

Presbytery of Chicago Paid Family Medical Leave Policy Approved by Assembly on September 13, 2025

Introduction

In 2024 the Form of Government in the Book of Order was amended to require presbyteries to include a provision for a minimum of twelve weeks paid family medical leave in the terms of call for ministers / teaching elders serving congregations in installed pastoral relationships (see *G-2.0804*).

The Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Chicago recommends the following guidelines for the compassionate care of ministers / teaching elders in installed pastoral relationships, temporary pastoral relationships, and Presbytery staff members, in order to fulfill this requirement. Local congregations and sessions may adopt these guidelines for other church staff.

Leave Provisions

1. A minimum of 12 weeks (regardless of precipitating event or circumstance) of Paid Leave per year, with as much advance notice as possible. Paid Leave may be used, in accordance with need, consecutively or intermittently.
2. During Paid Leave, the minister will continue to receive all benefits in their terms of call / covenant agreement, including dues paid to and benefits provided by the Board of Pensions.
3. Use of vacation time is not required but may be used to extend leave time at the discretion of the pastor.
4. Family Medical Leave may be used for:
 - a. Pregnancy, the birth of a child, and in order to care for that child (see endnote 1).
 - b. The process of adoption or placement of a child for foster care with you and to care for the child.
 - c. To care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition (see endnote 2).
 - d. For a person's own serious health condition causing an inability to perform the functions of the position (see endnote 3).
 - e. For a person's own healing following a loss or tragic event.
5. A serious health condition includes but is not limited to:
 - a. a condition that requires inpatient care at a hospital, hospice, or residential medical care facility, including any period of incapacity or any subsequent treatment in connection with inpatient care;
 - b. a condition that requires continuing care by a licensed health care provider (ex. surgery, physical therapy after surgery); or

- c. illnesses of a serious and long-term nature, either physical or mental, resulting in recurring or lengthy absences or a chronic condition which, if left untreated, would result in a period of incapacity of more than two weeks

Congregation and Presbytery Support

1. While the individual congregation / entity is responsible for the funding and administration of Paid Family Leave, state-provided disability and paid leave benefits and Board of Pensions financial protection programs may be considered in order to help offset income continuation costs.
2. Where possible, communication of mutual needs and planning is vital to minimize disruption for the congregation / entity served by the minister. Ministers are encouraged to anticipate leave with sensitivity around the needs of the church/entity/body, including but not limited to temporary replacement and fulfillment of duties.
3. Paid family medical leave is not intended to be a burden but rather a source of joy as congregations / entities encourage ministers to take time for the good of their families. In the spirit of the connectional church, sessions and the presbytery are encouraged to work together to assist individual congregations in the development of funding paid family medical leave. The Presbytery of Chicago, through the Commission on Ministry (COM), will work to support congregations as their pastors or associate pastors use paid family medical leave.
4. The attached "Suggestions and Resources for Sessions and Congregations" is a helpful document for covering pastoral care and worship leadership when a pastor or associate pastor is on paid family medical leave.

Return to Work following Leave

Following the period of Paid Leave, the minister shall be entitled to return to the same position with the same title, terms of call, hours worked, and job description. If the reason for the use of Paid Family and Medical Leave keeps a minister from assuming their previous position, reasonable accommodation shall be made subject to renegotiation with the Session, Congregation, and the Commission on Ministry.

(endnotes to first section)

¹ *Leave for birth, adoption or foster care of a child must be taken within one (1) year of the birth or placement of the child.*

² *Immediate family usually refers to a spouse or partner, children (including biological, adopted, foster, stepchildren, and in-laws, as well as legal wards), parents (including stepparents and in-laws), siblings (including stepsiblings,*

half siblings, and in-laws), grandparents, and grandchildren. This list is intended to be descriptive, not exhaustive. The Presbytery recognizes that there are many nontraditional relationships that are as important as biological family to the individuals involved. "Immediate family" should be understood in an expansive way to apply to any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is equivalent to the relationships specifically listed above.

