

Continuing Ministerial Development

Sabbatical study leave

Guidelines for Ministers

Formation for ministry does not end when you leave college, or even when you complete your studies as a newly accredited minister - it 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, and offers small bursaries towards costs of qualifying programmes. The leave must 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 retirement**. If one is due in that period, an early sabbatical is possible once five years have elapsed since the previous one, but must be restricted to six weeks, as must any sabbatical in the third year before retirement.

Planning the Sabbatical

Venue

Ministers take their sabbaticals in many different places. Some stay at home, when it is 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. The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague offers facilities for sabbaticals. It is also possible to plan an overseas programme with BMS World Mission (who may then make a grant in addition to the Union's).

Themes

Normally 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, and you are asked to list your planned reading; ten to fifteen books is about right for a three month sabbatical. Some sabbaticals, however, are more experiential and less book-based. No form of sabbatical (other than one which is really an extended holiday) is excluded, *provided that* you can demonstrate that it will make a significant contribution to your ongoing formation by developing knowledge, skills and insights. If you plan to take such a sabbatical you must

explain how it helps this process. In particular, if you are planning an exchange of pastorate, the BU must be assured that there is more content than just taking services, and needs to know how you expect the leave to contribute to your development. After any 'alternative' type of sabbatical, you must present a more substantial report, including a theological journal reflecting on your experiences.

Bursaries for sabbaticals consisting of academic work leading to a higher degree are only available if (a) the minister is not already receiving assistance from the BU Further Studies Fund and (b) the relevance to ministry can be clearly demonstrated.

Even if your sabbatical plans do not fit into the BU scheme (due either to content or timing), the granting of leave is between minister and church. The BU cannot and would not wish to forbid any local arrangement, provided it is understood that in such circumstances no bursary can be awarded.

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. The BU Ministry Department should be informed as soon as possible.

Normally your first sabbatical should take place in the seventh calendar year after your enrolment on the BU Register of Covenanted Persons Accredited for Ministry, and then every seventh year after that. If you are overdue a sabbatical you may take it at any time, but then seven years must elapse before the next one is available.

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 settlement. Adequate arrangements have to be made for both the preaching ministry and pastoral care during the leave period, hence the importance of planning 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 Ministry Department. The Department 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.

Finance

B U Bursaries

If your programme qualifies as outlined above a bursary will normally be given. It will not normally be more than half your expected costs, and also is limited since it comes from the Home Mission budget. (The sum is enhanced to up to three-quarters of costs and the maximum to 50% above normal if the minister is supported by Home Mission, since it is not realistic to ask aided churches to make a major contribution to the costs.) The application form is available on request from the Ministry Department.

Payment of the bursary

The BU tax adviser has told us that any bursary paid directly to you could be regarded as taxable. Your 'employer', however, may provide training for you without liability arising, so the bursary is paid to the church. You must then claim the sum as out of pocket expenses (substantiated by suitable receipts) or arrange for the Treasurer to pay directly invoices to the value of the bursary - e.g. for accommodation at a College.

Church contribution

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

Report

You are expected to 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. The results are often beneficial to others too, and will probably be of interest to your church. It is important to 'ring-fence' time either at the end of the sabbatical or in the early weeks of return to ministry in order to write this. The report should be sent to the Ministry Department within two months of the end of the sabbatical.

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