

Sabbatical Leave Policy (2014)

The Diocese of Niagara encourages clergy and licensed lay-workers to take periodic sabbatical leaves. Our understanding of the importance of and need for sabbatical leaves is rooted, in part, in the Genesis stories of creation and the 10 Commandments, exhorting us to observe Sabbath rest. Our purpose in granting such leaves is **to bring renewed energy and enhanced knowledge & skill to the practice of ministry to benefit both the employee and the church.**

Eligibility

Clergy, Licensed Lay-Workers and certain diocesan staff (as per their letters of appointment) are eligible for a two (2) month leave which can be combined with vacation time [usually resulting in a combined total of three (3) months for sabbatical leave purposes], once every seven (7) years of active (non-retired) ministry; provided that:

- A person proposing a leave should have been in the position from which they are taking leave for at least two (2) years.
- Notice should be given at least eight (8) months prior to the start of the proposed leave, preferably enabling budget planning where possible.
- The person requesting a leave submit a written proposal to the following persons: Bishop, Wardens, Regional Archdeacon [for those whose ministry is under the jurisdiction of a Regional Archdeacon] and Director of Human Resources. The written proposal should be one to two (1-2) pages in length, outlining the purpose and elements of the sabbatical leave, including possible outcomes which will be of benefit to the employee, parish and diocese and the relevance of those benefits to the diocesan vision for ministry.
- The applicant shall be encouraged, in light of the biblical Sabbath tradition and the fact that vacation time is often part of a sabbatical leave period, to ensure that there are significant aspects of rest incorporated into the sabbatical leave proposal.
- The sabbatical proposal shall make specific plans for sharing the benefits received with the parish, region and/or diocese through presentations, workshops, articles or other publications, *et cetera*, as appropriate for the outcomes of the particular sabbatical leave.
- A written statement of support for the proposal is received from the Wardens and relevant Regional Archdeacon [or Director of Human Resources, for those whose ministry is not under the jurisdiction of a Regional Archdeacon]. This support will not be unreasonably withheld.
- The Bishop provides *written* approval of the proposed sabbatical plan.
- A written description of the arrangements for replacement coverage is submitted to the Bishop (or designate), Wardens and Regional Archdeacon, not less than three (3) months prior to the beginning of the leave. If funds are being requested, this plan should include a request for a Sabbatical Replacement Coverage grant and a simple budget outlining how replacement coverage funds will be used.

Costs and Resources: Employee

The study and any accommodation and travel costs for the sabbatical leave are borne by the employee. Some or all of these costs may be defrayed through successful applications to the General Synod's Continuing Education Plan Sabbatical Grants; the employee's own, employer-funded, Continuing Education Plan account; and diocesan Education & Training Grants provided that the distinctive guidelines, timelines and eligibility requirements for the particular granting programme are met. It should be noted that the greater the lead time in making application for Sabbatical Grants, the greater the likelihood that funds may be available.

Costs and Resources: Employer

Replacement coverage will rarely cover all of the responsibilities exercised by the person taking a sabbatical leave. The non-financial costs of reduced staffing capacity during a sabbatical leave are acknowledged and borne by those in the parish and diocese who are not taking the leave. Replacement duties for urgent

pastoral care coverage might be carried out by clergy in neighbouring parishes, Honorary Assistants, deacons and lay leaders.

The financial costs of replacement coverage are borne by the parish. Since sabbatical leaves will normally include the use of a month of the employee's vacation, the cost of clergy supply during that month will have been already anticipated in the normal budgeting processes of the parish. The cost of clergy supply for regular worship services will be borne by the parish at the usual clergy supply rates. In larger parishes with multiple services per Sunday, this cost is likely to be *approximately* two thousand dollars (\$2,000) in total for two (2) months' worth of Sunday services. The Sabbatical Replacement Coverage Fund is a diocesan reserve fund for subsidizing these costs. It will maintain a minimum of twenty-six thousand dollars (\$26,000) available to reimburse up to thirteen (13) parishes per year (being roughly one-seventh (1/7) of the number of active clergy and licensed lay-workers eligible for sabbatical leaves) for up to two thousand dollars (\$2,000) replacement coverage costs per sabbatical. The reserve fund would be initially established and maintained through donations, transfers of unrestricted or appropriately designated investments, and/or, when necessary, assessment of levies to parishes. [If no other sources of funding were available for this reserve, the cost per parish would be less than three hundred dollars (\$300) per eligible clergy-person or licensed lay-worker, in any year in which the reserve fund needs to be fully restored.] This reserve fund enables parishes which do not have the financial resources to pay all of the replacement coverage costs in any given year to receive the benefits of sabbatical leaves for their licensed ministers. As a diocese we are in a stronger position to set up and maintain this reserve fund than we are as separate parishes.

Any additional costs [in excess of the two thousand dollar (\$2,000) grant to the parish] for pastoral or administrative assistance as required by the particular parish are borne by parishes.

It is recommended that the Human Resources for Ministry Committee assist in developing and periodically updating a set of (size of parish-specific) guidelines for parish leaders as they prepare for a sabbatical leave to be taken by an eligible clergy-person or licensed lay-worker serving in that parish.

Post-Leave Requirements

- The person taking a leave will submit a brief written report to the Bishop, Wardens, Archdeacon, and Director of Human Resources outlining the degree to and manner in which the original proposal's intentions were realized.
- Within three (3) months of the conclusion of the sabbatical, the parish is asked to report to the Director of Human Resources and Treasurer & Director of Finance concerning how its Sabbatical Replacement Coverage grant was spent so as to assist the diocese to monitor the effectiveness of this programme and identify any unanticipated obstacles to enabling sabbatical leaves.
- The person taking a leave will, in consultation with the Regional Archdeacon, Director of Human Resources and Wardens, follow through, adjusting as necessary, on the plans for sharing the benefits of the leave with the church.
- The person taking a leave is expected, under normal circumstances, to return for at least one (1) year in that position.

Communications

We, as a Diocese, shall proactively communicate that the goal of realizing a beneficial impact on the practice of ministry for both employee and church is at the core of our rationale for granting sabbatical leaves. Eligibility of individual employees for sabbatical leaves should be monitored, anticipated, publicized and known by parish leaders. Letters of appointment and annual performance and development reviews should systematically remind all parties of the eligibility (including timelines) for sabbatical leaves.