

# Great Plains Conference Parental Leave Policy

## Statement of Purpose

The United Methodist Church proclaims, “Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received”<sup>1</sup> and “Nurture and support are fundamental to the proper functioning of families.”<sup>2</sup> We seek to love one another and enable all members of the body of Christ to grow and flourish.

The Great Plains Conference supports families and advocates for parental leave for all persons welcoming a child into their home, both clergy and lay. Further, we encourage all parents who are welcoming a child into their home to make full use of parental leave policies.

The World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization advocate for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave,<sup>3</sup> and The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* allows for up to 13 weeks of “maternity or paternity leave” for clergy families.<sup>4</sup>

The Great Plains Conference has developed this policy in order to assist clergy families, local churches, District Superintendents, and the Annual Conference in caring for family and advocating for parental leave in the church and beyond the church.

This policy applies to all clergy, regardless of their part-time or full-time status. In this policy, “clergy” means any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who is appointed to a local congregation or annual conference-funded extension ministry, including but not limited to conference and district positions, and conference staff. Clergy appointed to non-conference-funded extension ministries are encouraged to adopt (change to adopt) similar policies for their settings. [In this policy, the term ‘clergy’ shall not be interpreted or understood to exclude laity serving a local church or annual conference-funded ministry setting under episcopal and/or superintendent assignment, including, but not limited to, Certified Lay Ministers, Lay Missioners, Home Missioners and Deaconesses, and/or supply preachers.]

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2020/2024 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, 162.A.

<sup>2</sup> The 2020/2024 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, 162 A

<sup>3</sup> Maternity Protection, Compliance with International Labor Standards.

<https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>

<sup>4</sup> The 2020/2024 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, 356. Printed in full in the next section.

This policy goes into effect on January 1, 2026. The Great Plains Cabinet will review and update this Parental Leave policy at least quadrennially.

### **Book of Discipline Foundations**

*(Information below is what is contained in the 2020/2024 Book of Discipline)*

**356. Maternity or Paternity Leave**—Maternity or paternity leave, not to exceed one-fourth of a year, will be available and shall be granted by the bishop and the cabinet, and the executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry to any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who so requests it at the birth or arrival of a child into the home for purposes of adoption.

1. Persons desiring maternity or paternity leave should file their request with the committee on pastor-parish relations after consulting with the district superintendent at least ninety days prior to its beginning to allow adequate pastoral care for the churches involved to be developed.
2. During the leave, the clergy member's annual conference relations will remain unchanged, and the health and welfare benefit plans will remain in force.
3. A maternity or paternity leave of up to one-quarter of a year will be considered as an uninterrupted appointment for pension purposes.
4. Compensation will be maintained for no less than the first eight weeks of leave.
5. During the leave time, pastoral responsibility for the church or churches involved will be handled through consultation with the committee on pastor-parish relations of the local church(es) and the district superintendent.
6. Special arrangements shall be made for district superintendents, bishops, and those under special appointment.

### **Policy for Births and Adoptions**

1. All clergy in the Great Plains Conference who are expecting the birth, placement, or adoption of a child are eligible for Parental Leave (see *The 2020/2024 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 355). Parental leave is guaranteed to all clergy who request it within the guidelines of this policy.
2. Families giving birth are encouraged to communicate with their district superintendent as soon as they are public about their pregnancy. Adoptive parents are encouraged to communicate with their district superintendent as soon as they are approved for adoption/foster parenting, with follow-up upon the placement of the child.