³You may be requested to provide a representative from the Committee on Ministry with confirmation from a medical provider explaining the need for leave and length of leave. This information need only be confirmation; any further information shall be only shared at the discretion of the minister.

Suggestions and Resources for Sessions and Congregations For Pastoral Care and Worship Leadership when a pastor or associate pastor is on Paid Family Medical Leave

The following suggestions, slightly edited, were created by the Advocacy Committee for Women and Gender Justice of the General Assembly (PCUSA), to assist congregations in covering pastoral care and worship leadership while a pastor or associate pastor is on Paid Family Medical Leave.

Pastoral Care

1. Congregation members, including Ruling Elders and Deacons, bear witness to God's love and grace as they engage responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church (*G-1.0304*). This involvement includes lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support. When a minister in a congregation is on leave, members have the opportunity to provide pastoral care for one another.
2. Deacons in a congregation are called to exercise a ministry of compassion, witness, and service as they care for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, and the friendless (*G-2.0201*). In congregations which do not have Deacons in active service, the task of the Deacons are incumbent on the Ruling Elders of the congregation. When a minister in a congregation is on leave, Deacons and Ruling Elders have the opportunity to provide such care to others.

Worship Leadership

Week 1 - A ruling elder proclaims the Word. We encourage presbyteries to provide training to their ruling elders to be able to proclaim the Word. Ruling elders are the spiritual leaders of the congregation, and we encourage them to step up during this time.

Week 2 - Invite a community partner to come in and share the mission of their organization.

Week 3 — Music Sunday. Select a scripture and have music that reflects that scripture.

Week 4 - Youth Sunday.

Week 5 — Invite a mission co-worker to share their work. This takes advance planning, and it can happen in person or online. This could involve paying an honorarium.

Week 6 — A ruling elder proclaims the Word.

Week 7 — A Retiree Group or a Bible Study Group leads Sunday worship.

Week 8 — Do you have a retired minister or retired educator in your congregation? Ask them for one Sunday as a gift to the church.

Week 9 — A Sunday School Class or local mission group leads Sunday worship.

Week 10 — Invite another community partner to come in and share the mission of their organization.

Week 11 — Is there someone in your congregation who has a story of faith to share? Or several people? Give them a prompt to help shape their comments.

Week 12 — You made it! Celebrate with a hymn sing and prepare to welcome your pastor back.

The Presbyterian Outlook [publishes liturgy for each Sunday of the year](#). Be sure to credit Presbyterian Outlook.

Holy Humor Sunday is also called Bright Sunday. Learn more [here](#). [You can celebrate it any Sunday](#).

Other suggestions include:

- Invite a candidate under care of your presbytery to fill the pulpit one Sunday. Your presbytery can help you with this.
- Is there a PC(USA) seminary or one of our full-communion partners less than an hour away? They often have students who are approved to fill the pulpit. Reach out.
- Is there someone within your presbytery who serves on a PC(USA) national committee? Invite them to share stories of their work.

- We suggested the retired educator, but an educator from another congregation may be willing to come share a message or new ideas around Christian formation.

Worship doesn't have to happen just in the sanctuary. Worship around the tables in the social hall, with food and hands-on activities as prayers are prayed, scriptures are shared, and hymns are sung. The Word is proclaimed via your hands-on activities.

We encourage the presbytery's committee on ministry to assist congregations in planning for the 12 weeks.

We encourage sessions to be proactive in preparing for these 12 weeks by setting aside the current honorarium for a pulpit supply into a separate line item in their budget monthly. We acknowledge that some presbyteries require congregations to set aside for sabbatical leave. But with creative worship ideas, congregations are not covering the cost of pulpit supply for the whole 12 weeks. They thus can set aside half of the rate monthly instead of the whole amount.

We encourage sessions to be creative if they feel they can't include the funds into their budget to pay for an honorarium. We also encourage sessions to reach out to their presbytery. Does the presbytery have funds that could help offset the expense of honoraria?

Don't forget your synod. Do they have funds that could help you? Or, since we are a connectional church, maybe the synod has resources that can help you.