



## Why should we give the pastor a Sabbatical?

e4 Partnership promotes regular, intentional and proactive Sabbaticals for its pastors. We view it as a decision of love and long-term investment for the church.

Pastors have a unique call – not simply to lead, manage, persuade, develop, use talents, etc... but to *hear the voice of God and shepherd eternal souls*. Our culture of distraction, busyness and secular noise war against the pastor's primary call. The question is not whether one type of work is harder or more demanding than another, but rather: what is best for our pastor to fulfill his call faithfully?

e4 Partnership promotes regular, intentional and proactive Sabbaticals for its pastors, because:

**Sabbaticals are biblical.** They arise from the Sabbath stream of biblical theology rather from direct injunction. One obeys the Sabbath by weekly resting from work. The old covenant laws stipulated “sabbath years” for the land and “jubilee years” for the whole community (Lev. 25). Jesus modeled daily solitude (Mark 1:35, Luke 9:18), times of rest (Lk 9:28), and periods of extended retreat (Mt. 4:1-2). Pastoral Sabbaticals are a response contemporary application of the Sabbath principle.

**Sabbaticals promote godly health.** They aim towards emotional, spiritual, and physical health by inviting the pastor into a planned time of restoration, quiet for listening, and space for engaging parts of their call that have laid dormant.

Sabbaticals are neither vacation nor labor-just-not-at-the-office. The pastor on sabbatical is not expected to read thousands of pages or finish a seminary class. If churches would like to provide leave for specific continuing educational or writing opportunities, this is a wonderful gift – but it is not sabbatical. Neither are sabbaticals space to work through marital, moral, or physical crisis – these are ‘leaves of absence’ of another type and should be named appropriately. Leaves of absence are reactive; sabbaticals are proactive – planned beforehand for health and spiritual growth.

The Sabbatical can also lead to growth in the church's health as they continue to BE the church without the direct leadership of the pastor for a short while. Churches can grow overly dependent on the pastor, and the sabbatical helps to wean the body from this poor habit.

**Sabbaticals express love.** A congregation loves the pastor and his family, as well as the whole body, as they proactively provide for periods of rest. This gift is a sacrificial act of love that Christ may be formed in their pastor more and more.

## Guidelines for Sabbaticals in e4 churches

Each church determines the length and frequency of sabbaticals for their pastors, but are urged to make decisions with the following principals in view:

- Sabbaticals should be long enough that it doesn't feel like a vacation (recommended: 8 to 12 weeks)
- Sabbaticals should be routine, every 5-10 years (depending on the length)
- Churches should urge their pastors to take the sabbatical built into their policies
- Sabbaticals should not place a financial burden on the pastor's family
  - e4 will supplement funds given by the local church for the pastor and his family to take full advantage of the sabbatical
  - e4 also commits to helping its churches, especially solo-pastor churches, with the added burdens when the pastor is away.

Planning sabbaticals well is key to their fruitfulness and acceptance among the congregation. Sabbaticals should be planned in far enough advance to not feel "sudden" or surprising to the communication. Furthermore, efforts should be made to teach the congregation about why sabbaticals are a value of the church and how it helps the whole body.

Other Common concerns include the question of coverage: who will provide care? Cover a funeral? Preach? These are good questions that can be addressed by careful planning. We encourage churches to use our other document, "*Sabbatical Planning Template*" to help think through these communication, coverage, and other details.