

African Methodist Episcopal Church
Second Episcopal District
Spiritual Peace, Restoration and Renewal Leave Policy For Pastors

Introduction to Peace and Restoration Leave:

Pastors bear the burdens and responsibilities of ministry, the needs, the pain, and the hurts of their parishioners 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And as a result, many experiences, to one degree or another, symptoms of emotional collapse, stress-related illnesses, and “burnout” that adversely affect their personal, family, and professional life and greatly diminish their effectiveness and well-being. This situation has been tolerated and even accepted as an inevitable part of the job for too long. A practical solution to this situation that affects pastors and the congregations is what we are identifying as Spiritual Peace, Restoration, and Renewal (Peace and Restoration) Leave.

Peace and Restoration--Definition

Peace and Restoration Leave for pastors is a planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission. A more commonly used term for "Sabbatical" comes from the Hebrew word "Shabbat" (Sabbath), meaning "cease" and "rest". The Second Episcopal District Peace and Restoration Leave is both an act of faith that God will sustain us through a period of reflection and changed activity and an occasion for recovery and renewal of vital energies.



Leave time is awarded to take apart from ordinary duties for the purpose of rest, restoration, and further education. In recent years many churches have begun to grant periodic Leave to pastors. They find that by granting some time away from the 24/7/365 demands of church life, these pastors may fill their spiritual/emotional/ intellectual "bucket" and thus return with renewed energy, creativity, vision and enthusiasm in the ministry.

Granting Leave is an investment in the quality of ministry and the length of time a minister will stay in pastoral ministry. By committing ourselves to support ongoing and serious spiritual reflection, learning, and renewal on the part of its professionals, the church takes steps toward its faithfulness and growth. And indeed, when the pastor returns from Leave refreshed in body and spirit, ready to enter a new stage of ministry, and eager to share what they have learned, the congregation benefits significantly.

Peace and Restoration--Recommendations

The committee recommends that the Second Episcopal District offer paid Peace and Restoration Leave of four (4) weeks to its full-time Ministers with pastoral appointments during this time of the Lilly Endowment Initiative. This Peace and Restoration Leave should be offered to those who have served at least seven (7) consecutive years of pastoral ministry. The successive years do not have to be at the same church. The time spent on Peace and Restoration Leave is qualitatively *different from vacation and not counted against annual vacation leave*. During Leave time, the church will continue to pay the pastor's compensation package, and the grant will pay the supply pastor and all other related Leave expenses up to \$5,000.

The Pastor, church leadership, and staff should discuss a possible Peace and Restoration Leave plan, taking the needs of the pastor and the church into consideration. This discussion of a possible Peace and Restoration Leave plan should begin immediately for any pastor who has over seven (7) consecutive years of pastoral ministry.

Should the Peace and Restoration Leave be approved for the pastor, the following steps should be taken:

1. That the pastor provides a rough draft of their Peace and Restoration Leave plan for feedback, including personal goals, benefits for the pastor and the church, travel, activities, and any anticipated expenses that the church will be required to cover during the Peace and Restoration Leave.
2. The pastor meets with the congregation soon after completing the Peace and Restoration Leave and shares the different experiences imparted during the Leave, along with lessons learned and insights gained, and submits a written summary to SED.
3. That the pastor return after the end of the Peace and Restoration Leave and shares with the congregation all the gain as a result of the Peace and Restoration Leave
4. All approved Peace and Restoration Leave must be completed **by December 31, 2022.**

Peace and Restoration--Rationale

We are concerned about the high rate of burnout among our pastors and wish to address this problem in a practical way. Roy Oswald, a Senior Consultant of the Alban Institute, an ecumenical think-tank for the mainstream church, says that studies now identify the ordained ministry as the #1 burnout profession in the country (+). The primary cause of burnout among pastors is, according to Oswald, "compassion fatigue."

We have also learned from Roy Oswald about the positive effects of long-term pastorates on congregations(++). Along with the Alban Institute, we believe that the granting of periodic Leave will provide the necessary rest, renewal, and refreshment needed to help stem the tide of burnout among our pastors(++). There is Biblical precedent for granting rest every seventh year in Leviticus 25:1-7, the text commanding Hebrew farmers to let their land lie fallow every seventh year, setting up a multi-year rhythm in human life consisting of six years of production followed by one year of rest.

This Biblically-based tradition of granting Rest has been maintained over the academic world. It is a growing practice in the business community and in the church. Many universities and colleges throughout the country continue the long-standing tradition, dating back to when the academic world was part of the church, that grants professors an opportunity every seventh year to become students again and refresh their callings.

Peace and Restoration--Staffing

Many clergy is available to serve a church on a short-term basis during the four-week Peace and Restoration Leave.

Footnotes:

(+) Quoted by the Rev. David Webb of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in the Florida-Bahamas Synod Peace and Restoration leave policy statement, after hearing Roy Oswald speak these words at the September 2000 Alban workshop "Transforming Leadership."

(++) Roy Oswald, "Why You Should Give Your Pastor A Peace and Restoration," (Video), Alban Institute, 2001.

(+++) A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehof, Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide To Peace and Restoration Planning (Alban Institute: 2000), p. 49.