

TO: Churches and Ministers Planning for Sabbatical or other leave
FROM: Mary Susan Gast
RE: Replacement Pastors

As you consider a pastoral replacement for the minister who is going on Sabbatical, Parental, or other leave of several months' duration, here are a few things to bear in mind.

1. A Replacement Minister does not carry out the same functions as an Interim Minister. A trained Interim Minister may do a fine a job as a pastoral replacement, but the ministry assignment is unique.
2. During a Sabbatical, Parental Leave, or other leave, the called pastor is entrusting her/his ministry into the care of the Replacement Minister.
3. The Pastor who is going on leave must have complete confidence in the Replacement Minister, thus the Pastor must have a decisive voice in determining who the Replacement Minister will be. (An exception would, of course, occur if the Pastor has become suddenly and seriously ill).
4. Before going on leave, the Pastor should meet with the Replacement Minister to go over the particular assignments which the Pastor foresees should be carried out during his/her leave.
5. The congregation should expect to compensate an ordained minister serving as Replacement Minister at the same rate as the Pastor who is going on leave. If the Replacement Minister is a seminary student the compensation could be at a lower rate, with a nearby mentoring pastor assigned to be of assistance to the Replacement Minister.
6. A contract should be drafted stating the terms of the assignment as Replacement Minister, and signed by the Pastor, the Moderator (or other elected church leader), and the Replacement Minister.
7. During the leave, the Replacement Minister should not in any way disparage the ministry of the Pastor on leave, nor initiate any changes not discussed with the

Pastor, and should actively discourage members of the congregation from making unfavorable comments about the called Pastor. If concerns surface, the Replacement Minister can relate them to the called Pastor when the Pastor returns, and/or encourage the member to do so.

8. When the Pastor returns, s/he should meet with the Replacement Minister for a de-briefing and updating on the pastoral concerns that emerged and significant events that occurred while the Pastor was on leave.
9. A service of farewell and appreciation for the Replacement Minister and a service of welcome upon return of the Pastor may be celebrated.
10. The church governing board and the Pastor will want to meet for “resuming of the pastorate” session upon the Pastor’s return, during which the Pastor and the governing board discuss what they’ve learned and done during the Pastor’s leave and prepare for “re-entry.” The Pastor and governing board may want to invite their Associate Conference Minister to be present for that session.
11. The Replacement Minister will not worship with the congregation for at least one year after her/his departure, nor have pastoral contact with members of the congregation unless called to serve that congregation or engaged as Interim Minister or Replacement Minister once again.

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