3. Parental leave should be requested at least 90 days in advance of the anticipated beginning of the leave, in accordance with the *2020/2024 Book of Discipline*. Clergy should send notification in writing to the District Superintendent, Episcopal Office, and the Board of Ministry Conference Relations Registrar.
4. Parental leave shall be encouraged and permitted for up to 13 weeks with full compensation and will not affect the clergy person's pension, health benefits, and appointment status.
5. Churches will maintain their regular compensation for clergy on leave for the duration of the leave.
6. Coverage for Pastoral Responsibilities for the church or churches involved (which might include, but is not limited to: : worship /pulpit supply, pastoral care for emergencies, funerals or other unexpected crises) will be arranged before leave begins by the clergy person through consultation with the district superintendent and the committee on pastor-parish relations of the local church(es).
7. The Annual Conference will assist local churches with additional funding for pastoral coverage, in consultation with the clergy person and the SPRC, up to \$4,000 per leave.<sup>5</sup>
8. These funds will be approved by the Cabinet as a reimbursable expense to the local church. After the first 30 days, local churches will submit reimbursement statements for parental leave coverage to the District Office up to \$4,000 over the 13 weeks of leave. Parental leave may be taken consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part-time, according to the needs of the family. All parental leave must be taken within 9 months of the placement or birth of the child.
9. Parental leave is not vacation. The use of parental leave does not affect the clergy person's use of their annual vacation granted in the Annual Conference Rules.
10. Churches will make reasonable accommodations for breastfeeding and pumping parents, as well as for the feeding of infants. This can include private space, access to an outlet, and time/space to feed according to the infant's needs.
11. Churches and other ministry settings will also examine their personnel policies for lay staff and are encouraged to ensure adequate and equal parental leave for all.
12. Clergy in the Annual Conference will support and promote parental leave, including by providing pastoral care coverage if asked and needed, in accordance with their schedule.
13. The Annual Conference will support clergy on parental leave by excusing or making alternate arrangements for their district and conference duties. This includes the annual conference session, charge conference, district and conference committees, and residency requirements.

---

<sup>5</sup> Funding will come from a special line item in the Cabinet Budget. \$4,000/ leave was calculated based on averages for pulpit supply and pastoral care coverage. Total budget of \$20,000 was set based on historical research through Cabinet minutes where annual parental leaves range from 3-5 each year.

14. The Cabinet will remain in conversation with clergy about potential appointment changes, without making assumptions about the desires of future parents. These conversations should affirm the professional dignity and sacred worth of clergy parents and families.
15. In the event of a pregnancy loss or infancy loss, District Superintendents will help interpret and support the need for space and time for grieving for clergy families. District Superintendents will be in consultation with clergy and the SPRC to arrange this time, recommended for a minimum of two weeks, and it will not affect a clergy person's annual vacation.
16. Beyond the church, the Annual Conference will advocate for paid Parental Leave in all aspects of society.

### **Policy for Foster/Resource Families and Kinship Care Placements**

The Great Plains recognizes the significant need for foster/resource families and kinship care. The intended temporary nature, often short notice, and variable government financial support of foster/resource families and kinship care present different support needs.

1. Clergy who serve as foster/resource parents should be in communication with their SPRC and district superintendent at the time of appointment or during the licensing process. Clergy considering or notified of possible kinship placement should communicate immediately with their SPRC and District Superintendent. Within thirty days, clergy should send notification in writing to the District Superintendent, Episcopal Office, and the Board of Ministry Conference Relations Registrar.
2. Should a clergy family welcome a child into their home through foster/kinship care, a specific plan will be worked out among the District Superintendent, SPRC, and the clergy family, with the goal of caring for the family. This plan is encouraged to be made as early as possible.
  - a. Foster/resource parents and kinship caregivers generally anticipate taking off work for some days at the beginning of the placement, to arrange for daycare and/or school enrollment, potential medical or caseworker appointments, potential first family visitation, and to begin to establish a relationship of mutual trust with the child(ren).
  - b. Foster/resource parents and kinship caregivers may also need a few days at the end of a placement as well, to care for both the logistics and grief of transition. These transitions may be unexpected.

3. Up to four weeks of paid parental leave may be given each calendar year to clergy beginning or ending foster/resource/kinship placements. This may be taken consecutively or nonconsecutively, full or part-time, according to the needs of the family.
4. The Annual Conference will assist local churches with additional funding for pastoral coverage and compensation, in consultation with the clergy person and the SPRC, up to \$1,200 per year. These funds will be approved by the Cabinet and fall under the parental leave support fund.
5. The Annual Conference will advocate in Kansas and Nebraska for all children and families, especially those in foster/kinship care.