

Talking Points for UMC Parental Leave

Created May 2024

Note: This is a generalization of talking points and should be contextualized to each annual conference's unique needs.

Language notes:

1. **United Methodist.** This document always says “clergy” (an expansive term) rather than “pastors” (a more limited term). We use the term “spouse” rather than “partner,” in line with assumptions in the *Book of Discipline*. In discussing employee recruitment and retention, we recognize that this is only a concern in annual conferences with a clergy shortage.
2. **Inclusive. These talking points are trans-inclusive.** You’ll see “birthing parent” (instead of “birth mother”) and “pregnant person” (instead of “pregnant woman”), since trans men and nonbinary people can give birth. We also say “parental leave” instead of “maternity” (female) and “paternity” (male) leave. Not only is “parental leave” inclusive of both fathers and mothers, but it also includes nonbinary parents.
3. **Contextual. You need to decide the most helpful language and talking points in your context.** Think about how this needs to be framed for an older man whose wife was the primary caregiver. What language do you need to use for him to get on board?

The Big Idea

Annual Conferences need stronger and clearer parental leave policies than the minimums set by the *Book of Discipline*. This proposed policy closes up loopholes in the *Book of Discipline*.

The legislation enables every new parent to access a full thirteen (13) weeks of paid leave without increasing the burden on local churches. While expanding paid parental leave from 8 weeks to 13 weeks, it provides financial support for congregations providing the leave.

The legislation makes provisions for families that grow through fostering or adoption. It also covers part-time clergy, licensed local pastors, and conference-funded extension ministries.

By passing this legislation, you will support healthy families, healthy clergy, and healthy churches. This legislation promotes family well-being, contributes to the thriving of churches, and models a more equitable and inclusive society.

Key Messages

Paid parental leave of at least 13 weeks supports the well-being of children, parents, and families.

Longer paid parental leave has a positive impact on families. It supports bonding, attachment, and overall family well-being.¹

Longer paid parental leave is particularly important for infant health. Research indicates that children whose mother returns to work within the first twelve weeks after birth are less likely to be breastfed, less likely to be up-to-date on immunizations and pediatric check-ups, and are more likely to present with externalizing behavior problems.² Meanwhile, each additional month of paid leave reduces infant deaths, decreases premature births and low birthweight, and positively affects the children's long-term achievement.³

Paid parental leave has a positive impact on parental physical and mental health.⁴ Paid leave decreases postpartum depression.⁵ Research shows that the physical health of the birthing person improves when their partner also takes leave.⁶

Paid parental leave is how we care for one another.

Supporting children and their families through paid parental leave fulfills our baptismal vows. We have promised to “nurture these children in Christ’s holy Church” and “surround these persons with a community of love.”⁷ Scripture calls us to provide care for each other as members of Christ's family.⁸ We are to welcome all generations as Christ welcomes children.⁹

Caring for clergy is part of how we care for the church. By granting just, compassionate, and generous family leave, the Body of Christ creates stronger and more supportive relationships and longer ministries.

¹ [Paid Leave Research | National Partnership for Women & Families.](#)

² [Paid Leave in the States: A Critical Support for Low-wage Workers and Their Families](#) by Sarah Fass, 2009

³ [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

⁴ [Paid Family and Medical Leave Fact Sheet](#)

⁵ [Paid Leave in the States: A Critical Support for Low-wage Workers and Their Families – NCCP.](#)

⁶ [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

⁷ “Baptismal Covenant I,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*

⁸ 1 Timothy 5:8

⁹ Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:15. Luke 18:16.

The Church should be leaders in showing how workers deserve to be treated. It is the church's role to advocate for better family leave for our clergy, congregants, and people outside the walls of the church.

Paid parental leave strengthens clergy well-being and improves morale, recruitment, and retention.

Investing in care is investing in the church's future. This is a short-term cost for a long-term benefit.

Parental leave is not vacation. Time for bonding, connection, and recuperation is distinct from self-care, leisure, and Sabbath.

Paid parental leave attracts and retains talented young clergy. By strengthening the physical and mental well-being of clergy parents, we prevent clergy burn-out and improve clergy morale. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, "Paid family and medical leave is linked to increased business productivity, higher employee morale, recruitment and retention of skilled workers, and reductions in costs associated with turnover."¹⁰ Research on churches shows that conference-level parental leave policies improve pastors' relationships with their congregations.¹¹ Clergywomen with positive parental leave experiences are less likely to leave parish ministry.¹² In both secular and church settings, employee retention is cheaper than employee replacement.

Paid parental leave contributes to thriving congregations, as clergy have time to find family and work balance. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management found that family-friendly leave policies have an overall positive impact on employee productivity and morale: "When an employer demonstrates support of its employees through this means, it fosters goodwill and creates a more compassionate family friendly workplace, resulting in a more productive workforce."¹³

¹⁰ [Paid Family and Medical Leave Fact Sheet](#)

¹¹ Sharp, E.C., Huebner, A.J. Clergywomen and Role Management: A Study of Clergywomen Negotiating Maternity Leave. *Pastoral Psychol* **63**, 147–170 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0539-3>

¹² [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

¹³ [Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act](#)

Paid parental leave is a global standard and growing in industries across the U.S.

