

What's On Your Mind?

Holidays for ministers – Part 1

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

When a congregation calls a minister, the congregation makes a number of promises to that minister. For example, if you read the 2011 version of Appendix A-29 in the *Book of Forms*, you will see that the congregation promises to offer “all due respect, encouragement, and allegiance in the Lord” and to provide a stipend that meets or exceeds the minimum set by the General Assembly along with suitable housing or a housing allowance.

Other promises follow. One of them is “to provide five weeks holiday annually.”

This article addresses three questions about minister holidays.

How soon after being called to a congregation is a minister entitled to take vacation?

There is no probationary period that a minister must complete before being eligible for holidays. In other words, a minister could be called to a pastoral charge, arrive on September 1, and immediately take up to five weeks of holiday. I don't know any ministers who have done this, but there could be circumstances that lead to this decision. It is certainly a legal option.

In a similar vein, to some it seems excessively generous that a brand new minister should receive five holiday weeks in the very first year of employment. The rationale behind this agreement is that, whether you are in your first or fortieth year in ministry, a minister needs

adequate time away from the responsibilities of the parish to rejuvenate body, mind and spirit.

May a minister carry holidays over from one year to the next?

There is no ironclad “use it or lose it” rule. Guidance is offered, however, in the promise of five weeks *annually*. The word “annually” implies that the five weeks are intended to be granted and used within a 12 month period.

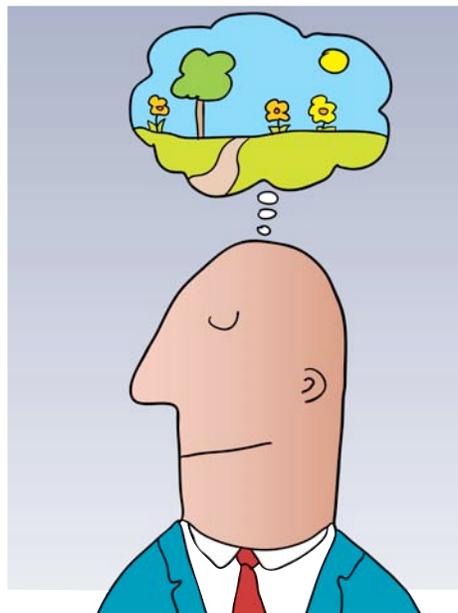
In my view, this is one of those situations in which grace may abound. For example, if for some reason the minister was not able to use all five weeks in one year, it might be reasonable to carry some holiday time over to the next. It may not, however, be reasonable to carry over all five weeks. These are matters that should be addressed fairly and sensibly by minister and session.

Does a minister need the permission of the session to take holidays?

The minister does not need the permission of the session to take holidays. This benefit is assured by the congregation and supported by the General Assembly. It may be pastorally wise, though, for the minister to discuss holiday plans with the session so all are informed and thoughts about holiday timing can be voiced.

Blessings,

Don Muir



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Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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