of the laity in preaching would be another positive possibility. After prayerful consideration, each church will need to decide what will work best to care for their staff's family and the church.

## **Background Thoughts on Ministry Renewal Leave**

*From Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations*

by A. Richard Bullock

*(An Alban Institute Publication)*

David Ellingson describes Ministry Renewal Leave (MRL) as “a time to relearn and rehearse that critical capacity to reflect, which transforms dreams of vacation to new visions of vocation.” For me, and possibly for other clergy, “sabbath study leave” comes closest to describing that period of rest, travel, and study that makes up a ministry renewal leave. And it also alludes to its vital biblical roots.

The situations differ, but the reality is the same. You reach a point where you must get off the treadmill for a while. “The treadmill metaphor was very real for me in my own ministry,” confesses David Pohl, Director for Ministerial Settlement of the Unitarian Universalist Association, “because there was little relief from the pressure of the Sunday morning deadline, virtually no let-up in the seven-day schedule of meetings, study, counseling, and visitation, community and denominational commitments, and little sense of making headway. I would complete one service and sermon only to be confronted with the challenge of another, seven days hence.”

A ministry renewal leave gets one off the treadmill and provides an opportunity for renewal of vision and hope. It’s more than just a chance to recharge your batteries for another year. It can be a life and soul-changing time – a time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together.

Ministers desperately need to recreate and restore what has been worn down by day-to-day encounters with reality. Nourishing one’s soul and regaining perspective requires a change of pace and place – a pilgrimage.

But by stepping completely out of our current ministry situations, we are freed to embark on a holy trek. Some clergy have experienced life-changing “ah-ha’s” by listening to God during five, ten, twenty, or even thirty days of quiet retreat. One clergy person took a ministry renewal and did not celebrate the Eucharist for six months. Instead, he stayed in the pew singing hymns and praying with people – and he began to touch again the roots of his ministry, connecting with the holy timelessness of God. For him, ministry renewal leave was a touch of heaven and a glimpse of the banquet to come.

Ministry renewal leave is a time to receive, to be nurtured, to dig deeper into yourself, your relationship with God, and your own roots and stories, so that you can be renewed, refreshed, and revitalized by the breath of God.

## Purposes of the Ministerial Renewal Leave

### A. Removal

One must leave the place of service temporarily for the purpose of a broader, wider perspective without the tyranny of the urgent or unceasing interruptions.

It is recommended that a portion of the leave be done in isolation to more keenly hear the Lord in quietness and solitude. In the rush of our world, we tend to lose touch with the still, small voice of God.

One must be away from meetings, friendships, phone calls, and all the everyday interruptions if one will gain the clear perspective of one's walk and work.

### B. Rethink

In the first weeks, there should be given time for an analysis of present ministry. One should consider a) its strengths, b) its challenges, c) its completeness. It is a time of looking closely to the whole and then to each part.

### C. Renew

Now is the time for physical, emotional, and spiritual rest. Let the Spirit of God surround you and hold you. Be sure to take care of your physical and emotional needs, so that your spiritual needs will be met.

### D. Retool

Time must be taken for reading, or seminars, or Pastor-in-residence program. One should be in relationship with a mentor, and visits to other sites of ministry might be useful. There are many ways to retool and this approach should be talked about with your leadership before the MRL takes place.

One takes the new vision and new learning for the next steps in Church leadership. How will you introduce the new ideas to the congregation? Plan now for the church retreat that will give you opportunity to bring your ideas for the future.

### E. Resource

Take time to assimilate the new learning. Talk about your reading with your mentor. How will you implement new ideas?

### F. Return

Refreshed and renewed, one brings new vision and mission direction to one's own life. Share with your family. One should be strengthened in spirit, body, and emotions coming back to the place of calling.

## **A Suggestion for Ministerial Leave**

### **The Concern**

In today's world, there are few vocations that demand as much from a person as does the call to ministry. Our pastors are expected to be available to the needs of their congregation. They are always "on call." There is healthy respect for the pastor's "day off," but when needs arise, we call our Shepherd! Our pastors "burn out" and the Ministerial Renewal Leave gives time for clear perspective, renewal of soul, mind, and body, and an opportunity to resource for the years ahead.

