

Part 1: A SABBATICAL AS A FAITHFUL ACT

by Stephen McCutchan

Think about your ministry. You are called to give witness to and proclaim the fullness of life for God's people. Your profession asks of you an enormous physical, emotional, and spiritual task. You are asked to manage a small business and organize the activity of a large group of volunteers. You are asked to be present to and offer nurture and comfort to multiple individuals in a variety of highly emotional circumstances. Each week you seek to inspire people in a creative and challenging way through worship. Your constituency ranges in age from birth to death, male and female, and from a variety of stations in life. Your normal work-week can easily exceed 70 hours. I doubt if there is any other profession so designed to drain a person both physically and emotionally as well as spiritually.

As Scripture proceeds to develop commentary on the Sabbath, it is clear that in addition to one day in seven, there are also longer sabbatical periods recommended. For clergy, regular sabbaticals, at least every seven years, are both important for their refreshment and a witness to the faith they proclaim.

Seven Steps to a Sabbatical

First, find information on how to apply for a grant to help pay for your sabbatical.

Go to Lilly Foundation and look for their clergy sabbatical grant program. If you get one of these, they even provide some money for your church to cover extra expenses during your Sabbatical. Go also to the Louisville Institute and look at their grant programs. There are probably other grant programs that can assist you.

Second, talk to your General Presbyter—Ask how presbytery can help with your sabbatical. S/he may know of additional resources or other ways to plan your sabbatical. They may also have ideas about how to prepare your congregation for the experience.

Third, identify several clergy in the area, including those of different denominations, who have been creative in planning sabbaticals? Have several conversations with such people. The more you talk to others about sabbaticals, the more creative ideas will emerge.

Fourth, take your spouse out for a nice meal and talk to her about what creative activities would be refreshing for you both during this sabbatical. Sabbaticals should not be all work—they are to be restorative both for you and your family.

Fifth, several months before the sabbatical, form a task force of some leaders in your church to plan together how the church might organize during your sabbatical but also how they might benefit from the sabbatical. *(See the article on how the congregation can engage in a Sabbatical experience.)*

Sixth, this is a time to listen more deeply to God about how a sabbatical can nurture your spirit and listen more closely to God's call in your life.

Seventh, in addition to some good books about planning a sabbatical, you might go to my Blog: www.smccutchan.com and search for some blogs I have done about sabbaticals. I'd be pleased if you would subscribe to the blog.

Over forty year of ministry, I was blessed with five sabbaticals. I did it as an associate, as the pastor of a single pastor church, and as head of staff. While I encourage you to look for grants to assist you in your sabbatical, I did all five sabbaticals without any grants, so I know it can be done.