Globally, the World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization advocate for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.¹⁴ The U.S. is one of only seven of the 193 United Nations countries that has no guarantee of paid time off for new parents.¹⁵

Paid parental leave is a growing standard in the United States. The U.S. Department of Labor notes, “Paid family and medical leave is already working for several states, thousands of large and small businesses, and the federal government.”¹⁶ The Federal government provides 12 paid weeks.¹⁷ The military guarantees 12 paid weeks for all new parents, in addition to 6 paid weeks of convalescent leave for the birthing parent.¹⁸ Many tech companies are leading the way in this cultural shift, with Google offering 24 weeks of paid leave.¹⁹

Expanded paid parental leave will likely be the standard in coming years, including in The United Methodist Church. Multiple annual conferences have adopted similar policies, including East Ohio, Western PA, Illinois-Great Rivers, and Western NC. Similar denominations, like the PCUSA, have also recently expanded their paid parental leave programs.

United Methodists support paid parental leave.

The revised Social Principles support parental leave. Paid parental leave is in the 2020/2024 *Book of Resolutions*, where the resolution “Maternal Health: The Church's Role” includes this call to action: “Align church policies to support maternal health, including paid family, parental and medical leave, as well as quality and affordable health care.”

Paid parental leave supports racial, economic, and gender justice.

¹⁴ [Maternity protection: Compliance with international labour standards](#)

¹⁵ [Is paid leave available for both parents of infants? - WORLD Policy Analysis Center](#)

¹⁶ <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/paid-leave/PaidLeavefactsheet.pdf>

¹⁷ [Paid Parental Leave Is Available to Most Federal Employees—But Some May Not Know About It | U.S. GAO and Text - H.R.1534 - 116th Congress \(2019-2020\): Federal Employee Paid Leave Act](#) (passed 2019)

¹⁸ [Service Members Get Extended Parental Leave](#)

¹⁹ [Google Just Increased Parental Leave To 24 Weeks—Here’s How That Compares To Other Tech Giants | Forbes](#)

Paid parental leave contributes to the thriving of churches and a more equitable and inclusive society. This puts our Social Principles into action. From the first Methodist Social Creed in 1908, we have stood “for such regulation of the conditions of labor for women” and “for the protection of the worker” and for protection of children. Today this is “for the transformation of the world.” We mourn that not everyone has access to paid parental leave, but the church can – and *should* – model a different expectation as we go on to perfect love of God and neighbor. This policy encourages every church to “ensure adequate and equal parental leave for all.” This means there is a potential societal impact of the church leading the way on this work.

Paid parental leave benefits women. Parental leave increases rates of women’s employment, access to senior management positions, and lifetime earnings.²⁰ When their spouses take leave, women are able to share equally in family care-giving responsibilities.²¹ Women’s liberation is tied to liberation for all genders.

Paid parental leave can decrease maternal mortality. In the U.S., maternal mortality has spiked, and ⅓ of these maternal deaths “occur after the birth of the baby” — the time that should be covered by parental leave. Significantly, “Black women are three to four times more likely to die of a pregnancy-related cause than white women.”²²

Paid parental leave supports racial justice. According to the US Dept of Labor, “Access to paid family and medical leave can increase equity. Currently, low-wage workers and people of color have less access to paid leave than high-wage and white workers, so their caregiving demands can result in lower earnings, wealth building and retirement security.”²³

Paid parental leave is for more than just the person giving birth.

Expanding your family is a big change for everyone. Fathers/non-birthing parents deserve the same opportunities to bond with their new children. Paid parental leave also improves the non-birthing parent’s physical and mental health.²⁴

Paid parental leave for both partners supports the whole family. Research shows that the longer leaves for a non-birthing parent correlate with greater long-term

²⁰ [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

²¹ [Paid Leave in the States: A Critical Support for Low-wage Workers and Their Families.](#)

²² [A Mother’s Guide to the Fourth Trimester | Columbia University Irving Medical Center](#)

²³ [Paid Family and Medical Leave Fact Sheet](#)

²⁴ [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

family involvement and stronger bonds with their child.²⁵

This positive effect on the whole family is why adoptive parents need to take parental leave as bonding time. Foster parents have special considerations, and they are also covered in this legislation.

Paid leave enables families to meet their basic needs

New parents face increased medical and childcare expenses. Parental leave is more accessible to families when it is paid.

While the UMC has long provided for 13 weeks of parental leave, the current *Book of Discipline* only guarantees 8 weeks of paid leave. This means that too many clergy do not take their full leave because they cannot afford five weeks of unpaid leave. **This disproportionately affects clergy on minimum salary.**

Paid parental leave is more affordable than you think.

This legislation does not increase the burden on local churches. Local churches continue to fund the clergy person's salary, just like normal. The conference then covers the cost of pastoral coverage.

See Q&A on "how much will this cost" for further financial considerations.

Paid parental leave helps to equalize appointments.

For equity across appointments, conferences should provide assistance in supporting parental leave. Congregations have unequal access to resources, and, while most local churches want to be supportive of new parents, the fact is that finances are a barrier. When local churches have to bear the full cost of parental leave, they are more likely to challenge clergy seeking to take their leave.²⁶ A conference-funded paid parental leave policy benefits small churches, church plants, and churches in struggling economic areas.

²⁵ [Delivering care for pastors who are also new parents | Faith and Leadership](#)

²⁶ Sharp, E.C., Huebner, A.J. Clergywomen and Role Management: A Study of Clergywomen Negotiating Maternity Leave. *Pastoral Psychol* **63**, 147–170 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0539-3>