### **The Recommendation**

It is the recommendation that in the fifth year of ministry, the pastor be granted a six-week renewal leave. This is not vacation; it is a planned separation to give the pastor an opportunity to reflect, renew, resource, and return to the church with a vision for what lies ahead. Many of our pastors leave for a new church after five or six years because that is the only way they can have a fresh start. The goal of the Ministerial Renewal Leave is to give conditions that allow our pastors to remain fresh and vital in their current situation.

### **Considerations**

For many of our smaller churches, it is difficult to think of their pastor gone for a long period of time. Care should be taken that the Ministerial Renewal Leave and the pastor's vacation time be spread over the period of the entire year. It is unwise to take leave and vacation consecutively.

The MRL should be accompanied with adequate resources for the pastor. Perhaps a second home of a parishioner could be used. There are programs that require less financial impact than others, such as the resident pastor program of our seminary. The church leadership and pastor plan the renewal leave together for the benefit of both the church and the individual.

### **Implications**

The gospels remind us again and again of our Lord's withdrawal for prayer and to be away from the "crush of the crowd." It is clear that there needs to be time for prayer and reflection in order to renew one's spirit. When one guards one's life and takes time to be at peace, one's work remains strong and one's presence brings consistency and maturity to the work of the church. While a sabbatical of three months in the eighth year removes the pastor from the congregation for too long of a time, a Ministerial Renewal Leave of six weeks every fifth year gives the needed time of reconstruction and renewal and keeps the pastor in touch with his/her church.

## **Guidelines on Ministry Renewal Leave**

*From Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations*

by A. Richard Bullock

*(An Alban Institute Publication)*

1. Develop a PLAN in which you, your board, a ministry renewal leave committee, and members of the congregation mutually agree upon goals for your ministry renewal leave.
2. Remember that TIME plays a crucial role in developing a good ministry renewal leave plan.
3. Use a CONSULTANT, colleague, or nearby continuing educator to help you and those affected by your absence to be more objective in planning your ministry renewal leave.
4. Search out program RESOURCES in nearby universities, seminaries, or special continuing education programs.
5. Ask for JUDICATORY participation in policy, support, and resources as well as ideas.
6. Organizing your FUNDING provides the “reality test” for a ministry renewal leave.
7. Make firm TRAVEL plans that will literally remove you from your normal office.
8. Locate a COMMUNITY where you can participate as an individual and on a group level.
9. Use a MENTOR to help you reflect theologically and personally on the external and internal journey you’ve taken on your ministry renewal leave pilgrimage.
10. Plan BENEFITS that you hope to receive during your ministry renewal leave journey including several different areas: personal, couple, family, and parish. *(What do I want to happen to me personally? How would I like the parish to benefit? What can be special for my spouse, kids, or the Bible study group I lead?)*

# Post-Ministry Renewal Leave Questionnaire

Adapted from *Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations*

by A. Richard Bullock

(An Alban Institute Publication)

*Use these questions as they seem appropriate to your congregation. The church may ask the pastor to write responses or use this list as a guide for discussion and evaluation of the leave. Leaders in the congregation (the church board, PRC, or executive committee) may also be asked for responses to receive a broader perspective on the experience.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the pastor's expectations for this renewal leave?
2. What were the congregation's expectations?
3. How was the content of the ministry renewal leave defined?
4. During the ministry renewal leave, what was the impact on the church?
5. During the ministry renewal leave, what was the impact on the staff (if applicable)?
6. What was the impact on the pastor's career, thinking, and plans?
7. How was the church involved with the pastor during the ministry renewal leave?
8. After the ministry renewal leave, what responsibilities changed for the pastor within the church?
9. How were these changes planned for? Did they just happen?
10. What debriefing happened for the pastor, interim, staff, board, and members?
11. What experiences from the ministry renewal leave became part of church life?
12. What role shifts occurred?
13. How did the pastor, interim, staff, board, and parishioners evaluate the ministry renewal leave experience?
14. What happened to the pastor and family on re-entry?
15. Would the pastor and the church do it again and why/why not?