

**Sabbath  
Rhythms  
&  
Sabbaticals**

**For  
Pastors  
&  
Congregations**



**Southern  
Nazarene  
University**

**Church Relations**

# Pastors Die By 1000 Paper Cuts!

## Sabbath Rhythms and Sabbaticals

### INTRODUCTION

Pastors are NEVER done! As soon as we step off the platform at the end of a Sunday sermon, there is a little voice in our head saying, “You have to do this again next Sunday! And it has to be even better than this Sunday.”

Pastors don't work a 40-hour week. Pastors don't work Monday through Friday. Pastors carry individual, congregational and personal burdens that no one else knows about. Sometimes pastors get so busy taking care of everyone else's needs they neglect their own self-care.

In a culture that often feels like it runs on busyness and is driven by results, we have lost the balance of work and rest. Wayne Muller, in his book Sabbath, cautions us: *“In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the essential rhythm between work and rest. Our culture supposes that doing something – anything – is better than doing nothing. Because of our desire to succeed, to meet those ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, our lives are in danger.”*

This document is intended to encourage pastors to intentionally create sabbath rhythms in their life. The first section discusses sabbath rhythms for pastors while the second section is directed toward the implementation of sabbaticals and is written for both pastors and congregational leaders.



# Sabbath Rhythms for Pastors

## ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

Sabbath rhythms come in all shapes and sizes! For the health of our pastors, it is imperative that we learn to build sabbath rhythms into our lives, but those practices are going to look different for each person, each circumstance and each stage of life.

**Daily Rhythms:** Quiet, devotional time of connection with God! Maybe a 10 minute Sabbath Walk.

**Weekly Rhythms:** A day of Sabbath! Not a “day off” but a day to unplug and be unproductive!

**Monthly Rhythms:** A day of Sabbath! If you can’t find a weekly day of Sabbath, at least find one day a month to practice Sabbath!

**Quarterly Rhythms:** A two to four day retreat for personal rest... and maybe a little sermon work.

**Annual Rhythms:** Vacation time! You need the time away AND your family needs you!!!!

Sermon planning retreat! This will pay rich dividends throughout the year!

**Sabbatical Rhythms:** A Sabbatical is an extended leave of absence from pastoral responsibilities for the purpose of renewing the pastor (and family) physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

## WEEKLY RHYTHMS

Even a casual reading of the Scriptures makes it clear that God calls us to a regular time of Sabbath. In Exodus 20:8, the fourth commandment invites us to *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”* But long before this, in Genesis 2:2, we see God establishing the rhythms of work and rest: *“On the seventh day he rested.”*

Pastors would be wise to follow the model that God Himself has set for us. However, although Sunday may serve as a Sabbath for our congregation, for most pastors, Sunday is often a long, hard workday. So, we will need to find an alternative day/time for our Sabbath: Mondays, Fridays, Thursday afternoons, etc. The important thing is not when you take Sabbath time off, but that you are intentional and faithful to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy!

Another variable in our Sabbath practices is determining who we share our weekly Sabbath with. There will be occasions when the pastor needs time where he/she can be alone! Alone with God! In other circumstances, it may be valuable for the whole pastoral family to “get out of town” on their Sabbath, while other times the pastor and spouse may need to find a caregiver for the children while mom and dad have a romantic escape!

The pastor also needs to consider where he/she wants to “hide away” for their Sabbath time off. For many, that place will be in the quietness of their own home while others will find themselves “cocooning” at a local coffee shop or meandering around a golf course. Some pastors have been fortunate enough to find a local retreat center or even the vacation home of a parishioner.

Our Sabbath times will be enriched if we give intentional thought as to what we should exclude and include in our weekly practice.

What to Exclude:

- WORK!!!!
- Shoulds and Oughts
- Technology: Cell phones, computers, etc.
- Buying and Selling
- Hurrying
- Worry!!!

What to Include :

- Resting the body : Naps, bike rides, sunrises/sunsets, comfort foods, long walks, lovemaking, a good workout at the gym, etc.
- Replenishing the spirit: Naps, reading for pleasure, a phone call with an old friend, art work, yard work, etc.
- Restoring the soul: Naps, silence and solitude, contemplative prayer, a slow Sabbath walk, candles, yoga, etc.

