

In this month's REMC E-Topic, I offer some recent research in the area of sabbatical grants, conducted by Sheldon Sorge of the Louisville Institute.

The program evaluation study included 225 congregations where the pastor of the congregation had received a sabbatical grant in the last five years. The following are some findings from both the pastoral and congregational perspectives of those congregations.

Overwhelmingly, the pastors reported that the greatest gift of the sabbatical was the "gift of time." Pastors who reported the greatest levels of satisfaction from the sabbatical reported appropriate mixes of rest and task engagement. By far, the most common regret was trying to do too much on the sabbatical. Pastors who took 3 month sabbaticals gained the most from the sabbatical. In fact, pastors who took only 1-2 month sabbaticals reported such dramatically lower satisfaction levels from shorter sabbaticals that the Louisville Institute now rarely funds sabbaticals of less than 3 months.

Below are some additional findings...

- 90% of the pastors say that the congregation was very supportive of their sabbatical, whereas 97% of the congregational leaders say that the congregation was very supportive of their sabbatical.
- 80% of the pastors report being "greatly energized" by the sabbatical whereas 94% of the congregational leaders report their pastors as being "greatly energized" by the sabbatical.
- 92% of both pastors and congregants reported that the sabbatical helped the pastor "reframe" their view of the world.
- 61% of the pastors say that the sabbatical made them a better preacher while 71% of the congregants reported that their pastor preached better following the sabbatical.
- 76% of the pastors say that the sabbatical "enhanced their ability to build quality relationships" while only 60% of the congregants reported the same.
- 79% of the both pastors and congregants said that the sabbatical resulted in a "greater joy for ministry" following the sabbatical.
- 83% of the pastors say that the sabbatical improved their spiritual life.
- 74% of the congregational leaders reported that the ministry of the laity was strengthened during the sabbatical period.

- 67% of the sabbatical recipients were in the same congregation following the sabbatical.