

## R14-1

RESOLVED, that the Bishop Diocesan appoint an ad hoc committee of Council, drawn from the Commission on Ministry, the Finance Committee, and others to study the present "bishop-sponsored Diocesan Sabbatical Program;" and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Committee report to the 109th Annual Council in 2015 its findings and any appropriate proposed legislation.

### EXPLANATION

The Diocese says that it has a "bishop-sponsored Clergy Sabbatical Program [which] seeks to ensure that all clergy in the Diocese of Atlanta have an opportunity for a time of Sabbath, for a renewal of spirit and a reaffirmation of life with God." It affirms that a "sabbatical and the preparation for it is a time of intentional, focused reflection and renewal for the clergy person and, hopefully, also for the congregation (parish, mission, chaplaincy, or other faith community)." Yet, this Program and its principles have no discernable implementation mechanism, saying only that the "actual shape of the sabbatical time is determined by the specific vocational, personal needs and desires of the clergy person and his or her family. How a congregation uses this time is also determined by a congregation's particular situation and desires."

The reality is that large, wealthy parishes expect their clergy to go on sabbatical and are able to afford the same while smaller parishes are either unable to afford them or unconditioned to expecting them. This proposed Resolution seeks to address this matter by seeking the formation of a committee. The committee would study ways of addressing awareness issues (amongst both parishes and priests) and finance issues and how to resolve them. If the Church believes that clergy wellness is something to take seriously, then the matter of clergy sabbaticals must be included in that conversation.

This past June 28<sup>th</sup>, blogging from his sabbatical in San Miguel, Mexico, the Reverend Mac Thigpen, Rector of St. Bartholomew's, Atlanta, wrote "two months time here has been restorative, productive, challenging, prayerful." That is precisely the point of the Clergy Sabbatical Program, yet this experience of restoration and enrichment is not only for the clergyperson. From the Lilly-supported initiative *Insights into Religion*, "sabbaticals typically enrich ministry in very tangible ways, but unexpected ways. And

most of the time, the minister's congregation finds the sabbatical to be a blessing, too, despite sometimes resisting the idea at first. A 2008 survey of sabbatical recipients and their churches helped to gauge those feelings. Congregations overwhelmingly reported that their ministers came back with a renewed vigor and commitment."

How striking, then, are the statistics we see from, for example, the article by Kristin Stewart entitled "Keeping Your Pastor" in the *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* 13(3) (found at [http://www.oak.edu/~oakedu/assets/ck/files/Stewart+\(SU+09\).pdf](http://www.oak.edu/~oakedu/assets/ck/files/Stewart+(SU+09).pdf)). Two interesting quotes from the article are:

- A Duke University study found that eighty-five percent of seminary graduates entering the ministry leave within five years and 90% of all pastors will not stay to retirement (Kanipe, 2007, n.p.).
- This study also found that the North Georgia clergy attrition rate ran as high as 90% for those having served 20 years or more. These ministers apparently left to preserve what was left of their families, their sanity, their health and their faith (Kanipe).

Here in the Diocese of Atlanta, we have priests such as the Reverend Canon John Bolton who have been, in some cases, canonically resident in here for two decades, more or less, and yet have never had a sabbatical because they have either never been in any one parish long enough or because they have consistently served parishes which were too impoverished to afford a clergy sabbatical. This is wrong. The Committee will grapple with the question of whether sabbaticals are incentive programs for longer service in any one particular parish, or, rather, are they wellness programs for clergy and for the parishes they serve.

After study and consideration, the Committee would return to Council in one year's time with proposed legislation, if any, to address the issue.

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