



M I C H I G A N M I N I S T R Y N E T W O R K

**HOW TO VACATION WELL
RESOURCES PLAYBOOK**

The Importance of Vacation

*"I have never believed that vacations are luxuries.
They are our necessities – just like shelter, clothes, and food, they make us feel like
humans and not like animals that care only for survival."
Alexander Babinets*

If you are reading this, you are at least thinking about taking some time off. But maybe you're not fully committed to it. You may not think you need it, deserve it, or can afford it. Or, you know from experience that taking a week off from ministry means you'll have twice as much work and stress when you return.

Taking a vacation does not have to be that way. Be encouraged; it's a GOOD thing for you to take time off and get away.

The benefits of time off are so important. Studies show a noticeable health benefit for those who take time away from work. Additionally, there are real benefits for your mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational health.

Actual and intentional time off helps with your mood, motivation, relational dynamics, enjoyment of life, and a more optimistic view of the future. A genuine joy is lost when one ignores the natural signs of burnout, fatigue, sustained irritability, and negativity.

From pre-planning to re-entering well, this brief playbook is designed to help you be intentional and strategic when taking a vacation to maximize your time away with your family by being renewed and refreshed.

PART 1: SET THE DATES

"Someday is not a day of the week."

Janet Dailey

You have thought about taking a vacation. Maybe you've even talked about it. The problem usually isn't whether or not you *want* to take a vacation but when you *will* take it. Don't make plans to take a vacation "someday". Someday never comes.

If you're old enough to remember some of the first T.V. infomercials, you are familiar with the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie and the phrase, "Just set it and forget it!"

This is a good starting point for taking time away. SET it on the calendar. But don't wait. Do this in November for the next year so nothing gets in the way. If you don't set it, you won't get it. You will allow other things to get in the way and fill your calendar.

Take charge, get out the calendars, have a family meeting, and set the dates!

Part 2: SET UP A PLAN

"A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

We know by now that when we fail to plan, we plan to fail.

Set up a plan for the church while you are gone.

6-8 weeks before your scheduled time away, meet with staff, board, admins, and leaders to plan as many details and scenarios as possible.

Who's in charge?

Who will open and close the building for services?

How are decisions made?

Who are the "go-to" people for different areas of ministry? (and how do people contact them?)

- In the church office
- On Sunday mornings
- For Visitation
- For building/maintenance issues
- For emergencies

Who is preaching? If it's a guest speaker, who will host the guest?

What will hosting the guest speaker involve?

Do honorariums need to be prepared before you leave?

Who is leading worship?

Are there midweek services/groups that need coverage?

Will there still be staff meetings? Who leads it? What's on the agenda?

If you are to be contacted in case of an emergency, determine ahead of time what truly constitutes an "emergency."

PART 3: TELL YOUR CHURCH

"The art of communication is the language of leadership."

James Humes

When the cat's away, the mice will play.

Sadly, it seems that congregants often think that's a good time to be gone when the pastor is away, too. People who do this make us feel good when they say, "I'm here because of your great preaching, and I just can't listen to anybody else because they could never be as good as you."

Because we know people can be like this, we tend to keep our time away from a secret to keep church attendance "normal." Don't do that. Tell your church in advance of your vacation. Create a culture in the church where the pastor taking a vacation is celebrated.

Schedule guest speakers who will make your people regret missing service while you're gone. Don't skimp or be insecure. Bring in the best you can and send a message to your church. You want them to have the best. If they miss church when you're away, they really miss out.

Announce and communicate your vacation dates through -

- Email
- Bulletin
- Private church group on social media
- Mass texting service (if you use one)

Remind staff, board, and leaders.

SAMPLE COMMUNICATION -

Letter/Email

Dear Church,

I want to inform you that my family and I have a vacation scheduled for **(DATES)**. We are excited to spend time away as a family to rest, recharge, and have some fun.

Be assured that the church is in good hands in my absence. Everything is planned out, and our board, staff, and leaders are in place and ready to serve.

On Sunday (DATE), we are blessed to have (NAME) as a guest preacher. (GIVE SOME BIO INFO) You will want to see what the Lord has in store for that day.

I have listed names and contact info below so that you know who to go to for specific needs or questions you may have while I am gone. Please do not hesitate to reach out as they are here to serve you.

Lastly, thanks for being a great church and understanding the value of rest for your pastor and his/her family. Please pray for us while we are away.

(YOUR NAME)
(CONTACT INFO LIST)

Text or Bulletin Reminders

Keep pastor and his/her family in your prayers while they are on vacation (DATES). The board, staff and leaders are here to serve you.

PART 4: GET AHEAD

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."
Alan Lakein

Planning will help you enjoy your vacation to the fullest and also help when you return. The more you anticipate and plan, the more effective your vacation will be.

