

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCH FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Church staff members are in a unique position of responsibility for the ministry to which God has called them—to be available to serve the congregation as needs arise. Pastors are gifted and called to shepherd the church and extend God's care and proclaim God's Word in a multitude of situations and needs. The work is demanding and fulfilling, stressful and joyful. Therefore, church staff members need help from the church in placing priority on their families. Churches should make provisions for family and medical leave in ways that communicate care and support.

At minimum, it is recommended that the standard of the United State's Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 be adopted as provisions for all church staff members. This allows the staff member, who has been employed at a church for one year, to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave in a twelve month period for the following purposes:

- The birth of a child
- The foster care placement or adoption of a child
- The care of an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent) with a serious health condition
- When the staff member is unable to work because of a serious health condition

Ideally, six paid weeks are recommended for family leave. (See addendum for implementation.) During medical leaves, any sick, vacation, or personal days that a staff member has accrued should be used to pay the staff member for a corresponding portion of the leave. Remaining portions of the leave should be treated as an unpaid leave of absence.

It is recommended that all benefits that are normally provided while the staff member is working be continued during family and medical leaves.

In addition to the above, it is recommended that churches provide five days paid leave for purposes of attending the funeral of an immediate family member.

For churches where resources permit, consideration should be given to providing additional time for paid leave, particularly in situations involving unusual circumstances. The church should be sensitive, flexible and gracious in extending care and assistance to its entire staff. In cases of disability, every effort should be made to safeguard the well being of the staff members and his or her family, coordinating benefits available through Social Security and existing insurance programs.

These provisions for family and medical leave should be included in the church's call of pastoral staff. In all cases, leave should be taken only after discussion with the church's leadership and appropriate governing bodies, with sufficient notice of intent to allow for the church to make arrangements for supplementing coverage when needed.

ADDENDUM FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Discussion will need to take place to keep in mind both the needs of the staff's family and the church. The document, "Recommendations for Church Family and Medical Leave Policies and Practice," is intended as a recommendation. Realities of church situations may create a need to implement different scenarios. While ideally leave will be the same for the father and the mother during parental leave, the reality of church situations may bring alterations. While considering implementing paternity leave, it is worthy to note that in addition to other denominations, some industries are beginning to move toward providing paternity leave. For example, Pillsbury currently offers four paid weeks paternity leave that is not considered as vacation.

There are creative ways to help make paternity leave feasible for a church. For instance, where pulpit supply is hard to find, the father may take four days off a week and keep up the preaching during that six weeks leave time. Active involvement of the laity in preaching would be another positive possibility. After prayerful consideration, each church will need to decide what will work best to care for their staff's family and the church.

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