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WCD Sabbatical Strategy

This document contains the entire policy including planning templates

Executive Summary:

Purpose:

A key priority of the Western Canadian District is to *“encourage and challenge pastors to experience lifelong personal and professional health for effective ministry”*. This **Sabbatical Strategy** document provides a deliberate and proactive approach which focuses on developing a pastor from strength to strength.

Preamble:

1. The WCD Sabbatical Strategy applies to all WCD churches that need assistance implementing their own local sabbatical policy for pastoral staff.
2. Prior to considering the request of a local church to access the provision of this Strategy, a church must have their own sabbatical policies established. The District Coach can be engaged by the local church to develop a policy for sabbaticals. Guidelines for establishing a sabbatical policy and examples of existing policies are available from the District Office.
3. All requests for sabbatical assistance are to be made to the District Coach.

General Guidelines:

1. The policy is applicable to all eligible pastoral staff under the local church's sabbatical policy.
2. The District may be involved in extended sabbaticals of longer than 3 months for pastors who have greater than 6 years of continuous service in the same church.
3. At times a sabbatical/leave may be required to address a personal or health crisis. The District may consider these on a case by case basis.
 - a. In these circumstances the Board, Pastor and Coach will collaborate on a sabbatical plan that addresses the reasons for the pastors' circumstance and a follow-up strategy to mitigate a repeat of the issue.
 - b. Should counseling or medical supervision be involved, regular reporting will be required; the frequency to be determined by the District Coach
4. The WCD, in addition to the provisions of the local church's policy, requires:
 - a. A demonstration of the link between the sabbatical plan and the church's Ministry Action Plan. The premise being: "How will this sabbatical period contribute to the development of not only the pastor, but the church?"
 - b. The establishment of a group for encouragement, guidance and accountability for the pastor while on sabbatical. This could include their Strategic Peer Network (SPN) or another group approved by the board.
 - c. A reporting mechanism post-sabbatical to the board as well as to the District Coach.

General Guidelines for Establishing Sabbatical Policies

What is a Sabbatical?

Ministry is profoundly important, not only to the people directly served but also to the larger community and society. A sabbatical provides time for a pastor to step away from the persistent obligations of ministry life to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. Lead pastors and pastoral staff serve a variety of roles in their position at the centre of congregational life: preacher, teacher, spiritual guide, visitor, friend, counselor, strategist, confidant etc. The responsibilities are continual, often with no distinction between "office" and home. The pace and demands can often be relentless, frequently leaving the most dedicated and competent of pastors recognizing the need to replenish their own spiritual, emotional and professional reservoirs to regain energy and capacity for their ministry.

A sabbatical is an extended period of time granted for professional development and/or spiritual renewal away from normal ministerial responsibilities and in a manner that is not possible during the busyness of a typical work year. In the context of the involvement of the Western Canadian District (WCD), sabbaticals are not for continuing formal education. In those cases, please refer to the WCD's Policy on Continuing Education.

Well planned sabbaticals will also have a side-benefit of enabling leadership within the church to 'step up to the plate'. As others are afforded opportunity to lead on an interim basis, their leadership skills are developed. Your "bench strength" becomes more robust and the effectiveness of the church increases.

Sabbaticals are not vacations, but carefully planned times for intentional exploration and reflection, for regaining the enthusiasm and creativity for ministry and for discovering what will make the pastors' heart sing.

Guidelines for planning

From the Church's perspective:

1. As a church, establish your own sabbatical policy and communicate it to your staff. Samples from large and smaller church contexts are available from the District Office.
2. If needed, contact your District Coach for assistance in setting up a workable policy for your situation.
3. Recommended time periods are 3-4 months after 6-7 years of continual service at your church.
4. It is recommended that for sabbaticals to have their maximum effect, they be taken as a whole and not divided into several parts.
5. Assign someone from your board to proactively address your sabbatical policy with staff and assist them in planning.
6. Plan for both the financial logistics to support the sabbatical and well as the human resource & communication logistics for the time period when the pastor is away. (*See "Elder Board Sabbatical Planning Checklist"*)

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7. Create a clear plan for the pastor's re-entry into congregational leadership and reporting back to the board the outcomes of his/her sabbatical. (See *"Sabbatical Transitioning Plan"*)

From the Pastor's perspective:

1. Plan well in advance to propose a sabbatical according to your local church's policy. If they do not have a policy, discuss your desire/need for a sabbatical with your board. They can access the resources of the District Office through their Coach to establish a policy.
2. Your proposal should contain the following: (See *Pastors Planning Template*)
 - a. A summary statement describing the overall character and purpose of your sabbatical proposal.
 - b. A description of how this will:
 - i. Contribute to your own renewal and development.
 - ii. Contribute to the effectiveness of your congregation/ministry
 - c. On your own, or depending on your church's policy, in conjunction with others, create a chronological outline of how you will spend your time on the sabbatical. A template is provided for this.
 - d. A plan for assigning ministry responsibility to others while you are on sabbatical.

