

## **Pastoral Renewal Leave for Pastor Brian – Fall 2018**

The GCC Board of Elders is pleased to share that Pastor Brian Walter has applied for Pastoral Renewal Leave under the program previously adopted by the congregation (2010) and has been approved by the Board of Elders. We are excited about being able to offer this period of refreshment and study for Pastor Brian who will be celebrating his eighth anniversary as a pastor with our congregation in October!

Anticipating your questions we offer the following:

### **What are the details of Pastor Brian's Renewal Leave?**

Pastor Brian has been approved for a twelve week leave to take place during the Fall of 2018, specifically August 27 through November 24. The plan involves a combination recreation, reflection, re-connection with influential leaders from Brian's past, and study on various topics directly connected with his responsibilities here at GCC. Brian will also be leading the trip to Israel in November as part of this leave.

### **What about Brian's responsibilities at GCC while he is away?**

Each of the staff members who report directly to Brian will be meeting regularly with a member of the Board of Elders for encouragement, support, and accountability during the period of leave. Day-to-day needs of staff supervision will be handled by Pastor Chris. Other pastoral responsibilities that Brian is usually engaged in will be shared by Pastor Chris, Pastor Paul, and members of our Board of Elders.

### **Who do I contact if there is a circumstance in my family that requires a pastor's care or counsel?**

Contact the church office as usual. Depending on the need, it will be forwarded to the right person on staff in order to meet your needs in the best way possible.

### **What can I do to help?**

Our number one request as we approach the period of Renewal Leave is that every member and friend of the church would surround Pastor Brian and his family with prayer that this time of refreshment and study would proceed along the lines of God's sovereign will and to His glory.

To learn more about Renewal Leave, please consult the more general information below.

In Christ's service together,

The GCC Board of Elders

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Pastoral Renewal Leave Background Information (Updated November 2014)

### **Introduction**

In the late fall of 2006 the Board of Elders began consideration of the topic of Renewal Leave for our pastors here at Gurnee Community Church. Over the course of many months we discussed the biblical foundations for the concept, examined the resources available in the marketplace to learn how Renewal Leave has been implemented in other religious communities, and then explored how this would look within our church family.

The Elders started with a very real question: “Will Renewal Leave for our pastors ultimately honor God and edify (build up) our congregation?” They judged that both aspects were important and necessary and came to the conclusion that if done with careful planning both goals could be achieved. After a thorough process of discovery the GCC Board of Elders presented the concept of Renewal Leave to the Church Council (the lay governing body of GCC at the time Renewal Leave was being contemplated). After careful consideration and a thorough discussion the Council affirmed the proposal and forwarded this program concept to the members of Gurnee Community Church for action. While the Bylaws could be amended at that time under the authority of the Church Council the GCC Board of Elders and the Church Council agreed that it would be consistent with the spirit of congregational government that the members of Gurnee Community Church affirm by discussion and vote the creation of a program for Pastoral Renewal Leave.

The following language was adopted by the members of Gurnee Community Church in August, 2010.

## **The Bylaws of the Gurnee Community Church**

### **Section 2 Elders**

New: The elders will administrate a program for Pastoral Renewal Leave as provided for in Addendum A.

### **Addendum A** (appended to the Bylaws following the last section)

The congregation affirms that Pastoral Renewal Leave is beneficial to both the pastoral staff and congregation. Such opportunities are intended to enhance skills, increase competence and expand horizons of the pastor for his or her ministry with the congregation. While time is granted each year for short-term study opportunities, occasions for Renewal Leave will also be considered under the conditions detailed below. Renewal Leaves provide prime opportunities for renewal of spirit, extended study, reflections and planning, and creative growth that normal routines do not allow.

1. Full time members of the pastoral staff shall be eligible for a Renewal Leave after completing a minimum of five years of employment by Gurnee Community Church. After a Renewal Leave has been completed, the pastor shall be eligible for a Renewal Leave again in five to seven years. Leave must be taken as a continuous, uninterrupted block of time. Under certain circumstances, members of the program staff may also be considered eligible for Renewal Leave.
2. Such Leaves are intended for the mutual benefit and growth of both the pastor and the congregation. The timing for the Renewal Leave is a concern and must be compatible with the congregation's present needs and the desires of the pastor. Therefore, the time of the Renewal Leave (and its funding) must ultimately be approved by the Church Council (with formal input from the Board of Trustees) upon the recommendation of the Board of Elders who will be working closely with the pastor.
3. Renewal Leave would not generally be less than six weeks and would not generally be longer than 12 weeks. Tenure of service will be one of the factors (among many) to consider when approving the length of the Renewal Leave.
4. The pastor should begin the request process 12 to 18 months before the intended Renewal Leave and complete the process at least six months before the desired leave's beginning. A formal written proposal, submitted to the Board of Elders, should be developed and include

expectations, focus of the leave and presumed benefits for and impact upon one's work in the ministry. The contents of the proposal should be considered negotiable with the Board of Elders and approved by the Church Council upon the recommendation of the Board of Elders.