Even though we want to remember that Sabbath keeping is ultimately about offering our worship to God as our Creator, there are some unique benefits for pastors.

- Sabbath celebrates the wisdom of doing nothing!
- Sabbath invites us to surrender!
- Sabbath invites us to let go of our role as “Major Control Freak!”
- Sabbath walks become for us a time of sacred rest!
- Sabbath is taking our hand off the plow and letting God take care of things, while we drink, if only for a few minutes, from the fountain of rest and delight.
- Sabbath invites us to stop counting!
- Sabbath invites us to say, “Thank You!”
- Sabbath rocks us to sleep and holds us tight until we remember who we are!
- Sabbath invites us to take a day to be useless, unimportant and powerless!
- Sabbath gives us permission to STOP!
  - Stop working
  - Stop making money
  - Stop spending money
  - Stop running the world
  - Stop meeting everyone else’s needs

- Stop wanting more
- Stop doing more
- Stop hurrying
- Just STOP! However, you can't buy Stopped! Like our Jewish brothers and sisters at Sundown on Fridays... you simply have to Stop!

Henri Nouwen, in his book, Out of Solitude, offers these life-giving words regarding Solitude, Silence and Sabbath: *"In solitude we can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness and discover in the center of our own self that we are not what we can conquer, but what is given to us. In solitude, we can listen to the voice of He who spoke to us before we could speak a word... who healed us before we could make any gesture to help... who set us free long before we could set others free... who loved us long before we could give love to anyone. It is in solitude that we discover that Being is more important than Doing and that we are worth more than the results of all our efforts. In solitude, we discover that our life is not a possession to be defended but a gift to be shared."*



# A B L E S S I N G

## For One Who is Exhausted

By John O'Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,  
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;  
Then all the unattended stress falls in  
On the mind like endless, increasing weight.

The light in the mind becomes dim.  
Things you could take in your stride before  
Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.  
Gravity begins falling inside you,  
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out,  
And you are marooned on unsure ground.  
Something within you has closed down;  
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty time.  
The desire that drove you has relinquished.  
There is nothing else to do now but rest  
And patiently learn to receive the self  
You have forsaken in the rush of days.

At first your thinking will darken  
And sadness take over like listless weather.  
The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have travelled too fast over false ground;  
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up  
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain  
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,  
Taking time to open the well of color  
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone  
Until its calmness can claim you.  
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit,  
Learn to linger around someone of ease  
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,  
Having learned a new respect for your heart  
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

©John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p.125 & 126.



**Come  
To  
Me  
All  
Who  
Are  
Weary!  
Mt. 11:28**

## **Sabbatical Practices for Pastors and Congregations**

### **WHAT IS A SABBATICAL?**

Pastors are not only encouraged to cultivate daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual sabbath practices into the rhythms of their life, but Nazarene pastors (and congregations) are discovering the value of sabbaticals.

A pastoral sabbatical is a structured program that allows the pastor (and family) to take a leave of absence from his or her pastoral assignments for a specified period of time for personal and spiritual renewal, after which he/she returns to the pastorate and resumes the pastoral responsibilities.

#### What a Sabbatical Is

- It is a time apart from the pastorate
- It is a time for rest and reflection
- It is a time for renewed focus and vision
- It is a time to “pull things together” mentally, emotionally and spiritually
- It is a time to be stimulated by new learning
- It is a time to concentrate on family relationships
- It is a time to evaluate the past and envision the future
- It is a time for the local church to invest in the life of their pastor

#### What a Sabbatical Is Not

- It is not an extended vacation and does not take the place of a vacation.
- It is not a sick leave
- It is not a time to pursue advanced academic degrees
- It is not a time to focus on negative aspects of life or ministry
- It is not a time to search for a new pastorate



## NAZARENE MANUAL STATEMENT ON PASTORAL SABBATICALS

The first time that a statement on pastoral sabbaticals appeared in our Nazarene Manual was in 1997. The current statement now reads:

