

Sabbatical Leave Good Practices For the MCBC Constituency

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A. Philosophy

Mennonite Church BC churches and church institutions place high value on their personnel. It is recognized that after extended periods of service, employed personnel can benefit from an opportunity for renewal, revitalization and refocusing to sustain and enhance the effectiveness of their service and for personal health and growth. Many Mennonite churches and their institutions offer a sabbatical leave to fulfill this purpose. It may include study, service, retreats, reading, writing, visiting the work of the church at home and abroad, time for refreshment and for renewing family relationships, attending events that are inspirational and educational etc.[*] Personnel are encouraged to plan a sabbatical that gives them an opportunity to retreat from their formal roles and duties in order to focus on personal renewal.

This document of good practices has been compiled to assist applicants and decision makers think through sabbatical applications holistically. Recognizing that each work and service context is unique, it is suggested that personnel/churches/institutions consult with others with similar circumstances to discern the best fit. It is suggested that the sabbatical leave applicant and her/his supervisor(s) use this document to consider together which of the practices presented are relevant to their situation. Principles of integrity and justice will guide those responsible for working out the details with personnel considering a sabbatical leave.

B. Eligibility and Length

1. It is generally accepted practice that six years of continuous service has been completed before personnel apply for a sabbatical leave during their seventh year.
2. The length of a sabbatical leave varies greatly in MCBC. Factors weighing in are: the needs of the applicant, financial capacity the employer, the work context and timing, and the relationship between the applicant and the employer. It is wise to maintain flexibility.
3. It is acceptable for personnel to apply to add annual vacation leave to the sabbatical leave. It would be prorated to the amount of annual vacation leave available i.e. if the annual vacation leave is 4 weeks, 3 weeks could be applied to the sabbatical leave.
4. A sabbatical leave should not be a part of negotiation in a severance package.

C. Application and Procedure

1. It would be wise for the applicant to “test the waters” before making a formal application.
2. Application for a sabbatical leave should be submitted at least six months before the planned start date. This gives ample time for negotiation and preparation.

3. The application could consist of:
 - a. The proposal would be approved based on the merits of the plan, the timing, benefit to the applicant and to the employing body or constituency, the accountability proposal, how the applicant's tasks and obligations will be fulfilled in his/her absence and budget implications.
 - b. While not a part of the approval consideration, discussions should include whether or not a temporary replacement would be required
 - c. It is good practice for the employer to inform the applicant, in writing, outlining the consensus reached and conditions of the sabbatical leave.
4. A proposal providing: the proposed dates of the sabbatical leave, plus the additional vacation leave if requested; a description of objectives and the proposed activities; a statement of how these activities will be beneficial to the applicant and how they will contribute to enhancing his/her service.
5. A prioritized list of tasks, activities, obligations and services that will need to be addressed while on leave and suggestions as to how they might be met. The list should include anticipated issues that might need to be addressed.
6. A proposal, for discussion, of how the applicant plans to demonstrate accountability, e.g. a report, newspaper article(s), presentations, a blog etc.

D. Remuneration, Expenses and Some Administrative Suggestions

1. Remuneration plans vary with expressed values and principles, the applicant's financial situation, the employer's financial capacity and the sabbatical leave plan that emerges out of the discussions. Remuneration in general practice in MCBC varies between 70% and 100% of applicant's salary. Flexibility on both sides helps to come to an option that meets both party's needs and obligations. If a percentage of the salary will be remunerated, one option may be to consider prorating, or spreading, the percentage of reduction over one year to make each month's reduction smaller.
2. As noted above, the entitled annual vacation leave could be added as determined by the employment contract. Benefits would continue during the sabbatical leave and sick leave credits would continue to accumulate but vacation credits would not.
3. It is suggested that anticipated remuneration—stipends, honoraria, fees, wages, per diems etc.—be disclosed at the outset in the interest of transparency and for weighing possible income tax implications. Both parties could then decide if the anticipated remuneration should be handled as a salary top-up, reimbursement of expenses, or as a deduction from the applicant's salary.
4. A portion of the professional development amount already budgeted in the fiscal year of the sabbatical leave could be requested for approved activities.
5. To assist in financial planning, the employer may consider creating a budget line with an amount to cover unexpected expenses while conducting the employee's tasks during the leave.
6. The employee's routine operational budget may be used to meet routine expenses incurred during his/her absence.

E. Obligations

It is helpful to spell out obligations of the employee and employer to avoid misunderstanding.

1. Employee: It is generally accepted that, after the sabbatical leave has been completed, the service obligation to the employer is equivalent to one additional year of service i.e. the 8th year. It is reasonable to expect that should the employee resign on his/her own initiative before the time of obligation has expired, the employer would be released from all expectations customary of severance agreements beyond the legal requirements.
2. The employer: Should discuss the employee's proposal in good faith, giving full credence to the well-being of the employee with open communications. To maintain good faith the employer will retain the employee's position and not contemplate replacing him/her during his/her absence and not contemplate making any changes to the terms of the leave of absence agreement. Significant programming changes should also not be made in his/her absence.

[] Severe stress leave and time for counselling and treatment should be maintained under medical leave and not be combined with sabbatical leave.*