

**Living Hope Wesleyan Church
Madison, SD
Sabbatical Leave Policy**

TERMINOLOGY

The following terms will be used throughout; they will be considered equal in their respected intent:

- Church Leadership: Church Board; The Board; Advisory Council; Ad Council; Elder Board; Leadership; Leadership Team; LBA; Local Board of Administration
- Organization: Living Hope Wesleyan Church; LH; LHWC

I. PURPOSE

To establish and define the sabbatical policy for Living Hope Wesleyan Church of Madison, SD.

II. OVERVIEW

Definition:

A sabbatical is an intentional time of leave for the Pastor. It is a planned extended time away from their Pastoral responsibilities for the physical, emotional, spiritual and relational renewal of the pastor. For this to occur the Pastor needs time away from the people and the needs of the congregation he or she serves.

Historical Perspective:

The concept of a sabbatical is rooted in the biblical concept of the “Sabbath” which God modeled (Genesis 2:1-3) and commanded (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3). In Leviticus 25:1-7, the Lord says that after the sixth year the people were not supposed to sow the fields or harvest a crop. The land and people were to rest.

Historically, clergy have taken a sabbatical after several of years of ministry. Citing how they often became weary from the compounding effects of their pastoral duties and constant demands on their time; including the non-stop pace and cycle of local Church ministry.

Sabbatical Principles:

1. Supporting your pastor through a sabbatical benefits them and their family (if applicable), the congregation and the greater church community.
2. This time can open up new opportunities for the people of the Church and other staff to grow, serve and be a blessing for the congregation.
3. A pastor who practices good self-care remains healthier and it increases the odds of extending his/her life and ministry.
4. A sabbatical strengthens the pastoral home and close relationships.
5. The sabbatical is a time for renewed sensitivity to the Word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit.
6. It is a season for new experiences, deeper relationships, intellectual growth and spiritual rejuvenation.

Sabbatical Guidelines:

1. The sabbatical leave is an ongoing part of church policy and should never be used as a reaction to crisis.
2. The sabbatical is not a reward for good work, nor is it a “perk.” The sabbatical period is separate from the already determined vacation time allotted.
3. The Advisory Council should be apprised of what the dreams and aspirations are for the pastor and should be advised as to the potential benefits.
4. The sabbatical period is not a time to continue preaching, teaching, or to continue doing normal ministry within the church.
5. During sabbatical, the pastor will not visit church property unless an emergency exists, such as a funeral of a close personal friend or situation deemed outside the normal activities of the church.
6. The pastor will not be compensated for unused sabbatical time; Sabbatical leave time does not accumulate; The sabbatical will be taken in one consecutive time frame; the time cannot be split.
7. The sabbatical shall be planned to include and consider the Pastor’s spouse and children (if applicable) as much as possible. They should also be included during the time of re-entry.
8. The Pastor will make every effort and consideration to take their sabbatical during a time of year which would cause the least amount of disruption in the function of the Church.
9. The Pastor will have a staggered exit and re-entry into the regular ministry workload.

III. ELGIBILITY

Lead Pastor: It shall be the policy of LHWC that the lead Pastor will be eligible for a three (3) month sabbatical upon the completion of every seven (7) years of continuous and satisfactory service at LHWC.

Assistant Pastor(s): It shall be the policy of LHWC that any assistant Pastor will be eligible for a two (2) month sabbatical upon the completion of every six (6) years of continuous and satisfactory service at LHWC.

IV. FINANCIAL

Salary and Benefits: The pastor's full wages and benefits will continue for the duration of the sabbatical.

Related Expenses: There will be an established and maintained line item within the budget to assist with the financial aspects. The total will be for up to three (3) months of the total Pastor salary. This will help cover the expenses for, but not limited to: travel, conferences, counseling, resources, care of the family etc.

Pulpit Supply / Ministry Coverage:

1. It will be the pastor's responsibility to make the necessary arrangements for the coverage of weekly preaching/teaching duties. Unless requested by the visiting speaker or an alternate agreement between the Church and speaker, the regular pulpit supply honorarium, as determined in the annual budget, will be provided. (*\$200 per instance – 2025*)
2. The Advisory Council will assume general leadership responsibilities during the absence of the Pastor. Of which the AD Council and Pastor will determine.
3. All Church ministries shall continue as normal. The pastor going on sabbatical, along with the leaders in their respected area, should prepare as such.
4. The Pastor and Advisory Council will look for and consider outside funding support to help offset the overall costs incurred. Such as general donations, district grants, individual church members, fundraising etc.

V. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. During sabbatical the Pastor will in no way explore other employment options; apply for or candidate for other Pastoral positions; accept a new position at a different Church or anything as such.

2. The Pastor will remain as the Pastor of LHWC for at least one (1) year following their sabbatical.
3. If the Pastor leaves LHWC for a different ministry position within that year, the Pastor must refund the Church any monies used from the category of “related expenses” under the Financial Considerations section of this policy.
4. During the sabbatical, LHWC and its leadership will not use this time to review their relationship with the Pastor.
5. During the sabbatical, LHWC will not consider, search for or hire a different Pastor.
6. Exceptions to the above can be made when agreed upon by the Pastor and the Advisory Council.
7. Only one pastor shall take sabbatical in a given budget year.

VI. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. Advanced planning is a requirement when considering sabbatical leave. The requesting pastor must submit a written proposal using the guidelines below.
2. The senior pastor who is seeking sabbatical should bring the initial proposal to the Board not less than six (6) months before the intended commencement of the sabbatical.
3. Other pastoral staff shall bring their written proposal to the senior pastor following the same guidelines. The senior pastor will then submit the proposal to the Board.
4. The approved Sabbatical plan will be submitted to the District Superintendent at least ninety (90) days prior to the proposed start date.

Pending Responsibilities:

The pastor will provide a general outline of all known responsibilities which may require coverage during his/her absence.

Written Proposal: - The proposal should include the following *general* ideas:

1. Expectations and the focus of the sabbatical.
2. Type of ministry-related activity planned for sabbatical.
3. Plans for physical rest, personal recreation, family responsibilities, intellectual stimulation and spiritual renewal.
4. Strategy for coverage during the sabbatical that include preaching, teaching and all other routine and emergency duties.
5. Commitment by the pastor for continued service at the church.

The Advisory Council and the petitioning pastor shall agree to the final proposal.

Summary of Sabbatical Experience:

The applicant will provide a summary of the sabbatical experience – In writing to the Advisory Council *if so requested* – within one month of returning. A broader summary will be made available to the greater Church as determined by the Pastor and the Advisory Council.

Approval:

The Advisory Council will have the authority to approve, modify, or reject the plan. With the goal of full participation and collaboration with the Pastor in order to encourage and support the ministry.

VII. LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

The Advisory Council will remain responsible for all financial matters in the church, and will be responsible for ministry commitments during the senior pastor's absence.

The Board will also be responsible for the day-to-day decisions not specifically assigned to the Church Staff.

All administrative requirements will remain in effect.

The AD Council will assist the pastor in planning the sabbatical from beginning to end as needed.

The AD Council will maintain and document any necessary items that take place during sabbatical. Upon return, they will provide an update to the pastor on such developments and issues related to the church during his/her absence and to facilitate the gradual assumption of his/her full duties as pastor.

The Church Board will be asked to mediate any situations that may arise regarding a lengthy absence of the senior pastor.

VIII. STAFF RESPONSIBILITY

A staff member appointed by the senior pastor will keep a journal of events that have taken place during the sabbatical period. This will assist the senior pastor during the re-entry period to quickly get up to speed on the developments in the church while he/she has been away.

IX. LHWC OWNERSHIP

Congregation

The sabbatical is an important event in the life of a pastor and the church. For it to be successful, the church must “own” the sabbatical. It is unhealthy when the sabbatical is thought of simply as something the congregation “gives” pastors to do. The leave should not be given begrudgingly. The sabbatical is a church program and must be funded as any other program of the church and be designated to benefit the congregation as well as to enrich the pastor’s ministry.

X. EFFECTIVE DATE: 09/21/2025

This sabbatical policy is effective as of this date and will remain in effect until revised or cancelled by the Church Advisory Council.

Senior Pastor:

____ *HARD COPY HAS BEEN SIGNED* _____ Rev. Kirby Oaks

LHWC Advisory Council Members: September 2025

____ *HARD COPY HAS BEEN SIGNED* _____ JoAnn Casanova

____ *HARD COPY HAS BEEN SIGNED* _____ Derrion Hardie

____ *HARD COPY HAS BEEN SIGNED* _____ Floyd Rummel