

Part 2: SABBATH AS CONGREGATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

by Steve McCutchan

An Experiment in Sabbath Time

As you are planning your sabbatical, encourage your sabbatical task force to imagine ways that the congregation can engage in Sabbath time as a congregation. I will suggest one idea, but you can have some fun in brainstorming together about a variety of ways.

I encourage pastors to deliberately build in to their sabbatical plans an intentional time for family renewal and recreation. Since pastors often feel guilty about the time denied to their family due to the demands of the pastorate, I think this is a healthy part of his sabbatical planning.

Focus On the Family

What we also know is that many congregational families find themselves denying time with their family because of both their professional commitments and their participation in church and other community activities. Unlike the Puritan emphasis on the Sabbath that is part of this country's religious heritage, the European tradition places more emphasis on the Sabbath being a time for renewal of relationships. Consider what might happen if the congregation chose to make use of their pastor's sabbatical period to focus on their families in a new way.

A Night Each Month

Explain to the congregation that the session wants to encourage a renewed emphasis on family within the congregation during this three month sabbatical. What is being proposed is a sabbatical possibility during this time in which families within the congregation will set apart a time each week to focus on relationships within the family. It might be a Monday evening or a Sunday afternoon and evening, but it would be an agreed upon time for the whole congregation. Three weeks out of each month the congregation will agree that in place of church meetings, the church will suggest a variety of family relational activities appropriate to families with various age groups in them. Couples without children will also be encouraged to have a special night in which they focused on each other either at home or a date out.

Celebrating the Family Together

On the fourth week, there will be a church wide activity that will focus on the celebration of the family. It might be a time to bring in someone who can introduce music in a relational fashion or even a recreational specialist. The idea is to have a night of joy. There will be three of these during the pastor's absence and a fourth one when s/he returns. This fourth event will be a time to hear about the pastor's sabbatical and to share the congregational reactions to their own sabbatical experience. Maybe by that time it could become a habit that all would like to continue.