

Sabbatical Policy for Fairhill Manor Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Benefits of Sabbatical for Pastors and Congregation

The congregation of Fairhill Manor Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) affirms that ministerial sabbaticals are highly beneficial both to pastors and congregation. Benefits for the ministerial staff include, but are not limited to: renewal in mind, body and spirit through true sabbath rest. Such rest may result in renewed vision of calling and vision for the congregation, and the opportunity for the pastor to renew their personal commitments to God and to the church. Sabbaticals provide a unique opportunity for the associate pastor to “step into the shoes” of the senior pastor, a benefit not only for themselves but also for the congregation, and enables him or her to become involved in areas that are normally dedicated to the pastor, including: funerals, pastoral care, and serving as administrative head, among others. The senior pastor will also have unique opportunity to exercise leadership in areas normally dedicated to the associate pastor, including: education, teaching, youth and children’s ministries, among others.

Congregational benefits include, but are not limited to: a deep sense of gratitude for both pastors—the pastor on sabbatical, and the one who “takes over”—as well as for members of the congregation who find a new sense of identity and growth in their own spiritual gifts. Sabbatical provides the congregation with opportunities to step into roles that include worship leadership and visitation, and, may result in significant individual and communal growth. The church may also have the opportunity to hear from a variety of guest preachers.

Sabbatical Request

FMCC affirms with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that a sabbatical of three months be offered the minister after every five years of full-time ministry. However, any request shall be considered and ultimately approved by the Board. The pastor shall make a sabbatical request as early as possible to ensure adequate time for planning and financial considerations while he or she is absent. The pastor/associate pastor shall receive full financial support from the church during the period of the sabbatical, including salary and all benefits.

The period of the sabbatical shall not be considered as vacation time. The sabbatical period is a period of rest and therefore the privacy of the pastor on sabbatical must be respected. All requests for pastoral care, from the congregation or anyone outside the congregation, shall be made to the pastor not on sabbatical.

No more than one member of the ministerial staff shall be permitted to take a sabbatical within the same calendar year. The sabbatical shall be taken at a time best suited to the needs of the congregation and periods during Easter or Christmas should be avoided.

It is agreed that the pastor/associate pastor shall remain in the employment of FMCC for a period of at least one year following the individual’s return from the sabbatical, and therefore shall not use the sabbatical time to seek another calling.

Preparations & Procedures for Pastors and Congregation Before a Sabbatical

The pastor/associate pastor should endeavor to make their request for a sabbatical at least 6 months prior to the commencement date of the sabbatical. However, there are sometimes mitigating circumstances that may not make such a timely request possible. It is most beneficial for such a request to be made at the earliest possible time. The pastor/associate pastor shall make a request in writing to the Moderator, which will then be brought to the General Board. The request shall specify the period of the sabbatical, reasons for the sabbatical, and the presumed benefits that may result from the sabbatical.

The pastor/associate pastor shall endeavor to schedule any visiting ministers and speakers during the period of the sabbatical prior to its commencement, and plan as thoroughly as possible worship, worship leadership, and direction or programs after the sabbatical with the other pastor and/or church leadership, if there is only one pastor on staff at the time. The General Board, prior to the sabbatical, must approve compensation for guest preachers. A *Sending Forth Service* shall take place prior to the commencement of the sabbatical, and may be included in Sunday morning worship.

Preparations and Procedures for Pastors and Congregation Following a Sabbatical

A *Welcome Back Service* should be prepared upon the return of the pastor/associate pastor, and may be included in Sunday morning worship. Upon a sabbatical's completion, the pastor and associate pastor shall submit a report regarding the impact of the sabbatical on the ministerial staff and the congregation. This report should be made to the General Board within eight weeks of the sabbatical's conclusion and made available to the congregation. An opportunity for the congregation to express its views on both the benefits and challenges of the sabbatical shall also be made available.

Leave of Absence

The pastor/associate pastor may request a leave of absence, if necessary, for emergency medical leave or for other personal reasons. Such a request is at the discretion of the Board and shall be made to the Board as soon as possible. All financial considerations of salary and benefits during such a leave of absence must be authorized by the Board and could include full salary, half salary or no salary and full or partial benefits. A leave of absence shall not be considered a sabbatical.