5. Financial support of the pastor by the congregation during a Renewal Leave will continue: full compensation package as affirmed in the Pastoral Covenant with the church/elders.
6. During the Renewal Leave year other continuing education time would not generally be provided. Those monies designated in the budget for continuing education may be used for the Renewal Leave as determined by the Board of Elders, with the approval of the Church Council.
7. The Chairperson of the Board of Elders will appoint, and the Church Council approve, a special task force to be known as the Pastoral Renewal Leave Committee that will report to the Board of Elders and via the Elders to the Church Council. This committee's basic responsibilities will be to manage and coordinate congregational work being left behind by the pastor and to assure quality care of the congregation during the pastor's leave. The committee will meet with the pastor prior to the Renewal Leave to develop an understanding of, and plans to accomplish, those tasks. The committee will also plan for departure and return activities. Immediately after the Leave, the committee will bring the pastor up-to-date on the congregation's life and programs. The committee will have at least five members, which will include the Moderator of the Church Council and an Elder of the congregation.
8. The hiring of any individuals to serve as replacement for staff on a Renewal Leave will be arranged for and negotiated by the Board of Elders (in cooperation with the Pastoral Renewal Leave Committee) approved by the Church Council. The congregation values the leadership of an ordained pastor and desires such for temporary employment as needed.
9. In order for the congregation to benefit from the personal and professional renewal of its ministerial leadership after a paid Renewal Leave, the pastor would be typically be encouraged to remain in the employment of the congregation for at least two years following the pastor's return.
10. No two members of the staff would generally be on Renewal Leave within twenty-four months of each other.
11. Evaluations of the Renewal Leave and its impact on the pastor and the congregation are helpful means for planning such future opportunities. Evaluative reports should be submitted to the Church Council by the Board of Elders, the Pastoral Renewal Leave Committee and the pastor within forty-five days after the leave is completed. A separate summary report would also be submitted to the congregation. The reports should include the accomplishments of the leave as well as benefits and disappointments for both the minister and the congregation, as well as any recommendations for the future.
12. Funding for Renewal Leave shall be borne by the Gurnee Community Church through the establishment of a designated fund. It is acknowledged that at the time of adoption of these provisions monies are not currently available for the congregation to fund a Renewal Leave. Consideration should also be given to obtaining funding from outside sources (e.g. Lilly Foundation), from the GCC Endowment Fund or via special fundraising programs.

## **Questions and Answers**

1. Why should congregations want their pastors to experience renewal leave?

*(1 – 6 summarized from the Forward to the text: Clergy Renewal, The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning, Bullock and Bruesehoff)*

- 1. The very nature of being an effective pastor involves continual spiritual growth. Spiritual depth does not happen by accident; it takes hard, intentional work. Basically, it is a lifelong process involving big chunks of time set aside for reading, prayer, solitude, and reflection. Trying to do this while working between 45 and 60 hours each week is nearly impossible.*
- 2. Church ministry today is changing rapidly. Congregations will experience neither numerical growth nor growth in spiritual depth and service when they refuse to move with changing times and develop fresh ways to reach the new and young congregants. Meeting this challenge means that clergy must periodically retreat from the congregation to retool or refocus their ministry approaches.*
- 3. Without such renewal leave, there is a stronger chance that clergy will, over time, demonstrate the characteristics of burnout – exhaustion, cynicism, disillusionment and self-deprecation. Burned out clergy are much more likely to leave parish ministry, or seek another call, in order to get out of a place that is wringing them dry.*
- 4. Another lethal effect of burnout is that it makes a pastor dull, hollow and uninteresting. Such people are not the best vehicle to bring good news to people! Clergy vitality is the greatest asset in building up a congregation.*
- 5. The pastoral role generally involves long, hard hours without weekends off. Pastors are rarely afforded the luxury of having two consecutive days off every week that most laypeople enjoy. A sound family life is often unobtainable.*
- 6. We also should examine the ways in which congregations become overly dependent on their clergy. Clergy renewal leave can help congregations develop self-sufficiency skills that will be invaluable.*

Congregations expect much of their pastors and pastors expect much of themselves. In healthy relationships between congregations and their pastors there should be a sense of mutual care. The pastor cares for the members of the congregation and, in turn, the congregation cares for the pastor. A Pastoral Renewal Leave offers the pastor time for reassessment of his/her ministry which can be difficult while engaged in the day-to-day tasks of ministry. By changing the scene as well as engaging in different activities, pastors can find themselves enriched spiritually, mentally and physically.