When a sabbatical is not recommended

1. When significant conflict is present between pastor and the congregation. Time away will not rectify any self-defeating patterns of behaviour that are causing the conflict. Handle the conflict using other resources such as mediators, District Coaches etc.
2. When the timing is detrimental to the congregations' current context. Do not slavishly adhere to the policy's schedule for sabbaticals. Rather, talk honestly with each other as to the needs, goals and context of the church to determine the most acceptable time for the pastor to be away.
3. When it creates a serious financial burden to the church. Other paths may be available for assistance such as postponing it for another time so the church can work up to the finances required, or by requesting financial assistance from the District Office.

Before the Sabbatical – General Tips

- Consider strongly the idea of getting away during much or the entire sabbatical. This best provides the context for renewal, rest & reflection
- Pastors and the board are encouraged to respect the time away the sabbatical offers. If you do or must remain in town, set explicit boundaries with respect to interaction between the pastor and congregation. Communicate this clearly to the board and staff as well as to the congregation.
- Ensure areas of ministry responsibility that need coverage are assigned to staff or lay leaders. This may take a few months to accomplish, so be sure to plan far in advance for your sabbatical.
- Plan ahead so you can leave behind relevant information and resources to staff, volunteers and congregation members who might otherwise call on you.

During the Sabbatical – General Tips

- It will take at least 2 weeks to disconnect from church life mentally and emotionally – bear this in mind as you plan your renewal/development activities.
- Keep a journal before, during and after the sabbatical. This helps you discover what the sabbatical is doing for you and also helps you report back to the board and congregation.
- Remain connected to a peer cohort or other group as may be assigned by the board. A group like this provides spiritual companionship, accountability and nurture during the sabbatical period.
- DO NOT try to do too much.

After the Sabbatical – General Tips

- Together with the board, establish a clear re-entry plan. It is suggested to take 2-3 weeks to re-engage with your full ministry responsibilities. (See *“Sabbatical Transitioning Plan”*)
- Pastors should gauge their emotions and interactions carefully upon their return:
 - Immediate re-establishment and reassertion of your role in the congregation can be experienced negatively by congregants. Perceptions that the pastor is insecure, jealous or needing to reassert “authority” are not uncommon. Others have been leading in your absence. Thank them and gradually transition back to your leadership responsibilities.
 - Be careful not to look for evidence of things that did not go smoothly while you were away!
 - Take time to ask around concerning what happened in the life of the congregation while you were away
 - It is not uncommon for you to feel you can’t easily re-establish a pace or routine. Transitioning back takes time. Give yourself space to readjust.
 - You may come back full of ideas and energy about the next steps, but remember that the rest of the church has not been on the journey you just took, so ease people into your new thoughts so there is a shared vision and sense of partnership in ministry
- Recognize and thank everyone who helped make your sabbatical possible.
- Report on your sabbatical.

Elder Board Sabbatical Planning Checklist

- ___ Pastor's sabbatical proposal received
- ___ Proposed period of sabbatical: _____
- ___ Proposal aligns with elders' sabbatical policy
- ___ Assignment of a point person/liaison with the pastor for planning and communication purposes (to board, congregation and District Coach)
- ___ Budget considerations:
 - Strategies for covering 100% of salary during sabbatical period
 - Potential application to the District
 - Other considerations:
 - Tuition/education
 - Travel
 - Honoraria for guest speakers
 - Funding temporary or interim staff
- ___ Communication:
 - Assignment of point person for contact with pastor during the sabbatical
 - Frequency of reports from pastor to point person during sabbatical
 - Communication to congregation prior, during and post-sabbatical
 - Expectation for length of service required of pastor post-sabbatical
- ___ Accountability:
 - Assignment of peer cohort (SPN) or board committee
 - Follow up meeting to report on sabbatical outcomes to
 - Board
 - Congregation
 - To Western Canadian District :
 - Summary report provided to District Coach on link between the pastors personal development plans and the churches' ongoing effectiveness
 - Accountability during the sabbatical
 - Final report on sabbatical outcomes
 - In the case of sabbaticals due to crisis, ongoing reports to the District as per the instructions of the District Coach.
- ___ Leadership Continuity
 - Plans in place to cover the pastors' leadership and ministry responsibilities while on sabbatical (see *Sabbatical Transitioning Plan*)