“In order to encourage a healthy pastoral ministry and strong spiritual life of the pastor, the church board, in consultation with the district superintendent, should provide a sabbatical leave for the pastor during each seventh consecutive year of service in one congregation. The timing and duration of the sabbatical shall be determined in consultation with the pastor, church board and district superintendent. It is strongly urged that the pastor’s salary continue in full and the church board provide for pulpit supply during the sabbatical period. This topic is to be addressed by the district superintendent as part of the church/pastoral relationship review process that would come after year two and again in year six, once the viability of continuing the relationship has been established... At the church board’s discretion, such a program may also be implemented for a member of the pastoral staff.” (Paragraph 129.10)

### PROCEDURES

The procedures outlined below relate to two different types of sabbaticals: the tenure-related sabbatical and the crisis intervention sabbatical. Both of these need to be planned in coordination of the pastor, the congregation and especially with the direction of the District Superintendent. Each district has their own unique guidelines, so the pastor needs to work in close relations with the District Superintendent.

*The tenure-related sabbatical* is granted on the basis of tenure and is meant to be an incentive for pastoral longevity. Also, it serves as a preventive measure to help pastors and their families avoid burn-out. As stated in the Manual, a tenure-related sabbatical may also be offered to a staff member

*The crisis intervention sabbatical* is intended to provide preventive and curative intervention in crisis situations. In cases where pastors (and/or family members) are weakened by crises such as burn-out, physical illness, mental health issues, financial difficulties, or family problems, a temporary leave from the pastorate could help prevent further escalation of the problem or possible ministry termination.

### APPROACH

With the tenure-related sabbatical, it is suggested that a Sabbatical Team appointed by the Church Board become involved in the planning process at least a year in advance of the proposed sabbatical. This group will work in conjunction with the DS, consider any budget requests and serve as a liaison to the congregation. A sabbatical proposal should be presented to the church board six months prior to the beginning of the sabbatical.



When it is determined that a crisis intervention sabbatical is needed, the District Superintendent should be contacted. This is to be done by the pastor or by a designated member of the Church Board. The District Superintendent would make the determination as to the feasibility of the request and suggest appropriate actions.

## LENGTH

A tenure-related sabbatical should be considered when the pastor has served at least seven consecutive years at the same church. A rule-of-thumb is to give two weeks of sabbatical time away for each year of pastoral ministry served at that local church. Some districts provide shorter sabbaticals after three years or five years of service.

The length of the crisis intervention sabbatical is determined by the severity of the problem and other factors, such as finances available. It is important that some flexibility be built into the process to allow for ongoing evaluation. Two to three months should meet most needs.

## NATURE

Both types of sabbaticals should emphasize rest and renewal. There should be a total disconnection from the local church except for periodic exchange of progress reports and contact in case of emergencies. This generally means at least part of the sabbatical would be taken at some geographical location away from the area where the church is located.

The pastor on a tenure-related sabbatical would have complete control of his/her schedule and activities. On the other hand, the pastor on a crisis intervention sabbatical will be given the help (medical contacts, mental health assessments, counseling, etc.) necessary to resolve the problem.

## BENEFITS

Sabbaticals are beneficial for both the pastor and the congregation. There is in the heart of every God-called minister the noble desire to succeed and a strong drive to make a positive difference. When those desires are frustrated, the result can be the feeling that one is running a wearying, but joyless marathon. A period of time away from the regular work routine allows opportunity for reflection on the realities of ministry and for a refocusing on the vision and goals for ministry. It is no wonder that many of those who have participated in a sabbatical program testify to a fresh anointing and a new motivation in their ministry as well as a deep appreciation to the congregational leaders who have provided the time away!



Sabbaticals also provide congregations with new opportunities to rely on and trust in the Holy Spirit in new ways. With leadership from the Sabbatical Team, the congregation can see that pastoral sabbatical as a time for their own renewal as well as an enlarged vision for ministry. New strengths are developed and new appreciation arises for each other and for the absent pastor. These are just a few of the compelling reasons to consider the idea of a sabbatical. Those who have made the decision, report their experience to be life-changing.