Pastors desperately need to recreate and restore what has been worn down by day-to-day encounters with reality. Nourishing one's body, mind and spirit and regaining perspective requires a change of place and pace – a pilgrimage. Jesus provided us with a good example to follow. He actively nourished his whole person, body, mind and spirit – in prayer, in teaching, in travel, in time alone, in rest and in caring for people. Renewal Leave typically includes time for prayer, meditation, reading, writing, resting, reflection, fasting, traveling, visiting new places and engaging in new experiences or new cultures. Jesus' forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in his ministry. David tended sheep and learned valuable lessons about God's care and provision. Paul, struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years and emerged with a new vision. Renewal Leave is a time for the pastor to rest, receive, be nurtured, and reflect on their relationship with God – so that the worker can be renewed, refreshed and revitalized by the breath of God.

2. What benefits could a congregation hope to receive from a period of Pastoral Renewal Leave?

While it might be assumed that the only beneficiary of Renewal Leave would be the pastor it is our belief that such a focus falls short of what God intends for the local church during such a time. Most obvious is the indirect benefit to be received by the members through having a happy, healthy, invigorated, and ‘feeling appreciated’ pastor. These cannot be underestimated! But there can also be direct benefits to the congregation during times of Renewal Leave. When a pastor takes a Renewal Leave the congregation will benefit from the opportunity to reflect on its mission and ministry, experience different gifts of leadership, and perhaps discover their own unique areas of ministry.

3. Why have we selected a ‘five to seven year’ cycle?

The time frame of a Renewal Leave can be approached from a number of perspectives. Typically, Renewal Leave connotes some time off every seven years. But in today’s environment that might be a less than optimal time. The key issue is that a pastor has both incentive for staying longer periods of time, and built-in points of refreshment when they do. Flexibility in our structure is intentional so that the ‘best’ time can be selected rather than the ‘scheduled’ time.

4. How is the church going to finance Renewal Leave?

The congregation has been saving toward Pastoral Renewal Leave since the year after its adoption. Monies are set aside every month into a dedicated account. At this present time the congregation has accumulated enough money to fund Pastor Brian’s proposed Renewal Leave. It should be noted that the pastor on leave continues to receive his/her full salary and benefit package during the period of the leave (which is already included in the annual budget). The additional monies sourced from the dedicated account mentioned above will cover the cost of the leave itself (housing, books, course fees, etc.).

5. Is there any accountability to the Renewal Leave or is it just like a vacation?

A Renewal Leave is not just time off; it is time to renew. Whether the plan calls for reading, research, reflection, retreating or writing, it should be done under some form of accountability. The use of a spiritual director or mentor may well be advised. This would be an individual who would serve as a “reality check” for the person on leave. This should not be a person from the leadership team of the church; very likely another area pastor or one of our Pastor’s current established mentors could serve in this role.

Renewal Leaves should not be so tightly structured that the Spirit has no freedom to lead and reveal. If the goal of a Leave is to renew one’s vision and commitment, then the Spirit may lead us in ways only He knows. A well-structured Leave plan should have a certain amount of available flexibility.

Note that the Elders have recommended that GCC also appoint a Pastoral Renewal Leave Committee (PRLC). This group will work with the pastor to “implement” the leave and incorporate it into the fabric of the church. What tasks need to be delegated, assigned, etc., during the pastor’s absence? The details of the Renewal Leave plan (what would be accomplished by the pastor on leave, etc.) would still rest with the Elders but the Elders are not in a position to work out the operational challenges that

would be assigned to this committee. It is our suggestion that the PRLC would be a committee that reports to the Board of Elders.

