



CHURCH LEADERSHIP ENRICHMENT: An Important Commitment for Leaders and Congregations **Leadership Council – Policy 982**

I. Introduction

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada is committed to providing learning and growth opportunities for those engaged in leadership roles in the church and encourages pastoral leaders and congregations to embrace the biblical understanding of Sabbath. The Sabbath call for rest and renewal invites us to make a commitment to personal growth and well being, and to deepen our knowledge of God and our world. The following policy focuses on professional development and sabbaticals for pastors. Many of the principles outlined below are also applicable to lay leaders in the congregation.

II. The Concern

It is recognized that the demands of leadership in people-related ministries are such that regular refreshment, renewal and input opportunities are needed in order to grow personally and to remain effective in one's work. Pastors also require time for reflection and evaluation of their work as well as to assess vocational direction. Occasions may arise when pressures are such that a person needs a break in order to gain a new perspective. At times leaders are called to do tasks for which they need additional training. These and other reasons call attention to the fact that we must consciously structure a variety of opportunities for enrichment for church workers. It should also be noted that MCEC does not consider Professional Development or other enrichment opportunities as holiday time since the pastor is still engaged in professional activities. In summary, learning or growth experiences might emerge for the following reasons:

1. To provide opportunity for spiritual, physical and emotional renewal
2. To devote time to general enrichment, study, upgrading or course work
3. To allow for specific retraining and/or specialization
4. To engage in a cross-cultural experience/study tour or a volunteer assignment
5. To set aside some time for vocational re-evaluation and possible redirection
6. To provide training for a task for which one is inadequately prepared
7. To allow for a total break from pastoral ministry (This might include work in another job on a leave-of-absence basis.)

III. Leadership Enrichment Opportunities

1. Professional Development (Continuing Education) is normally an integral part of the pastor's ongoing work assignment. Specific arrangements will vary depending on the needs of the congregation and pastor. It might include a range of options such as enrolling in a semester course at a university or theological school, taking a course one day a week for a number of months, enrolling in a short program for one or more weeks, or attending School for Ministers.

The area of study should reflect a careful evaluation of the leader's needs and interests. Decisions are best made with the participation of a congregational group to which the pastor or leader is accountable. Pastors are encouraged to be involved in some form of significant ongoing educational experience at least once every two years. The congregation is encouraged to release the pastor from enough duties so as to make

good use of the training experience. In many congregations, the pastor's Professional Development budget can be accumulated for up to three years. Professional Development is funded through an annual allotment agreed to in the pastor's Memo of Understanding. [For details see Pastor's Salary Guidelines available from Mennonite Church Canada.]

2. Leave of Absence is defined as being released from one's regular assignment for a period of at least two or more months. The leave could be classified in a number of ways.
 - a) Study Enrichment Leave. The pastor may feel the need for a period of training to finish a formal degree program, to retool, to specialize, to be spiritually and emotionally refreshed, or to evaluate vocational direction. Enrichment Leaves of this nature (also known as sabbaticals) might include study tours, self-directed study, short-term courses, seminars or other types of enrichment.

Often a pastor will request a leave-of-absence from a ministry assignment with the intention of returning after the study leave is completed. On the other hand, a Study Enrichment Leave might also occur between assignments and be an occasion to refreshment prior to a new assignment. Expectations about the pastor's return to the ministry assignment need to be processed carefully to avoid misunderstandings.

Study leaves should be encouraged for persons to do intensive work in relation to clearly defined needs. The person should take the initiative to plan an appropriate program inline with identifiable goals growing out of the needs. This should be done in consultation with congregational leadership and the MCEC Leadership Council. The study leave need not include a formal training program but should have the usual educational components of input or experience as well as a time for reflection and evaluation. Extended enrichment leaves may be eligible for grant assistance through MCEC's Leadership Enrichment Fund. [See *Leadership Enrichment Grant Policy for Ordained and Licensed Pastoral Leaders in MCEC*". Available on the MCEC website.]