## FUNDING

One of the most important principles underlying the sabbatical concept is that the local church would continue to provide the pastor and family with regular salary and benefits during the course of the sabbatical. Additional costs for housing, travel, and other needs would be the responsibility of the pastor. If carefully planned, some of these other costs could be provided by the church as well. Hopefully, in the case of the tenure-related sabbatical, the church would have planned in advance to take care of at least some of these costs. With reference to the crisis intervention sabbatical, emergency funds may be available through the district office. Accommodations for ministerial families on sabbatical are available on a complimentary basis in several areas across the country. Information on these locations can be found later on in this document.

## PASTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

A vital part of planning for a pastor's sabbatical is a careful and thoughtful understanding of how the pastoral responsibilities are going to be handled in the pastor's absence.

- Preaching assignments
  - One interim pastor for the whole sabbatical or
  - Guest speakers each Sunday
  - Weekly honorariums
  - Who is the person responsible to contact and make arrangements each week?
  - What about mid-week services?
- Pastoral Care
  - How will pastoral care be handled in the pastor's absence?
  - Who will do the hospital calling?
  - Are there Christian counselors in the area who could help if a need arises?
  - Who will coordinate responses to an emergency?
- Daily Operations
  - Who is responsible for the daily operations of the church office?
  - Who do the congregants call if they have questions?



## RETURN/CELEBRATION

The Sabbatical Team will want to plan a special all-church celebration to welcome the pastor (and family) back from their sabbatical. Hopefully, this will be a joyful time where the pastor can share some of his/her sabbatical highlights with the congregation. This would also give the congregation the opportunity to update the pastor on any life-events that happened during the sabbatical. It might also be helpful for both the pastor and the Sabbatical Team to prepare a written reflection a month or so after the sabbatical in order to evaluate the experience and to discuss fresh vision and purpose for the church moving forward.

## CONCLUSION

It has been said that pastors die from a 1000 paper cuts! One paper cut won't kill you, but over a period of seven years pastors can accumulate a LOT of paper cuts! When a congregation grants their pastor a sabbatical leave, it communicates a desire on their part to provide a time of healing and refreshing as well as a hope that their pastoral relationship can continue long into the future!



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# SABBATH/SABBATICAL RESOURCES

## Books

Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Hayley Barton

Invitation to Silence and Solitude by Ruth Hayley Barton

Sabbath by Wayne Muller

Out of Solitude by Henri Nouwen

With Open Hands by Henri Nouwen

Coming Home to your True Self by Albert Haase

Everything Belongs by Richard Rohr

The Gift of Being Yourself by David Benner

Open Mind, Open Heart by Thomas Keating

Sabbath as Resistance by Walter Brueggemann

A Sabbatical Primer for Pastors by David Alves

A Sabbatical Primer for Churches by David Alves

Planning Sabbaticals by Robert Saler

A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants by Rueben Job and Norman Shawchuck

## Videos

<https://vimeo.com/190411006/20d690112a>

Interview with Dr. Doug Hardy from Nazarene Theological Seminary

## Retreat Centers

<https://transformingcenter.org/> Ruth Hayley Barton

<https://usacanadaregion.org/ministry/clergy-development> Nazarene Clergy Development

[www.christianhospitalitynetwork.com](http://www.christianhospitalitynetwork.com) 38 locations in TX

[www.parsonage.org/care/ministries/index.cfm](http://www.parsonage.org/care/ministries/index.cfm) (Focus on the Family)

[www.hiddenmanna.org](http://www.hiddenmanna.org) The Woodlands, TX

[www.hospitalityhomes.org](http://www.hospitalityhomes.org) Locations all over the world (8 homes in Hawaii!!!)

[www.beside-stillwaters.org](http://www.beside-stillwaters.org) FREE! Florida!

Brewster Rest Haven (Maui, Hawaii)

Mailing Address: Karen Meyer P.O. Box 92226 Anchorage, Alaska 99509

## Sabbatical Grants

[www.lillyendowment.org/religion\\_ncr.html](http://www.lillyendowment.org/religion_ncr.html)

[www.clergyrenewal.org](http://www.clergyrenewal.org)

[www.clergyrenewal.org/resources/2012\\_NCRP\\_APP.pdf](http://www.clergyrenewal.org/resources/2012_NCRP_APP.pdf)