

MODEL SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES

The annual compensation guidelines of the Lower Susquehanna Synod recommend and encourage congregations to offer sabbaticals for rostered ministers who have served in the same ministry site for a minimum of seven years. The following guidelines and resources are offered to assist congregations and rostered ministers as they plan sabbaticals.

PURPOSE

A sabbatical leave is an extended period of time (normally three months) for study, spiritual growth, skill development, research, refreshment and renewal for the purpose of enrichment for continued service in the same ministry setting.

The distinct benefits of a sabbatical are twofold:

- a.) The mission of the congregation benefits from the rostered minister who returns to ministry with new experiences and abilities, as well as being refreshed and renewed.
- b.) The rostered minister benefits from the personal and spiritual growth and renewal that comes from participation in an intentionally-structured time away.

A sabbatical leave is not a time to do similar professional work in another setting nor is it an extended vacation. The word *sabbatical* has its roots in the biblical concept of Sabbath (“to rest” or “to cease”). It is a time to be refreshed in body, mind, and spirit and to deepen one’s relationship with God.

ELIGIBILITY

The rostered minister must be serving in the ministry site for seven years prior to the start of the approved sabbatical leave and may be eligible for a second sabbatical every seven years thereafter. An alternative option could be to offer a one-month sabbatical every three years of continuous service.

The rostered minister covenants/promises not to pursue, seek, or accept another call or position for a minimum of one year following the sabbatical.

COSTS OF THE SABBATICAL

The congregation continues to pay the full salary and benefits for the rostered minister who is on sabbatical leave. Accrued continuing education dollars can be used for educational costs of the sabbatical.

Vacation time (normally a minimum of four weeks annually) is NOT included in the sabbatical leave. Continuing Education (normally a minimum of two weeks annually) is counted as part of the sabbatical in the year in which the sabbatical is granted (unless otherwise negotiated and approved by the congregation).

The cost of providing ongoing ministry during the rostered minister’s absence is the responsibility of the congregation. Other costs of the sabbatical are the responsibility of the rostered minister. The rostered minister is encouraged to seek grants (e.g. the Lilly Foundation), scholarships or other means to defray the cost of research, education or other study.

It is strongly recommended that the congregation place \$500-\$1000 per year into a sabbatical leave fund to be used to offset costs of providing ministry during the sabbatical.

PLANNING

Proposed sabbatical leave is to be planned in consultation with the rostered minister and the Mutual Ministry Committee at least 18 months prior to the sabbatical and submitted to the Congregation Council for [general] approval at least 12 months prior to the sabbatical.

MINISTRY IN THE CONGREGATION DURING THE SABBATICAL

It shall be the responsibility of the rostered minister, in cooperation with the parish staff and Congregation Council, to arrange for worship leadership (supply preachers), pastoral care, education, and special services (e.g. weddings and funerals) coverage during the sabbatical.

Rostered ministers and congregations are encouraged to be creative and collaborative with other congregations and this synod in providing coverage. Lay leaders, seminary students, and supply pastors could share in the role of providing pastoral leadership.

Congregations should be encouraged *not* to scale back or change their worship practices during the sabbatical.

Congregations should be encouraged to see the sabbatical period as a time of growth, renewal, and reflection for the congregation as well as the rostered minister.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN PLANNING A SABBATICAL?

Rostered ministers shall define the areas where they are most in need of renewal (e.g. spiritual, professional, mental, emotional, social) and the types of activities that would be most renewing to them (e.g. retreat, study, family time, travel, writing). The best sabbaticals usually are more open-ended than rigid, allowing for growth and surprising new directions that may emerge.

Upon return from sabbatical, a written report shall be submitted to the Congregation Council; it is recommended that a report be given to the dean of the conference and the bishop's office. The report may cover what was done, who was met, what was read; what impact the experience had on the minister personally, including family, vocationally and congregationally; what went well and what was problematic in the sabbatical preparation, experience, or follow-up; what has been discovered about oneself or one's ministry; plans for applying the knowledge and experiences in ministry upon return. In addition to the written report, it is important for the sabbatical recipient to provide an opportunity for the congregation to report about their learning experiences during the sabbatical time.

RESOURCES

Bullock, Richard and Bruesehoff, Richard, Clergy Renewal: the Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning. Alban Institute Publication, 2000.

Changing the Rhythm of Parish Ministry: Sabbatical Policy Insights: Study Guide and Video produced by Atonement Lutheran Church, Muskego, WI.

Taking a Sabbatical, Christianity Today International, 2010; visit www.buildingchurchleaders.com

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