So, adjust your work week for two weeks before your vacation and focus on covering everything while you are away. Get your workload as "caught up" as possible before you leave. This will give you great peace while away and help you not be overwhelmed when you return.

Give your staff/team specific instructions for handling communications during your vacation. Designate a place to put all your mail, phone messages, and printed communications (somewhere other than your desk) so you don't return to a cluttered mess.

Make it clear to your board, staff, and leaders that they will not contact you while you are away. Save it for when you return. Empower them to be problem solvers and focus on solutions.

PART 5: AUTO-RESPONSES

"Loving yourself isn't vanity. It's sanity. "
Katrina Mayer

One of the beautiful things about technology is that you can make it do things for you automatically.

E-mail

Rather than read your emails and reply that you are on vacation, set up an automated "Out of Office" response explaining that you are out of the office, who they should contact instead, how they should contact that person, and when you will be back in the office and available.

Texts and Calls

Android and iPhone can send an SMS auto-response to people who call or text, whether built-in or downloaded as an app. Use this to your advantage and set up an auto-response letting people know that you are on vacation and unavailable until a specific date. Include who they should contact and how to contact that person.

Voicemails

Change the voicemail greeting on your cell phone and the church phone to communicate that you are on vacation, who and how people should contact you, and when you will be available.

PART 6: VACATION FROM SUNDAY

“Relax, Recharge, and Reflect. Sometimes it’s OK to do nothing.”

Izey Victoria Odiase

Two weeks is the preferred minimum length for a great vacation. Even if it is only one week, please take both Sundays off. Otherwise, you will spend the week before your vacation preparing for Sunday and not preparing for your time off.

If you preach Sunday at the end of your vacation, you will spend the last few days focusing on the upcoming Sunday instead of on your family.

Decide ahead of time if you will attend church during your vacation. For some pastors, visiting a church during vacation is relaxing, refreshing, and life-giving. Other pastors spend the whole service analyzing, dreaming, critiquing, comparing, and getting ideas to implement when they return to their church. If you can’t mentally check out and get out of pastor mode, maybe you should watch church online while on vacation.

PART 7: DON’T VIOLATE YOUR VACATION

“A vacation is having nothing to do and all day to do it in.”

Robert Orben

Please value yourself, your marriage, and your family enough to stay on vacation, disengage from the church, and fully engage with them.

Don’t check texts, voicemails, or emails. And do not return calls, texts, or emails.

The church can survive without you for a few weeks. And if you prepared well, there should be no good reason to bother you.

But, if a true emergency arises, and you must take a call, leave early or even just for a day, and take “makeup” vacation days.

PART 8: TRULY ESCAPE

"A vacation helps to relieve stress and boredom, gives us a change of scenery, provides us with adventure and helps to bring us closer to the people in our lives."

E. S. Woods

Vacation is not a personal retreat to pray and seek God's vision for ministry and the church. It's a time for you to get away from all that and be you—the person. Be a spouse and a parent, not a pastor. Focus your time and energy on being present with the most important people.

Do things you wouldn't normally do or don't have time to do. Read books not ministry-related or leadership books but books for personal enjoyment. Take naps, play games with your family, and visit places you enjoy. Go for walks, runs, and bike rides together. Sit by the water, climb a mountain, or see a live show.

Escape, enjoy, and show your family they are your top priority.

PART 9: UNDERSTAND THE RHYTHM OF REST

"He that can take rest is greater than he that can take cities."

Benjamin Franklin

For many, rest can be hard and does not come naturally. A minimum of 2 weeks is preferred for vacations because we don't spend our entire vacation time resting and enjoying.

Our minds and bodies decompress for the first 1 to 4 days. It takes this long to relax and get into a vacation mode or mindset.

For the next 5-10 days, we focus on our family and enjoy being on vacation and relaxing.

The last 2-3 days, our minds begin to focus on getting back to work and thinking about what may be.

So, work hard to R.E.S.T.

R—RELAX—do nothing. Don't feel guilty about not accomplishing anything. The truth is, relaxing and resting IS accomplishing something.

E – ENGAGE – with family and friends, have fun, try new things, laugh a lot

S – SETTLE – Get some time to be with yourself. Experience the peace of not rushing and doing. Settle into a new life-giving rhythm.

T – TALK – Spend time talking with people in your life.

PART 10: RE-ENTER WELL

“The misconception that energy is constant leads us to believe we’re able to rush things, that a faster pace means we’ll get more done.”

Amy Arthur

Don’t come back and start going 100 miles per hour. Pace yourself. Ease back in – keep the vacation mindset as long as you can while you work.

To help do this, plan beyond your vacation by one week.

Before you leave, schedule meetings with any staff or board members for the week you return so that they know when you will be available to debrief and address any issues that may have come up during your vacation.

Try to schedule only a few meetings your first few days back. When you return, schedule extra time for communications, such as returning phone calls and responding to emails, texts, and mail.