

Guidelines Related to On-Leave-From-Call Status

In accord with churchwide bylaw 7.31.16., the Church Council voted in April 1996: “To adopt the following document, ‘Guidelines Related to On-Leave-from-Call Status in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’”:

I. DEFINITION AND CRITERIA FOR “ON-LEAVE-FROM-CALL” STATUS

- A. At the termination of the call of a pastor or a rostered lay minister (associate in ministry, deaconess, diaconal minister), and the rostered minister has not received and accepted a subsequent call, the following procedure is to be followed:
1. At the termination of a call the bishop will write to the rostered minister, providing information and these guidelines for on-leave-from-call status.
 2. On-leave-from-call status is not automatically granted. It must be requested and a rationale provided by the rostered minister as to why the on-leave-from-call status should be granted. A rostered minister seeking on-leave-from-call status shall make a written request to the synodical bishop within 45 days following the termination of a prior call. Failure to do so may result in removal from the roster.
 3. The request for on-leave-from-call status should include:
 - a. a statement of the rostered minister’s commitment to be available for a letter of call;
 - b. a statement of how the rostered minister’s gifts and abilities can contribute to the ministry and mission of this church;
 - c. the anticipated date when the rostered minister will be available for a letter of call;
 - d. a statement describing the ability and willingness of the rostered minister to provide ministry services while on leave from call at the direction of the synodical bishop;
 - e. the rostered minister’s plan for continuing education while on leave from call; and
 - f. a statement describing the rostered minister’s current and intended participation in a congregation of this church.
 4. A rostered minister on leave from call must be an active member of a congregation of this church.
 5. A rostered minister on leave from call remains accountable to the synodical bishop and must be willing to meet the criteria and standards of this church for its rostered ministers.
 6. If a rostered minister requesting on-leave-from-call status desires to make a personal statement relative to the request, the Synod Council may, at its discretion and in the manner of its determination, allow for a personal appearance by the rostered minister to the Synod Council (or its designated committee).
 7. Action granting or denying on leave from call is to be taken by the Synod Council [ELCA constitutional provision 20.17., bylaws 7.31.16., 7.52.22., and †S8.12.i.9) in the *Constitution for Synods*] upon recommendation by the synodical bishop. A committee may be designated by the bishop to evaluate applications and bring recommendations to the Synod Council through the synodical bishop for action.
 8. The effective date for on-leave-from-call status, if granted by the Synod Council, begins the day the rostered minister is no longer serving under a regularly issued letter of call.
 9. Synod Council action related to a rostered minister’s on-leave-from-call status is reported as information to the annual Synod Assembly in the report of the bishop or the Synod Council.
 10. Written notification is sent to the rostered person requesting on-leave-from-call status reporting the action of the Synod Council.
 11. The secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Board of Pensions are notified of the action of the Synod Council in granting on-leave-from-call status. Similar notification is given by the synod to the secretary of this church and the Board of Pensions when such status is ended.
 12. Prior to the annual anniversary of the effective date of the Synod Council’s decision granting on-leave-from-call status, the rostered minister on leave will need to request renewal of the on-leave-from-call status. Annual action by the Synod Council is necessary for the continuation of that status.
- B. A rostered minister engaged in graduate study, in a field of study that will enhance service in the rostered ministry of this church, may be retained on the roster of this church for a maximum of six years by annual action of the Synod Council, in consultation with the Vocation and Education unit [see bylaw 7.31.16.].
- C. On-leave-from-call for family responsibilities is available to rostered ministers who have had at least three years of active service under call, with demonstrated circumstances that fulfill the criteria for this status. A rostered minister may request on-leave-from-call status for family responsibilities for a maximum of six years, by annual action of the Synod Council, based upon either of the following reasons [see bylaw 7.31.16.]:
1. For the birth or care of a child or children of the rostered minister.
 2. For the care of an immediate family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health problem. A serious health problem is an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves either a period of incapacity or treatment with inpatient care in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical facility, or a

period of incapacity or subsequent treatment following inpatient care. A medical certification of such a serious health problem must be submitted to the Synod Council as part of the request for on-leave-from-call status.