6. Would the pastor's family be involved in any way?

Well, that depends on the pastor's family circumstances as much as anything else. But as a rule we need to accept that it's not just the pastor under the pressure cooker - his whole family shares the load. A good Renewal Leave plan may want to allow for some form of family renewal. Joint mission adventures, at least during a part of the pastor's time, can only be a healthy investment. Even family travel as the pastor makes a pilgrimage to a particularly significant place or ministry can make for a family leave investment.

7. Will we ever learn what happened on the Renewal Leave?

While congregational involvement looks to the preparation for a Renewal Leave, feedback speaks of sharing with the church the results of a renewal experience. The church should be helped to see the benefits of the investment they made in their pastor's life. Whether it's new programs or a fresh vision, or simply new vitality in the pulpit, pain should be taken to link results with the sabbatical leave. In that way, the church will continue to be receptive to future Renewal Leave experiences.

8. How does the pastor 'reconnect' with the congregation after the Leave?

A plan must also be in place for the return of the pastor on Renewal Leave and their re-integration into the ministries of the church. The pastor on leave will feel disconnected and out of touch. Both the pastor and the congregation will be in a different place following the Renewal Leave. It may also be helpful to "re-negotiate" roles and expectations as a part of the re-entry process. Welcome home events, forums, etc., would allow both the pastor and the congregation to reconnect.

9. Is Renewal Leave only for ordained staff members?

After considerable discussion it was agreed by the Board of Elders that we should focus our attentions on providing Renewal Leave for our pastors without excluding the possibility of Renewal Leave for our non-ordained program staff. The future is impossible to predict and we want to offer future leaders the opportunity to respond appropriately to the unique needs of our staff and congregation.

10. Where can I go if I still have questions?

Please feel encouraged to contact one of the members of the GCC Board of Elders.

### **Additional Facts and Figures**

Presbyterian Church USA: in 2005 the Presbytery voted that new Calls to Ministry are required to include a provision for Renewal Leave

Disciples of Christ: most regions encourage a three-month Renewal Leave after five years

Evangelical Congregational Churches: “urges all churches consider a Renewal Leave for their pastor after the pastor has served a minimum of seven years at one church”

From the 2008 Survey of the Presbyterian Church USA:

### *Sabbaticals*

*Large majorities report that the most recent sabbatical was “very helpful” or “helpful” for their:*

*o Emotional health (91%)*

*o Spiritual health (89%)*

*o Improvement in their ministerial duties (79%)*

*o Physical health (77%)*

*Of 18 life circumstances, responsibilities, or needs, the second highest ranking item pastors indicated they were concerned about was: Need for their own spiritual renewal (number one was retirement planning).*

Sobering statistics from The Fuller Institute, George Barna Research, and Pastoral Care, Inc.:

- 90% of the pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 80% believe pastoral ministry has **negatively** affected their families. Many pastor's children do not attend church now because of what the church has done to their parents.
- 95% of pastors do not regularly pray with their spouses.
- 33% state that being in the ministry is an **outright hazard** to their family.
- 75% report significant **stress-related** crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 80% of pastors and 84% of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged as role of pastors.
- 90% of pastors said the **ministry was completely different** than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.
- 50% feel unable to meet the **demands** of the job.
- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression.
- 70% say they have a **lower self-image now** than when they first started.
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 40% report serious conflict with a parishioner at least **once a month**.
- 33% confess having involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the **church**.
- 50% of pastors feel so **discouraged** that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- 70% of pastors feel grossly underpaid.
- 50% of the ministers starting out will not last **5 years**.
- 1 out of every **10** ministers will actually retire as a minister in some form.
- 94% of clergy **families feel the pressures** of the pastor's ministry.
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is overworked.
- 80% spouses feel left out and **underappreciated** by church members.
- 80% of pastors' spouses wish their spouse would choose a different profession.
- 66% of church members **expect** a minister and family to live at a higher moral standard than themselves.
- Moral values of a Christian is **no different** than those who consider themselves as non-Christians.

- The average American will tell 23 lies a day.
- The **profession of “Pastor”** is near the bottom of a survey of the most-respected professions, just above **“car salesman”**.
- **4,000** new churches begin each year and **7,000** churches close.
- Over **1,700** pastors left the ministry **every month** last year.
- Over **1,300** pastors were terminated by the local church **each month** , many without cause.
- Over **3,500** people **a day** left the church last year.
- Many denominations report an **“empty pulpit crisis”**. They cannot find ministers willing to fill positions.

**#1 reason pastors leave the ministry** – Church people are not willing to go the same direction and goal of the pastor. Pastor's believe God wants them to go in one direction but the people are not willing to follow or change.