- b) Special Assignment. Increasingly the church is becoming aware of the value of sharing person resources with the larger church. Pastors and congregations are encouraged to arrange leaves-of-absence for pastors who have particular gifts to share with Mennonite program boards (e.g. education, mission, with mission churches in isolated areas) or for special MCEC assignments. The congregation may wish to continue payment of salary with the agency carrying the expenses incurred. Special Assignments are not normally funded by MCEC enrichment grants.
 - c) Service Break. A pastor may request a leave-of-absence in order to be involved in a totally different job. The change may be needed for many reasons – rest, a new experience, change of pace, reflection, etc. With appropriate planning this could be a creative experience and allow for a greater variation in one's pastoral experience. During a Service Break, it is anticipated that financial needs are met by the new employer. MCEC enrichment grants are normally not available to fund a Service Break.
3. In-Service Training is a concept of on-the-job learning for persons who are called to do a task for which they are not adequately prepared. On occasion a person may be called from within the congregation to assist the pastor in ministry (e.g. elders). These persons

may need a program of in-service training to prepare them to do the job. Additionally, congregations call persons to minister in areas where more training may be needed (e.g. music, drama, teaching). The congregation should plan together with these persons, so that the individual can enrol in courses geared to the various needs of the congregation. At times the congregation may plan for special training sessions within the congregation (e.g. hospital visitation). The cost for these programs should be carried by the congregation.

IV. Congregational Benefits

It is a general principle that when the pastor is learning and growing this will be reflected in the life of the church. The pastor will function more effectively and will give the overflow rather than using up reserves. The pastor will ideally model a pattern for learning and growing. The congregation will also have an investment in the process and will feel part of the learning and growing process.

In cases where the pastor is granted a leave-of-absence, the congregation will discover new resources to carry on during the pastor's absence. New enthusiasm and interest may well emerge, providing new models to act out the "priesthood of believers" concept.

Often it is not necessary to secure an interim pastor. The congregation is encouraged to use lay persons from within the congregation, persons from institutions such as Conrad Grebel University College, students in training for ministry, lay persons from other churches, as well as relying on retired or neighbouring ministers to meet special needs.

A leave-of-absence may not cost a congregation extra money but can result in many unforeseen returns. It should be noted, however, that change will occur in both the pastor and the congregation. Depending on the length of Enrichment Leave, re-entry may well be an issue for the returning pastor as well as the congregation. It is important to be aware of this dynamic.

V. Family Considerations

Family concerns are extremely important in planning for leaves-of-absence particularly when it entails a move. Consideration should be given to the educational, social and spiritual factors entailed in moving children.

Whenever possible every effort should be made to have the spouse also benefit from the leave. This may mean financial assistance for formal study or planning for some involvement in other forms of renewal-growth programs. The intention is that the experience is an enriching one for the entire family

VI. Financial Planning for Church Leadership Enrichment

It is vitally important that congregations plan for the various enrichment opportunities that are available. The pastor's Memo of Understanding should include commitments from both the pastor and congregation for Professional Development (continuing Education) as well as extended enrichment leaves.

Extended enrichment leaves should be financially supported by the congregation. MCEC may assist with this support through its Leadership Enrichment Fund. MCEC's Leadership Council administers this fund and will only consider applications for financial assistance once the applicant has completed six years of service in Mennonite Church Eastern

Canada. Furthermore, a person is only eligible to receive a grant from this Fund once every six years. [See "*Leadership Enrichment grant Policy for Ordained and Licensed Pastoral Leaders in MCEC*". Available on the MCEC website.]

It is the present policy of some congregations to make a provision in the pastor's Memo of Understanding that allows for sabbatical/enrichment leaves that are not dependent on MCEC's funds. For instance, a pastor might be allowed one month of enrichment leave for every year of service. Leaves of this nature, especially when they are only of several months duration, are often financed entirely by the congregation at full or partial salary.