- D. With approval of the Synod Council, either by general policy or by specific authorization, the synodical bishop may place limitations or restrictions upon the availability for service of a rostered minister who is on leave from call.
- E. Six months prior to the end of the third year of on-leave-from-call status, the bishop or bishop's designee will contact the rostered minister on leave from call to review:
 - 1. Pension and health insurance implications, with a recommendation that the Board of Pensions be contacted.
 - 2. The implications and expectations of being in a non-rostered status, including for ordained ministers the document, "Guidelines for Persons Formerly Rostered as Ordained Ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."
 - 3. The criteria for continuation of on-leave-from-call status beyond three years.
 - 4. The process for reinstatement to the roster.
- F. Ordinarily, a rostered minister on leave from call cannot be transferred to another synod while on leave from call. In unusual circumstances, *e.g.* in the case of a married couple, both of whom are on a roster of this church, the transfer of an rostered minister who is on leave from call may be authorized upon mutual agreement of the synodical bishops involved after consultation with and approval by the secretary of this church.
- G. The secretary of this church should report to the Conference of Bishops any person whose on-leave-from-call status has gone beyond three years (six years in the case of approved graduate study and family leave) without action by that person's Synod Council. This report should be made within six months following notification to the synodical bishop by the secretary of this church of the expiration of on-leave-from-call status. The Conference of Bishops may then, upon recommendation of the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops, recommend removal from the roster of such an individual by the secretary of the church.

II. CRITERIA FOR CONTINUATION OF ON-LEAVE-FROM-CALL STATUS

- A. On-leave-from-call status normally terminates at the end of three years. A rostered minister may remain on leave from call beyond three years (six years in the case of approved graduate study and family leave) when such continuation contributes to the ministry and mission of this church, and when the particular circumstances of the on-leave-from-call status warrant an exception to the normal three-year limitation. Such continuation on the roster of this church is contingent upon recommendation by the synodical bishop and action of the Synod Council and the Conference of Bishops.

- B. A rostered minister who seeks to remain on leave from call beyond three years must provide a written request to the synodical bishop and Synod Council for the continuation of that status. This request should be received no later than six months prior to the end of the third year of on-leave-from-call status.
- C. This request must state clearly the reason(s) for such a request and how these reasons relate to the church's ministry and mission.
- D. The request must include the following information:
 - 1. The rationale for the rostered minister's remaining on leave from call, including a statement of the rostered minister's commitment to be available for a letter of call, and an articulation of how the rostered minister's gifts and circumstances can contribute to the ministry and mission of this church;
 - 2. The anticipated date when the rostered minister will be available for a call;
 - 3. A statement describing the ability and willingness of the rostered minister to provide ministry services at the direction of the synodical bishop, consistent with the ministry and mission needs of the synod;
 - 4. The rostered minister's plan for continuing education while on leave from call;
 - 5. A statement describing the rostered minister's current participation in a congregation of this church.
- E. Graduate Study: A rostered minister engaged in graduate study, in a field of study that will enhance service in the rostered ministry of this church, may be retained on the roster of this church beyond six years, upon the approval by the synodical bishop, by annual action of the Synod Council in consultation with the Vocation and Education unit, and by action of the Conference of Bishops. The written request must indicate clearly the educational goals of the rostered minister, the time line for completion of study, and a statement of commitment that the rostered minister intends to be available for a letter of call within this church upon completion of graduate study.
- F. Family Leave: A rostered minister on leave for family responsibilities may be retained on the roster of this church beyond six years, upon the approval by the synodical bishop, by annual action of the Synod Council, upon authorization by the Conference of Bishops for a maximum of two years. The written request must indicate clearly the continuing family needs of the rostered minister, the possible time line for conclusion, and a statement of commitment that the rostered minister intends to be available for a letter of call within this church upon conclusion of these circumstances.
- G. Action by the Synodical Bishop and Synod Council
 - 1. The synodical bishop reviews the request for continuation of the on-leave-from-call status beyond three years (six years in the case of approved graduate study and family leave) and forwards that request to the Synod Council together with the bishop's evaluation of the request.

2. At the request of the synodical bishop, the Synod Council considers the request of the rostered minister and how it relates to the mission and ministry of the synod. Should the decision of the Synod Council be to recommend approval, the Synod Council shall make such a request to the Conference of Bishops.
 3. The Synod Council forwards its decision, together with the statement of the rostered minister and the rationale of the Synod Council in recommending approval, to the Conference of Bishops.
 4. A rostered minister on leave from call must provide an annual, written request to the synod bishop for recommendation to the Synod Council for continuation of that status.
 5. The Synod Council must review and act annually on requests for continuance of on-leave-from-call status beyond the three-year norm (six years for graduate study and family leave).
- H. Action by Conference of Bishops
 1. The Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops reviews such requests and reports its recommendations to the Conference of Bishops.
 2. The Conference of Bishops, at a regular meeting of the conference, by a majority vote acts upon requests for continuation of on-leave-from-call status. It shall report its decision to the Synod Council seeking such a continuation.
 3. The action of the Conference of Bishops in approving the request of a Synod Council is valid for two years.
 4. A Synod Council may act to continue the on-leave-from-call status for a second year [beyond the normal three-year limit] before requesting subsequent action by the Conference of Bishops for a further exception.

*Adopted by the Church Council
as policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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