Sabbatical Transitioning Plan

This planning guide covers BOTH the transition out and the re-entry strategy for the pastor on sabbatical

Sabbatical Role Assignments:

The current roles & responsibilities of the pastor will be allocated to others as follows:

Pastors' Current Role	Primary responsibility during sabbatical	Secondary responsibility during sabbatical (if needed)

Ongoing strategic initiatives (if needed)

The following areas of ongoing strategic initiative are those which the pastor wishes the church to continue to pursue in his absence:

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-
-

Miscellaneous initiatives (if needed):

General initiatives the pastor wishes to have pursued in his absence:

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-
-

Communication plan to Staff & Congregation:

- Discussions with staff regarding purpose and sabbatical responsibilities
- Announcement to congregation (see sample *Communication to Congregation*)
 - Purpose of sabbatical
 - Dates
 - Key components of the transition plan

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Re-entry Planning:

- Week one – 50% load
 - No preaching/teaching responsibility
 - Participate in all staff/ministry meetings with interim leaders continuing to lead
 - Meetings with staff and lay leadership to **hear** updates. (KEY is to hear only – no directives/advice to be given)
 - Meet with board designate to discuss any redefinition of roles/responsibilities
 - Report to the board and staff
- Week two – 75% load
 - Prepare for re-engaging with preaching/teaching in week three
 - Allow interim leaders to close out their leadership responsibilities. Publicly thank them.
 - Meet individually with leaders who took on your roles to thank them and receive any updates
 - Clarify any new or redefined roles and responsibilities and discuss with the board
- Week three – 100% load
 - Communicate with staff any changes in your role/responsibility
 - Resume preaching/teaching ministry & schedule
 - Resume full working hours

Pastors' Sabbatical Planning Template

Proposed dates:

Why this is an appropriate time for the sabbatical:

Proposal summary (*purpose and rationale*):

Statement of intended benefits:

- How this sabbatical will contribute to my own personal/spiritual/professional development:

- How this sabbatical will contribute to the effectiveness of our congregation/ministry

Outline of proposed events/activities:

Dates (month/day/year)	Events/Activities	General comments (EG: Purpose of event; financial considerations...)

Plan for covering my pastoral responsibilities in my absence:

Proposed accountability group during my sabbatical:

Plan for reporting back to the board/congregation:

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Template: Sabbatical Communication to Congregation

Since the reasons for a sabbatical will vary from situation to situation, the following are merely guidelines for the content and flow of written or verbal communication to a congregation.

The elder's board has recently decided to offer a sabbatical leave to *(name of pastor)*. Pastor *(name)* has faithfully served our church since *(time period)*. *(His/Her)* sabbatical will commence on *(date)* and they will return to ministry on *(date)*.

We have decided to grant this sabbatical because *(list reasons – EG:*

- *Further educational or professional development*
- *Spiritual renewal*
- *Crisis/health etc*
- *Etc...*

In the interests of our ongoing vitality and effectiveness as a congregation, we believe it is important that we provide this time for our pastor to strengthen *(him/her)* self as a leader. The timing for this is right *(list any reasons you wish to here)*. We have worked out a sabbatical plan with our pastor to make the time away as meaningful as possible.

During *(name)* absence, the following people will be taking interim leadership: *(name only the pertinent roles the congregation needs to know about)*. We have asked *(name of elder liaison)* to be the key point person between our pastor and the board/congregation during this sabbatical period. It is important that we respect this sabbatical period and not contact our pastor as though he were still at work. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact the point person. *Name of pastor)* will provide occasionally updates to the elder's board during their sabbatical.

We covet your prayers for *(name of pastor and their family)*, that it will be a great season of refreshing, re-tooling and re-visioning for them. Their desire and ours is that they receive a fresh wind of faith and Spirit-filling for the next phase of their ministry in our church.

We welcome any questions you have. Please contact any member of the Board or our Board member liaison for sabbaticals, *(name of elder)*.

Sincerely;

(If this is a verbal announcement, pause here to pray for the pastor, the church and those who will lead during his/her sabbatical)