

**Parental and Family Leave Recommendations  
for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors  
PALO DURO PRESBYTERY**

These recommendations are provided to help churches develop and implement policies for Parental Leave and Family Leave for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastors (hereafter referred to as MWS and CP). These recommendations are meant to open conversations among sessions, human resources committees, and professional staff members to discern appropriate policies. This may also be a steppingstone for policies for an entire church staff. This is not a mandatory policy but a set of guidelines for good pastoral care of our pastoral leaders. Many churches may not afford full-time ministers or Board of Pension dues and so these guidelines are not policy, but they help recruit and retain quality employees and ministers for our churches. These guidelines aim to address Parental and Family Leave which now incorporates issues once solely called maternal leave to be inclusive of the other parent; it now incorporates and respects the time to address adoption, miscarriage, stillbirth, and fertility care.

**THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING**

God created us to be in relationship with one another, to care for one another, and to participate in families. “Children are indeed a heritage from the Lord.” (Psalm 127:3) and

“Reconciled to God...parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality.” (The Confession of 1967, 9.47) and

“We respond to God’s grace in the context of personal relationships...Congregations are encouraged to nurture and equip households and families...” (W-5.0104).

We are required to honor our parents and to care for our children. As congregational leaders, we are to encourage healthy families and healthy priorities. Parental leave gives the mother or father a chance to establish a healthy connection with her or his child and model good family life for the congregation.

As part of the minimum compensation recommendations of Palo Duro Presbytery, every call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament (MWS) or Commissioned Pastor (CP) may consider following Parental and Family Leave provisions as a minimum.

**PURPOSE**

- A. To provide sessions and other employing agencies a guide for minimum standards for an MWS and CP parental and family leave guidelines to be included in all call packages. It is anticipated that individual churches and employers will not feel limited by these guidelines and will respond to the need for family leave responsibly and generously.

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- B. To ensure that MWS or CP receive fair and equitable leave when required. It is anticipated that an MWS or CP will use this policy only when needed and will not abuse the generosity of the church.
- C. Maternity Leave is when a female professional staff member gives birth to a child; at the discretion of the staff member, maternity leave may begin before one's due date, in consideration of the health of mother and child.
- D. Paternity Leave is when a male professional staff member's spouse gives birth to a child or he is involved in the pre- or post- care of a mate having a prenatal, a birthing or a postnatal critical event.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTAL LEAVE**

- A. **MATERNITY LEAVE.** It is recommended that at least twelve weeks leave with full pay and benefits, excluding travel expenses or allowances, be included in the terms of each call.
- B. **PATERNITY LEAVE.** It is recommended that at least twelve weeks of paternity leave with full pay and benefits, excluding travel expenses or allowances, be included in the terms of each call. This leave does not require the MWS or CP to exhaust other types of paid leave, including vacation, and continuing education time.
- C. Other arrangements may be negotiated by the MWS or CP and session/council to extend the leave beyond the initial period. Upon completion of the leave, the MWS or CP will be entitled to return to his/her position. The position will not be filled during the leave except on a temporary basis.
- D. **ADOPTION LEAVE.** Recognizing that the adoption of a child requires as much of a transition as the birth of a child, it is recommended that a MWS or CP who is adopting be granted leave commensurate with maternity or paternity leave. If additional leave is necessary, the Session or employing agency will be consulted and it will be arranged under the terms of the Family Leave policy.
- E. An MWS or CP desiring parental leave will submit a written request to her or his session, ordinarily thirty days prior to the start of the leave.
- F. **MISCARRIAGE.** In the event of a miscarriage or stillbirth, the MWS or CP will be granted the same parental leave she/he would have received had the pregnancy been carried to term with no complications.
- G. The MWS or CP should be relieved of all ministry responsibilities for the duration of the parental leave. The session is responsible for the ongoing work of the congregation during this time. Session should be ready to arrange and pay for pulpit supply, a session moderator, coverage for hospital and emergency visitation and continuation of teaching and programming for which the pastor was responsible.
- H. Vacation time may be added to Maternity or Paternity Leave time with full pay and benefits. Requests for additional Parental Leave time due to the individual circumstances of each birth or adoption may be negotiated with the session and with the assistance of the Commission on Ministry. This leave does not require the MWS or CP to exhaust other types of paid leave, including vacation and continuing education time.
- I. **FERTILITY.** Personal time off is allowed and respected for medical visits including those which may be out of town for all the issues imagined above but also to include

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fertility or infertility medical conversations and treatments apart from other time off. This time can be measured in hours, days or weeks based on confidential conversation with the session.

- J. **In General.** The COM should be informed when a Parental or Family Leave option is exercised by an MWS or CP so that the COM may be of assistance in securing appropriate pulpit supply, pastoral care, and administrative assistance during the MWS or CP absence. Additionally, the COM and executive presbyter may be helpful, if needed, in advising the session on how they may continue the mission of the congregation while the MWS or CP is absent.

Congregations are encouraged to respect the boundaries and privacy of a Minister or a Commissioned Pastor while he or she is away on Parental or Family Leave.

(Approved 02/2024; Revised 11/2024, 09/2025)