

Sabbatical Information ...

Policy and Guidelines for Sabbatical Leave for Rostered Persons

Adopted by the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod Assembly – June, 1998

Consistent with the action of the ELCA 1997 Churchwide Assembly in adopting the recommendation, “Life-Long Learning and Development for Faithful Leaders,” the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod recommends the following sabbatical leave policy to its congregations, agencies, and rostered personnel.

Biblical Understanding of Sabbath

The term sabbatical has its roots in the Old Testament concept of sabbath, or rest, after seven days or years. Genesis 2:1-3 notes that God rested from the work of creation after seven days. Both versions of the Ten Commandments describe the Sabbath as a day of reflection on the blessings of God’s creation (Exodus 20:8-11), and for release from the bondage of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:12-15), Deuteronomy 15 describes a period after seven years in which release from several kinds of debt and labor are itemized. The Sabbath was given as a time for rest, renewal, and recovery.

Reflecting this Sabbath concern for the health and well-being of God’s people, Jesus himself pulls away from the crowds frequently for prayer and rest (see, e.g. Mt. 14:13; Mk. 7:24). St. Mark recalls Jesus telling his disciples to “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while,” noting that “many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” (Mk. 6:31)

Rostered ministry is a work which is at the center of all this “coming and going.” With the increased complexity of life in ministry the puzzles become more difficult to solve. The demands for more effective ministry grow more urgent. The explosion of knowledge requires ceaseless learning. The mission of the Church is best served by the health, energy, spiritual renewal, and knowledge which a sabbatical leave provides for its rostered leaders and congregations/agencies.

Sabbatical Leave

Sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period of time--usually three months after the first seven years’ service to a congregation/agency--in which a pastor/AIM is granted leave away from normal duties in order to spend an extended period of time in study, reflection, and renewal. Sabbatical leave is not a vacation, nor is it only continuing education; it is for the purpose of enhancing the mission of the congregation/agency.

Alban Institute and other research suggests that the most effective sabbatical leave is carried out in conjunction with the mission planning of the congregation/agency and the Synod Leadership Team. In the sixth or seventh year of the rostered person’s initial service, the organization reviews and/or plans its mission strategy for the next three to five years. Sabbatical leave is also planned and provided for the renewal, personal study, and skills attainment necessary for the rostered person to work most effectively to achieve the goals of the mission.

Synod Guidelines for a Sabbatical adopted June 13, 1998

1. A sabbatical leave is recommended for rostered persons after the first seven years of service in a congregation/agency, and every five years thereafter in conjunction with congregational/agency mission planning.
2. The recommended time for sabbatical leave is three months.
3. When a congregation/agency issues a call to a rostered person, consideration should be given to the inclusion of sabbatical leave in the call documents.
4. The costs for a sabbatical leave should be covered by the congregation/agency, including the continuance of salary, housing, pensions, and other remuneration of the rostered person. Continuing Education monies, GEM and other grants, and congregational/agency money put aside in non-sabbatical years should be able to cover the costs adequately.
5. In congregations where there is only one pastor, the congregation should put aside money to cover a supply pastor and any other help needed during the pastor’s sabbatical.
6. The sabbatical leave should be related to strategic planning. If the rostered person is renewed to lead the congregation/agency in the strategic plan, then he/she will look to serve another four-five years in that location. (If during sabbatical the rostered person comes to understand that he/she can no longer serve this mission, then another call should be sought. The strategic plan can aid in the call process as the congregation/agency seeks a successor.)

7. It is recommended that a letter from the Bishop be sent annually to the chairperson of each congregation/agency and each rostered person of the synod encouraging the use of the sabbatical leave program in conjunction with mission planning. The letter should be placed on the agenda of each congregation council/agency for discussion and action.

Planning for a Sabbatical

1. The congregational/agency costs of a sabbatical can be covered by budgeting for two weeks' extra salary each non-sabbatical year and placing those funds in an interestbearing reserve account.
2. Rostered persons should work with their Staff Support Committee, Congregation Council, or employer to develop a study and renewal plan which will best serve the mission of the congregation/agency at least six months before the sabbatical leave is to begin. The proposal is to be approved by both the rostered person's Staff Support Committee, Congregation Council, or employer and the Synod Leadership Team or the Bishop.
3. The rostered person should submit a written report and evaluation of the sabbatical leave to the Staff Support Committee, Congregation Council, or employer and the Synod Leadership Team or Bishop within six weeks after completing the leave.
4. Someone within the congregation/agency should be appointed to keep a weekly diary of events during the rostered person's absence so that the rostered person might be "caught up" on return.

Considerations for Planning a Sabbatical Leave Program

A sabbatical leave program should recognize the rostered person's need for spiritual renewal as well as the need to acquire specific skills and knowledge for effective work in furthering the mission of the congregation/agency. The following considerations are submitted for sabbatical leave program planning:

- personal objectives and program objectives;
- description of the major elements of the experience;
- specific competencies, abilities, and skills hoped to be acquired;
- issues which need to be addressed before leaving, and proposed solutions;
- how current job responsibilities will be covered while on leave;
- incorporation back into the congregation/agency upon return

Clergy Sabbatical Grants



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ELCA NEWS SERVICE
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Lutheran Pastors, Congregations Benefit From Renewal Program 05-182-FI

CHICAGO (ELCA) -- She may look like just another tourist, or it may seem like a family on vacation, but there's something more meaningful and more spiritual going on here. A congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its pastor are participating in the National Clergy Renewal Program of the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

The Lilly Endowment announced Sept. 20 that this year 23 ELCA congregations were among 124 congregations that received grants of up to \$45,000 each for the support of renewal programs for their pastors. Up to \$15,000 of each grant may be used for congregational expenses associated with a sabbatical.

Since 2000 the Endowment has invested more than \$23 million in the National Clergy Renewal Program for 755 congregations and their pastors. It awarded 20 of 132 grants to ELCA congregations in 2004, 10 of 117 in 2003 and 26 of 135 grants in 2002.

The Lilly Endowment is an Indianapolis-based, private philanthropic foundation that "seeks to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the persistent obligations of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection," the program's promotional materials said.

In August the Lilly Endowment announced that 2006 will be the eighth year for a similar program just for congregations in Indiana. Two ELCA congregations -- Risen Lord Lutheran Church, Bargersville, and Salem Lutheran Church, Indianapolis -- were among 36 congregations that received grants in the 2005 Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations.

"I have the privilege of talking with many pastors who have received grants from the Lilly Endowment for their sabbaticals and with leaders in their congregations," said the Rev. Richard J. Bruesehoff, director for leadership support, ELCA Division for Ministry.

"Almost without fail each expresses gratitude for the gift of this time of personal and professional renewal," Bruesehoff said. "Pastors will go on to talk about their profound gratitude both to the Lilly Endowment and their own congregation, and the renewed vitality and commitment with which they.

"Congregational leaders will talk about the new clarity and vision with which the congregation engages in its ministry after the sabbatical," Bruesehoff said.

That's not usually where they start out, Bruesehoff said. Pastors don't see where they'll find the time; pastors and congregational leaders worry about the finances and about the congregation