

# **Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA**

## **Extended Study Leave (Sabbatical) Guidelines**

### **Preface**

The concept of wholeness and wellness in ministry is an important principle in the life of the church. Healthy congregations, plus healthy pastors and deacons are keys to effective ministry. It is our belief that extended study leaves for rostered ministers are an expression of mutuality and care for one another. To help promote health and wholeness in the church, the Southwestern Washington Synod has developed extended study leave guidelines. These guidelines apply principally to rostered clergy; however, they may also apply to rostered deacons, depending on the nature of their responsibilities in a parish or specialized ministry setting.

A Sabbatical Program provides on-going renewal, growth, education and spiritual deepening for a pastor or AIM. A “Sabbath-time” away serves to keep church workers fresh, strong, and committed. It also becomes a time of renewal and learning for the congregation. When a congregation provides a Sabbatical for their pastor or deacon staff, they are making a wise investment in the health of their whole ministry.

An extended study leave is understood to be a time of release from normal duties in order that a rostered person may devote time to study and renewal. An extended study leave provides an opportunity for a rostered person to reflect on the call to ministry and her/his relationship with God and God's people. The study leave is expected to be beneficial to the congregation/institution, to the wider church, and to the rostered person. While continuing education provides regular short-term opportunities for growth in learning, an extended study leave provides not only rest from labor, but also opportunities for more in-depth learning and renewal. An extended study leave should be holistic, in that it includes time for prayer, reflection, rest, and care of the body, as well as developing gifts for ministry.

An extended study leave is part of an overall continuing education plan by which the rostered person and the key leaders of the congregation/institution can assess and plan ministry together. The conversation is intended to identify ministry highlights, to give thanks for ministry accomplished, to determine the ministry priority that is most affected by the rostered person's special leadership, to explore how the rostered person can become an even more effective leader through continuing education, and to develop this continuing education plan.

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### Guidelines

1. An extended study leave of twelve weeks (3 months) may be granted to rostered clergy, ordinarily after serving in a ministry site for five years. This recommendation may also apply to deacon rostered staff depending on the nature of their responsibilities. In some cases, in consideration of prior and current service in ministry, it may be desirable to offer an extended study leave after less than five years of service.
2. Congregations/institutions are encouraged to provide the rostered person full pay and benefits during the extended study leave.
3. Expenses incurred during the study leave will be borne by the rostered person (i.e., tuition, books, supplies, travel, living expenses, etc.), unless the congregation/institution chooses to contribute to these. These expenses may be covered by continuing education funds.
4. Expenses of pulpit supply and coverage while the rostered person is gone, if needed, will be covered by the congregation. Assistance from the synod bishop may be possible. The rostered person and the congregation are encouraged to meet with the synod bishop as part of the sabbatical planning.
5. The rostered person is normally expected to serve the congregation/institution for at least one year following completion of the study leave. (In some cases, it may be counterproductive for the rostered minister and/or the congregation/ institution to require further service upon completion of the study leave.)
6. The rostered minister will submit a report to the congregation/institution within a mutually agreed upon period of time following completion of the study leave.
7. It is understood that the extended study leave and the terms of it are a mutually negotiated agreement (covenant) between the rostered person and the congregation/institution. A plan of the extended study leave/sabbatical will be completed and filed with the Synod Office.

## Questions and Answers

### **1. Is there a biblical basis for taking an extended study leave (sabbatical)?**

Yes. The very root of the word is the same as that of "Sabbath." Throughout the Old Testament God instructs people to work six days and rest on the seventh.

Ezekiel 20:12

*And I gave them the Sabbath, a day of rest every seventh day, as a symbol between them and me, to remind them that it is I, the Lord, who sanctifies them, that they are truly my people.*

Leviticus 25: 1-7

*The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath in the Lord. Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten."*

### **2. When is an extended study leave appropriate?**

According to the ELCA, it is recommended that an extended study leave be considered after five years of service in a particular ministry setting. Normally, there is not accrued time from previous service to be credited to continuing education and/or extended study leave in a new setting. However, if a pastor or deacon has served at least five years in a previous ministry setting without the opportunity for a sabbatical, it may be wise to consider granting a study leave prior to completion of five years, as a benefit both to the church professional and to those whom she/he serves. For fewer years of service, a shorter study leave may be offered.

### **3. What is the length of an extended study leave?**

The length of an extended study leave will normally be three months. The ELCA suggests one month sabbatical for every two years of service. Vacation time should not be included as study leave time, but may be considered negotiable, along with any accrued continuing education time if a longer study leave is desired and/or appropriate.

### **4. What is the purpose of an extended study leave?**

There are several objectives to be considered by the church professional and the congregation/institution as they plan the study leave together:

- a. Will this be a time of renewal that will help 'recharge' the rostered church professional spiritually and professionally so that she/he will return with new energy for ministry?
- b. What are the learnings that can be shared upon return? How will this benefit the congregation/institution?

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- c. How will this help the church professional grow as a person and as a professional?  
How will it enhance his/her ministry skills?

### 5. What are some examples of extended study leave?

- a. Working on an advanced degree at a seminary or university
- b. Visiting the mission field
- c. Serving in a clinical setting (clinical pastoral education)
- d. Taking a personal spiritual enrichment retreat
- e. Traveling to observe other ministry settings in this country or overseas.

### 6. What is the cost to the congregation or institution?

It is recommended that full salary and benefits continue to be provided during the study leave. Car allowance may be a negotiated item. The pastor or deacon may use accrued continuing education funds. The congregation/institution would need to contract for interim ministry and/or supply preaching. It would be wise to budget for this several years in advance, if possible, or even put it into your annual budget. After educating the congregation on the need and purpose of the pastor or deacon's sabbatical, the congregation may desire to take special offerings for this.

There are several grants that congregation/institutions may apply for to help cover the cost of the extended study leave, such as the Lilly Foundation grant.

### 7. What is involved in planning for an extended study leave?

An extended study leave is to be a mutually negotiated agreement between the pastor or the deacon and the congregation/institution. Planning for how the study leave time will be used will be done by the pastor or deacon, in consultation with the local governing body (church council, parish executive committee, agency board, etc.) and the Southwestern Washington Synod Office. It is recommended that planning begin at least one year in advance of the study leave. When planning the study leave, the Southwestern Washington Synod encourages one month of learning for the sake of learning, one month of learning for preparation that will directly benefit the local congregation/institution, and one month of rest and renewal. To help emphasize this ministry as a partnership, a mutual covenant will be filed with the synod outlining plans for the study leave.

#### **Definition of Terms:**

**Extended Study Leave:** A study leave (sabbatical) normally three or more months in duration.

**Continuing Education:** Any specialized instruction in ministry-related subjects, which are offered to church professionals. Some examples include summer theological institutes, synod workshops, Bishop's Convocation, etc.

**Rostered Person:** A pastor or deacon under call, or serving a congregation or institution, who are on the roster of the Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA.