

**Sabbatical Guidelines
In the Southern Province
Of the Moravian Church in America**

The process for taking a sabbatical begins with a request from a pastor to the Provincial Elders' Conference for approval and to establish procedures and provisions for the sabbatical. With approval from the Provincial Elders, the minister may then proceed to the local Board(s) with the PEC's full support.

The Provincial Elders' Conference will recommend and encourage sabbaticals as part of call processes and conferences with boards. The PEC will work with the local Board (s) to enable the congregation to continue to function effectively during the minister's sabbatical. Triennial Reviews will also address the issue of sabbaticals.

Sabbaticals are recommended and encouraged every seven years; however, the minister should have served in the current position for a minimum of six years without any leave time other than vacation. The suggested length of a sabbatical is six weeks to three months. It is also recommended that planning for a sabbatical begin at least six months in advance to allow adequate preparation of the plan for the pastor and the congregation.

Sabbatical plans should include the following three components:

- 1.) Study/Outline a project or subject of study and how to accomplish;
- 2.) Reflection Activity/Retreat at a retreat center or reflective reading and reflection on spiritual writings with a written record of the outcomes;
- 3.) Recreation/relaxation with family and friends.

Sabbatical plans should also include:

- 1.) Provisions about how the pastor's responsibilities for the congregation or agency will be supplied;
- 2.) Information about how the sabbatical will benefit the local congregation or agency and the wider church;
- 3.) How the minister will report back to the PEC and the local congregation or agency about the successes and challenges of the sabbatical.

The minister's being away from the congregation or agency and locale, both physically and professionally, is strongly advised. If the minister chooses to stay in town, explicit boundaries should be set with respect to the ministers going to the church or office and parishioners or office contacts with the minister. Congregation members and office staff should understand clearly the boundaries of the sabbatical time and that it is inappropriate for them to contact the minister during this time. This should be clearly negotiated before the sabbatical begins. Phone calls and expectations that the minister will attend church functions or visit the office should be avoided. The sabbatical should have a flow that should not be broken by such interruptions. Special events in the life of the church or agency should be scheduled around the sabbatical. Responsibilities should be clearly delegated and provisions made for such events. Any relevant information should be left for reference by the responsible parties. This is a part of the sabbatical planning.

Sabbatical time should be taken as a whole and not be divided into several parts. Although sabbaticals may be taken in conjunction with or separately from vacation time, sabbatical time should be considered as separate and distinct from vacation time.

Although the minister may need to stay in touch with the supply minister or agency office about certain matters, there should not be a regular check-in or a return to regular duties during this time. Adequate coverage for emergencies and special concerns should be worked out prior to the beginning of the sabbatical.

Plans for staying in touch with other ministerial colleagues for spiritual companionship, accountability and nurture may be advisable. Groups such as *Sustaining Our Shepherds* may be helpful at this time.

Coverage of worship leadership, pastoral care and all other responsibilities should be funded as mutually agreed upon by the local congregation or agency and the PEC.

Upon the return of the minister, there should be a Board meeting to re-establish the relationship between the minister and the church or agency. The minister should report in writing on the benefits of the sabbatical, growth or changes in his/her person, and what rejuvenated or refreshed the minister for service. The Board(s) should apprise the minister of any happenings of importance in the church or agency; discuss what might have been done better in advance planning to prepare the congregation or agency and share results with PEC; and, discuss what the congregation or agency learned about the functioning of the minister that was significant. A reception or service of some sort should be planned to send off the minister and also to welcome the minister back and to give the minister the opportunity to thank those who made the sabbatical possible.

A period of re-entry should be planned in order to re-establish the minister's role. When the sabbatical works well, there is an empowering experience for the congregation or agency which has functioned well during the sabbatical.