

Whitewater Valley Presbytery Family Leave Policy Guidelines

Recommended by the Committee on Ministry

APPROVED by the Committee on Ministry October 28, 2015

The following policy model is presented by the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley as a guide to congregations within the presbytery in forming policies addressing family leave. This model is intended to start a conversation with the goal of contributing to fruitful, meaningful, and lasting ministry.

The covenant relationship between a congregation and its pastor(s) is one that goes beyond the ordinary limits of secular employment. Just as a congregation looks to a pastor for spiritual and emotional support, so should a pastor be able to expect understanding, support, and generosity from his or her congregation in encountering personal responsibilities. The same sort of compassionate relationship should exist between the congregation and all its employees. Therefore, in the spirit of love and service, it is important for a formal policy to outline the circumstances in which a pastor or staff member is eligible for family leave.

It is required that each session within the presbytery will establish a church-appropriate policy for family leave by January 2017. The session's family leave policy (in whatever form) shall be incorporated into the terms of call for pastors or Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE's). We also strongly encourage these guidelines apply to all staff. Limited financial assistance may be available on a shared basis to assist churches in implementing a family leave policy if the church concerned is not able to support specific needs under this policy.

Model Family Leave Policy

All pastors and other staff members, whether salaried or hourly, whether full-time or part-time, who have been employed by the church for at least six months, may request family leave. Because family circumstances differ widely, the church's session and personnel committee should be flexible and creative in meeting the needs of the families involved. All family leave provides full compensation and benefits (if applicable). In all cases, a person taking family leave must be able to return to her or his former position (or a comparable position) without penalty in seniority or compensation. The session may approve family leave for persons who do not meet the normal eligibility requirements.

The need for leave from church duties to care for family members may arise in many different circumstances. The birth or adoption of a child is one such circumstance, but pastors and other staff members also may need time to care for an older child, an aging or disabled parent, or another relative for whom they have responsibility. Family leave may also be needed to mourn a death in the family and deal with circumstances arising from that death.

Total family leave combining the elements below may be taken for a maximum of twelve weeks in any calendar year. As appropriate, it may be taken consecutively or in shorter segments. Family leave is not meant to supplement personal or medical leave, vacation, or professional development leave. In other than emergency situations, family leave timing should be worked out in advance to allow for church planning. Pastoral leave must be approved by the session, and staff leave by the head of staff.

Parental Leave

In recognition and support of the church's commitment to family life and to the importance of early bonding with a child by the parents, pastors and other church employees who welcome a new child through birth or adoption may request parental leave. A parent who provides the primary care for a newborn infant is entitled to up to twelve weeks' family leave. A parent who provides secondary care for a newborn infant is entitled to up to four weeks' family leave. Parents who adopt an older child are entitled to the same leave. When special circumstances make extended leave appropriate, the session may approve such leave; if the need is due to health complications, it should be treated as disability leave.

Family Care Leave

When a pastor or other church employee has a family member who needs her or his assistance for reasons of physical or mental health or disability, the staff member may receive up to fifteen days (prorated for part-time employees) of family care leave per calendar year. Such family members may be spouses, domestic partners, parents, grandchildren, parents of spouses or domestic partners, or others for whom the employee is a primary or secondary caregiver. These days need not be sequential. If additional leave is required by circumstances, it may be negotiated with the session.

Grief Leave

In the case of the death of a family member, up to one week of family leave may be taken. For the death of a family member or other person for whom the employee has primary responsibility, up to four weeks of family leave may be taken.