



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES For Wardens, Vestries, and Clergy Serving in Parishes During the Sabbatical Leave of the Rector

Historically, The Episcopal Church in Connecticut has encouraged parishes to provide a three-month Sabbatical Leave for their full-time clergy after every five years of continuous service. While not mandatory, such leaves can be extremely beneficial both to the parish and the cleric, for study and refreshment, both spiritual and personal. While there is no specific recommendation for part-time clergy to take sabbaticals, they are encouraged to negotiate with their vestries or supervisors for it.

Such leaves require extensive advance planning, for the priest to develop goals and the means for achieving them, and for the parish to anticipate both the pastoral needs of the congregation during the Rector's absence and the costs of meeting those needs. Ideally, a Sabbatical Leave is a time to celebrate the ministry of both Rector and congregation and the benefit to all of the Leave itself. Diocesan staff is available to offer support and counsel.

The parish is responsible for engaging clergy assistance as needed, whether that be as much as full time or as little as Sunday supply. The following are suggestions to assist in the process of bringing a priest on board during a Sabbatical Leave:

- The priest who serves the congregation is neither the Rector nor, strictly speaking, Priest in Charge. We have adopted the term "Interim Priest" for the title of the priest who will be walking with the parish during the Sabbatical Leave.
- Since each situation is different, a sample Letter of Agreement (LOA) is not available. However, as the Letter of Agreement with the Interim Priest is developed, care should be taken to articulate expectations as clearly as possible. For example: the specific dates the agreement begins and ends; that the Interim Priest is accountable to the Wardens; how many units each week the priest is expected to work (and how will she/he/they will be compensated if the demands of the parish consistently exceed that amount); what professional expenses will be covered (including mileage), and who may authorize such payments. In addition, the LOA might also outline procedures for dealing with disagreements, with a third party, named and accessible. If the Interim Priest has a secular occupation, the LOA might clarify appropriate boundaries between the secular and the priestly work. Finally, the LOA may articulate expectations of the Interim Priest once the Leave is completed (contacts with parishioners, returning to worship, for example).
- If at all possible, the Interim Priest should meet with the Rector before the Sabbatical Leave begins.

Other Considerations:

During the Rector's absence, it has been found extremely beneficial if frequent and consistent notices are given concerning the progress of the Sabbatical Leave. Simple one-line updates can serve both to keep the parish informed as well as eliminate possible misunderstanding that the Rector is either on vacation or has left the parish permanently. It is also an opportunity for the congregation to understand readily that the Sabbatical is intended for the benefit of the entire community, as well as the priest.

When the Sabbatical Leave is completed, the Rector is expected to provide evaluation of the time away to the Bishop Suffragan. (There is an Evaluation form available on our website episcopalct.org.)



Presumably such evaluations are shared with the parish as well, and evaluations from both the Interim Priest and the Vestry might also be helpful to the parish. Questions for consideration might include:

- Was the parish sufficiently prepared for the Leave and educated about its purposes?
- Were the Vestry and Wardens equipped to assume additional responsibilities?
- Was the financial planning sufficient?
- What observations would the Interim Priest make about the health, vision, and sense of mission of the parish?
- With whom and how will the Rector share the benefits of the Leave (for example, parish forums, parish education offerings [adult and children], Region events)?

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