

Sabbatical Leave – Information for Ministers

The Baptist Union encourages ministers to take study leave every seven years from the date of accreditation. This normally follows initial formation and training at college. This provision is included in the recommended terms of appointment. This document contains information for ministers about planning for a sabbatical.

Sabbatical Leave – Information Sheet for Ministers

Formation for ministry doesn't end when you leave college, or even when you complete your studies as a Newly Accredited Minister, but goes on day by day as you study and serve. Sometimes, however, it helps to stand back from regular duties and take time to study, reflect and pray at greater leisure than the demands of ministry allow. This can enrich your ministry and make it more effective, as you develop deeper understanding and insights and perhaps acquire new pastoral skills.

The Baptist Union encourages ministers to take study leave every seven years from the date of accreditation; this is included in the recommended Terms of Appointment. The leave should last at least one month, to provide the benefits of a significant break from duties, and should not be for more than three months.

A sabbatical is meant to refresh you for the next period of ministry, so **it is not normally appropriate to take one in the two years immediately before you plan to retire**. If one is due in that period, an early sabbatical is possible once five years have elapsed since the previous one.

Planning the Sabbatical

Venue

Ministers take their sabbaticals in many different places. Some stay at home, when it's not easy to leave the family, but this has obvious disadvantages, not least the temptation to do the occasional piece of church work.

The UK Baptist Colleges are willing to help arrange sabbaticals, although as there are only limited places early contact is advisable.

Themes

We suggest that you should pick two themes, one main and one subsidiary, guided by your own interests, current issues in ministry or perhaps gaps that you feel you need to fill. The subsidiary theme should be quite different from the main theme, to provide relief and contrast within the study programme.

Content

A sabbatical is described as study leave, and it is meant to contribute to your development, so some things should be included, and some things cannot be counted as sabbatical leave.

There should normally be extensive reading on your themes - ten to fifteen books is about right for a three month sabbatical. Some sabbaticals, however, are more experiential and less book-based. What you should be able to demonstrate is that it will make a significant contribution to your ongoing formation by developing knowledge, skills and insights.

Dates

The dates should be agreed with your church well in advance to enable proper planning. They may be dictated by College terms or other factors.

Normally your first sabbatical should take place in the seventh calendar year after your enrolment on the BU Register of Nationally Accredited Ministers, and then every seventh year after that. (The clock starts ticking when you become a Newly Accredited Minister, you don't have to wait until your transfer to the Fully Accredited list.) If you are overdue a sabbatical you may take it at any time with the church's approval, but then seven years should elapse before the next one.

The Church

The church's consent and co-operation is essential, but should be readily given since the granting of sabbatical leave is included in the standard terms of appointment. Adequate arrangements have to be made for both the preaching ministry and pastoral care during the leave period, so you should plan well ahead.

Family responsibilities

These will loom large in making plans. This is why some ministers opt for a home-based sabbatical. It is important, especially if you are to be away, to ensure that your family is not expected to carry extra burdens. Support and friendship from the church are vital; additional demands must be avoided.

Advice

Your Regional Minister may be able to help you think through how you might use your time on sabbatical. It may also help you in your planning to go through the BU's scheme of guided self-appraisal for ministers. Further information on this is available from the Ministries Team. The Team may also be able to help in other ways. If you take a sabbatical at a College you will be able to obtain guidance concerning topics and reading from the staff.

Holiday entitlement

A frequently asked question is whether taking a sabbatical affects holiday entitlement for the year. Since the sabbatical is work, not holiday, it does not. Many ministers who take a three month sabbatical feel uncomfortable taking their full holiday entitlement as well, however, and it is perfectly acceptable to include one or two weeks break within the sabbatical period instead. Alternatively, it may be possible with the goodwill of the church to 'bank' some leave for the next year.

Church contribution

Churches agree in the terms of appointment to pay the stipend and normal allowances during a sabbatical. We hope that they will also give some help with the extra costs incurred. We realise that not all churches can do so, particularly those which are grant-aided, but the companion information sheet to this urges serious consideration of this, where possible, as an investment in the future ministry.

Report

We recommend that you write a report on the sabbatical. This helps to ensure maximum benefit, as you draw together and reflect on the various strands of your study or experiences, and records them so that you can come back to them. The results are often beneficial to others too, and will probably be of interest to your church. It is a good idea to 'ring-fence' time either at the end of the sabbatical or in the early weeks of return to ministry to do this. If you wish to send a copy to the Ministries Team you are welcome to do so.