

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

FOR UNITED SYNAGOGUE RABBIS AND SYNAGOGUE COUNCILS July 2025



Sabbaticals are a very valuable offering from the United Synagogue for most communal Rabbis and their communities. Through a Sabbatical, Rabbis can deepen both their professional and personal growth and return to their communities with renewed energy. Sabbaticals are paid leave with salary and any other associated costs borne by the Community. Currently neither Rebbetzins nor Assistant/Associate/Youth Rabbis are eligible to apply for a Sabbatical period.

Sabbaticals are a contractual right for Senior Rabbis every seven years. Timings can be altered but cannot be significantly delayed without very good reason.

Key to the success of a Rabbinic Sabbatical is planning, collaboration and communication. Rabbis should be the ones shaping the content and setup of their Sabbaticals, but working together with the Executive (Chair, Vice Chair FR, Wardens, and Women's Officers) will help make sure everyone benefits. A well-thought-out plan means the Rabbi comes back feeling refreshed - physically and mentally - while the Community has a chance to build confidence and find new energy in their Rabbi's absence.

This advisory document is a guide for communities and Rabbis of all areas that should be considered and addressed throughout the Sabbatical process from initial preparations to the Rabbi's return. It provides a framework for planning, executing, and evaluating Sabbaticals, ensuring benefits for both Rabbis and their communities. For best results, we strongly recommend that the advice in this document be followed in its entirety.

INITIAL CONVERSATION BETWEEN CHAIR AND RABBI

- It is recommended that initial conversations take place at least 6 months prior to the proposed sabbatical dates, but ideally 9-12 months in advance.
- The Chair and Rabbi should discuss and find mutually agreeable dates for the Sabbatical.
- The Rabbi should prepare motivation for what he will be doing during the Sabbatical and present it to the Chair. These Sabbatical activities should ultimately contribute to the Rabbi's professional advancement, as well as being for the benefit of the Community.
- Agree who will provide halachic support in the Rabbi's absence.
- Agree the role of the Rebbetzin during the Rabbi's Sabbatical period (including entertaining).
- Agree in advance the expected results and the means of reporting back to the Community what was learned during the Sabbatical.
- Agree post-Sabbatical actions by the Rabbi.
- Dates and Sabbatical activities are then to be agreed with the Executive.

INITIAL DECISIONS FOR EXECUTIVE

Ideally in consultation with the Rabbi

- The Executive must decide whether and when the Community might need one or several of the following:
 - Rabbinic cover to adopt some or all of the Rabbi's hours during the Sabbatical (this might have to be an advertised position)
 - Rabbinic cover on an ad hoc basis for some Shabbatot or for pastoral work
 - Arrangements for any upcoming simchas, stone settings or events
 - Daveners and leyners to assist in running services
 - Accommodation for any of the above
- It should be noted at this stage that any additional costs of covering for the Rabbi during his Sabbatical are met by the Community.

AGREE SABBATICAL PLANS

- If the request for a Sabbatical is accepted by the local Honorary Officers, the written outline should be forwarded to the US Director of HR.
- The Director of HR will then arrange for a consultation meeting at which all the details are discussed and agreed by the Chair, the Rabbi and the Centre for Rabbinic Excellence (CRE).
- It is important to note that Sabbaticals do not negate the need for continual professional development to be spread across the year.

COMMUNICATION - PREPARATION

- Before the Community notifies all members of the Rabbi's forthcoming Sabbatical, the Rabbi must phone all families in the Community with a scheduled lifecycle event during the agreed Sabbatical dates and he should explain his absence on Sabbatical. Making these calls before the shul notification means the Rabbi can plan with each family, appropriate replacement Rabbinic cover for their wedding, bat/bar mitzvah or stone setting. Arranging replacement cover is the Rabbi's responsibility though he may enlist help from the Community and US Centre.
- The Rabbi and/or Chair then write a letter to the Community announcing and explaining the Sabbatical in general detail i.e. the Rabbi will be going on Sabbatical, dates, further information will follow. This should occur as early as possible.
- It should be followed up by a more detailed letter explaining what the Rabbi will be doing during his Sabbatical, cover arrangements and plans for visiting speakers etc
- The Rabbi can help his Community by preparing a letter to the Community for any chaggim with mitzvot and guidelines for managing and keeping them. These can be sent out by the Administrator during the Sabbatical.
- If the Sabbatical period covers the AGM, the Rabbi should prepare an annual report to the Community for that AGM.

THE SABBATICAL PERIOD

- A celebration might be planned to take place on the Shabbat before the Rabbi leaves, to wish him well.
- During the Sabbatical, the Rabbi should ideally not attend services or other events at his own Community; this includes attending shiva houses.
- The Rabbi must not officiate at any lifecycle events unless agreed in advance of the Sabbatical and communicated openly in advance with the whole Community.
- If the Rabbi is going to attend a lifecycle event during his Sabbatical, a consistent approach must be followed.
- The Rabbi must keep in touch with CRE throughout his Sabbatical.

AFTER THE SABBATICAL

- The Community should create a means of evaluating what has been learned during the Rabbi's absence, perhaps including:
 - The strengths of the Community made clear by the absence of the Rabbi;
 - Insights gained into the scope of the Rabbi's duties and support for the Community;
 - Programming introduced in his absence;
 - Management of the Community without the Rabbi; and
 - Volunteering.
- A senior lay-leader should have responsibility for this evaluation and implementation of learnings from it.
- A celebration might be planned for the Rabbi's return.
- The Rabbi should plan to share some highlights of the Sabbatical with the Community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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