

## Draft

### Diocese of New Jersey Sabbatical leave Policy

#### Introduction

At the diocesan convention in March 2008, Bishop Cancell announced his intention to take a sabbatical the following fall and asked the Standing Commission on Clerical Compensation to develop a sabbatical policy for all fulltime clergy in the diocese. The Bishop attended our first meeting and reiterated the importance of the policy for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the clergy. Since sabbaticals are not usually a benefit to persons working in the private sector, the lay members of the Commission were, at first, skeptical of the idea. Upon listening to the arguments from the clergy members of the Commission about how sabbaticals would not only benefit them personally but also their ministry, the lay members, who represent both large and small churches, decided the idea was worth pursuing.

The Commission examined the policies of the dioceses of Virginia, Washington D.C., Massachusetts, New York, Long Island, Central Florida and Newark and material from the Southeastern and Texas Districts of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod titled "Sabbatical Guidelines and Resources for Professional Church Workers". Our sabbatical guidelines are recommended minimums similar to the other clergy compensation components.

#### Recommendations

- Years of service *within the Diocese of New Jersey* to be eligible for a sabbatical leave – **5-7 years** (*Note the years of service do not have to be at the same parish*).
- Length of sabbatical leave – **2-3 months**
- Time required to stay after return from a sabbatical leave – **1 year**

#### Costs Involved for a Parish

- Full compensation to the clergy during his/her leave
- Supply or interim clergy to cover the sacramental and pastoral needs of the congregation
- Contributions to a fund to help defray the clergy member's expenses for the leave

The Commission is aware that many of the newer clergy have wording in their letters of agreement covering sabbatical leave. Our recommendation is that all Letters of Agreement must cover the topic of sabbaticals even if both sides mutually agree that sabbaticals are not feasible at that time. Furthermore, we recommend wording that would have both clergy and vestry revisit the subject after an agreed upon number of years.

Furthermore, the Commission encourages clergy who serve full-time in parochial ministry and who are canonically resident or licensed to serve in this diocese and who do not have sabbatical agreements with their vestries to open a dialog and hopefully, come to one.

Once the benefit has been agreed upon, the planning process must begin for both the church and the clergy. Churches are advised to establish an escrow account to give the clergy for sabbatical expenses as well as a fund to cover the supply or interim clergy for normal services. The Commission suggests that churches explore the utilization of any unused monies in the Clergy Continuing Education benefit (allocated yearly), carrying such monies into a line item for the establishment of a restricted Sabbatical Account

The amount used to defray sabbatical expenses should be agreed upon by the clergy and vestry. The amount of coverage the church wants while their priest is on leave will determine how much money to put away for that purpose. The earlier the process begins, the easier it is when the time arrives.

### **Sabbatical Leave Subjects**

While the Commission makes no recommendations re: the appropriate subject for a sabbatical leave, it believes that clergy who receive this benefit are accountable to the congregation and to the Bishop to do their best to use this benefit to strengthen their vocation to serve Christ and the Church, taking note of this Church's understanding of the ministry of a priest, as found in the Ordinal (see pages 531-533 of the Book of Common Prayer) and the Catechism (page 856, BCP).

### **Smaller/Mission Churches**

One of the chief concerns of the Commission is how smaller churches (levels I and II) can afford to give their priests 2-3 months off while paying him/her as well as a substitute and the sabbatical expenses. We hope the diocese establishes a fund to provide grants to those parishes for the purpose of giving their clergy sabbaticals. A possible alternative to a full sabbatical for smaller churches is to give their clergy more time than allotted for continuing education to attend conferences and retreats. The time off and expenses must be mutually agreed upon between the priest and vestry.

### **Assistance for the Clergy**

We, also, hope the diocese establishes a person or persons (not necessarily on the diocesan staff) to help clergy plan their sabbaticals including ways to help fund them. This same person(s) may help vestries with the financial aspects required and with finding substitute clergy.