

Paper H5

Sabbaticals

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 General Assembly agrees to ministerial sabbaticals being seven years from the previous sabbatical.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	At present, Ministers on the United Reformed Church payroll may apply for a sabbatical term every ten years since the last one. Ministries Committee suggests now is the time that this should be changed to every seven years from the last sabbatical.
Main points	See above.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	Sabbatical grants will be paid out every seven years.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. The term 'sabbatical' or 'rest' derives originally from the Old Testament and related to the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest and delight in God (Exodus 34:21; Isaiah 58:13-4). In the sabbatical year, every seven years, complete rest was commanded for the land, with no sowing or reaping, and the remission of debts and release of Hebrew slaves (Leviticus 25:4; Deuteronomy 15:1,12). To take a Sabbath is to rest from our productivity so that we can have a closer relationship with God, self, and others.
2. The URC defines a ministerial sabbatical as a period of release from the ordinary duties of the ministry, in addition to normal holidays, for the purpose of pursuing an approved programme of study, research, or experience. It is for vocational development and refreshment.

3. Sabbaticals are opportunities to re-train, refresh and renew the very core from which future ministry may develop and grow. Normally the length of the sabbatical is three months. It is usually taken in a three-month block and special permission is required for any change to this arrangement.
4. Sabbaticals can be extremely beneficial both for the individual minister, and for the health of the wider Church. The care and wellbeing of ministers is crucial to the health of the mission of the church. Healthy, fulfilled, maturing, joyful ministers who feel valued and supported are an enormous gift to God's Church. A sense of being cared for and loved will give energy and vigour when they face ministerial or pastoral challenges.
5. Well-being is more than just 'feeling good'. A positive well-being involves the interplay of physical, emotional, and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation, all contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Taking a sabbatical is just one of a number of ways in which the denomination has sought to support the wellbeing of ministers.
6. At present Ministers on the Roll of the United Reformed Church may apply for a sabbatical term every ten years since the last one. Ministries Committee suggests now is the time that this should changed to every seven years from the last sabbatical. After all, there is biblical precedent for such a suggestion as shown above.
7. The table below shows the number of ministers who will take/have taken a sabbatical by Synod since 2019.

Year	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	Total
2019		1	2	2	0	0	2	0	3			0		10
2020		1	1	0	0	2	3	0	0			1		8
2021			2	2	3	0	0	1	2		6	1		17
2022		2	0	2	1	3	1	1	5		5	1		21
2023	2	3	3	0	1	2	3	2	2		2	3		23
2024	2	3	2	1	2	0	4	1	1		1	0	4	21
2025	2		1	0	2	2	6	3	1	7	1	1		26

Of course, the totals are inaccurate, as some ministers did not take their sabbatical in the allotted year because of Covid-19. Some Synods gave their figures as total numbers since 2019, hence the blank spaces in the table and a large figure in 2024 and 2025.

8. Ministries Committee has consulted with the Treasurer and Chief Finance Officer, the M&M fund would be able to sustain the change to seven years due to the lower number of ministers eligible for a sabbatical in the future.
9. All ministers on the URC Roll of Ministers can apply for a sabbatical, although it is recognised that there are implications for non-stipendiary ministers if in secular employment.
10. It is intended that the sabbatical grant remains up to £1,200 travel, books, equipment etc. Similarly, sabbaticals of less than three months' duration will receive a

proportionately lower grant (eg for a two-month sabbatical, the maximum grant will be £800).

11. In addition to the sabbatical grant, the £700 EM3 grant can also be claimed in that year.
12. Other sources of support for sabbaticals may be available and should be applied for before making an application to the United Reformed Church EM3 Fund, ie the Coward Trust, and for sabbaticals involving travel outside Britain, the United Reformed Church's Mission department administers the Belonging to the World Church Programme.
13. Ministries Committee anticipates that, should this be agreed by General Assembly, there may be a rush of those who have served seven years from their last sabbatical. However, to ensure not too many ministers are away from their pastorates, if ministers (Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) are due a sabbatical, they should contact their Training and Development Officer or equivalent who, in consultation with the Synod Moderator, will give priority to those who are due a sabbatical ten years' from their last one. We believe this staggered approach is fair to all concerned.
14. All other requirements around sabbaticals remain as before the change.
15. It is proposed that the change to the time between sabbaticals begins in January 2026.