

St. Luke's Lutheran Church Sabbatical Policy

Introduction:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America encourages congregations to allow sabbaticals for clergy and full-time associates in ministry. St. Mark recalls Jesus telling his disciples to "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile," noting that "many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." (Mark 6:31). Life-long continuing education for rostered leaders is important for sustained vitality for ministry. Congregations of the ELCA have long been encouraged to provide time and financial assistance to enable pastors to maintain and improve their skills. From time-to-time leaders need extended time for study, personal growth, spiritual growth, reflection and renewal, without the demands of a regular schedule. The ELCA recommends sabbatical leave at regular intervals.

Experience shows the congregation's ministry directly benefits from such study, growth, and renewal. All parties benefit. Throughout Holy Scripture accounts of sabbath are clearly set apart by rest, quiet places, and time for restoration. God gives the sabbath pattern as a time of renewal, a time to be reminded of whose we are and what we are called to do, a time of rest that refreshes us for life.

Eligible Staff: Full time ordained pastors.

When a sabbatical is appropriate:

St. Luke's will recognize a three-month sabbatical after seven years continuous service at St. Luke's. In order to take a subsequent sabbatical, a pastor must be under full-time call at St. Luke's for a minimum of seven consecutive years following the previous sabbatical. Years cannot accumulate from other calls (i.e. four years at Trinity and two years at St. Paul's does not qualify), unless agreed upon at the time of call to St. Luke's.

Without specific Council approval the sabbatical leave is not to take place during the key church seasons of Advent or Lent, during Holy Week, or on the days of Christmas or Easter. If two or more pastors are under full-time call at St. Luke's, no more than one sabbatical shall be granted in the same church fiscal year. Vacation time or continuing education is not to be included as sabbatical time.

Planning for the sabbatical:

Planning should begin the calendar year before the sabbatical to allow for congregational planning. The time of planning of Sabbatical should focus on the vision and hopes for the sabbatical time as well as practical arrangements regarding pastoral coverage and financial considerations for the congregation. Conversation with the synod can help facilitate this planning and implementation so that it is intentional and mutually beneficial for both the congregation and the minister.

The pastor is encouraged to form a sabbatical planning team when beginning to think about taking a sabbatical. With their guidance and support, the pastor will submit to the Council a sabbatical leave proposal which shall include start and end dates, and plans for rest and recreation, personal continuing education, and professional development. Out of this should come a covenant which provides full compensation and benefits for the pastor and outlines the vision and practical details of the sabbatical.

Cost to Congregation:

- a. St. Luke's will continue to pay full salary and benefits (base salary, housing allowance, pension and insurance coverage). Car allowance, a ministry expense, is normally not paid.
- b. St. Luke's may establish a reserve account to be ready to provide resources for staff replacement during the time of sabbatical.
- c. Accrued continuing education dollars can be used for the educational costs of the sabbatical. Continuing education dollars can only be accrued for three years. After three years any unused portion is put into a joint dedicated sabbatical fund which can be used by pastors for future sabbaticals.
- d. St. Luke's may contract with another pastor or lay person to cover the duties of the staff. This can range from full time to only supply preaching. Costs for the sabbatical coverage should be figured on a time percentage of the staff person's base salary, with consideration for transportation costs and ministry expenses. Similar to the time of transition between pastors, this can be an excellent time for the congregation to be creative in addressing ministry and worship needs. Considerations involve:

1. Sunday worship/preaching. Normally done by a pastor engaged at the normal supply preaching rate of reimbursement.
 2. Teaching, visitation, occasional services (funerals, weddings, etc.). The pastor, congregational leadership, and the synod office can work together to arrange for these needs to be met during the sabbatical time. Another pastor can be contracted for certain responsibilities, other staff may adjust responsibilities, and/or neighboring pastors may agree to cover certain responsibilities.
- e. St. Luke's is not under obligation to fund the sabbatical in any other way. However, it may choose to provide additional financial assistance.

Other Considerations:

- a. Worker's Compensation and Supplemental Disability Income Insurance:
- b. Inquiry into State Worker's Compensation laws should be made since definite liability accrues to the congregation in case of accidental death or disability. St. Luke's may want to purchase a supplemental disability income insurance plan for their workers, coordinated with the disability insurance plan already provided by the ELCA.

IRS Tax Regulations: Congregations, pastors, and lay rostered persons are facing increasingly complex IRS tax regulations. Pastors are encouraged to obtain expert and up-to-date advice for guidance in tax reporting.

Councils must annually approve allowances for housing, ministry expenses and unreimbursed medical expenses for these to be legally excluded from income for IRS reporting.

Commitments following the sabbatical:

- a. The pastor will submit a report of the sabbatical time, and find occasion to share with the congregation's members the pastor's reactions, learning, insights, etc.
- b. The pastor is expected to remain at least one year in the parish following the sabbatical.

St. John's Lutheran Church – ELCA, Sabbatical

A. Policy

1. A sabbatical leave is understood to be a time of release from normal duties in order that a pastor may devote time to renewal and study.
2. A sabbatical leave is understood as an integral and important part of an overall strategy for enhancing the mission of the congregation through pastoral renewal, development, and growth.
3. Pastors shall be eligible for a sabbatical leave of 3 months after having continuously served the congregation full-time for 6 years. Thereafter, a pastor shall be eligible for further sabbaticals every seventh year.
4. Recipients of sabbatical leave opportunities will be expected to serve the congregation for at least one year following return from a sabbatical leave.
5. Sabbatical leaves are not granted automatically, but shall be evaluated, approved, and administered by the Congregational Council.

B. Procedure

Sabbatical leave procedures are to be considered flexible so as to accommodate surprises and unusual opportunities that may develop.

1. Since the congregation and entire church are ultimately enriched by the pastor's sabbatical leave, it is desirable that there be shared planning with the pastor's co-workers, interested congregational members, and the Congregational Council.
2. Pastors seeking sabbatical leave shall submit a written proposal to the Congregational Council providing adequate notice of the requested sabbaticals so as to allow for necessary coordination and budgeting for the proposed leave. Notice of between 3 months and 6 months is encouraged.
3. Proposals to the Congregational Council should include the following:
 - a. Personal objectives and program objectives
 - b. a description of the major elements of the experience
 - c. Proposed beginning date and end date.
 - d. Suggestions of how current job responsibilities will be handled during the leave.

- e. A description of any anticipated budgetary implications
4. A sabbatical leave is separate and distinct from continuing education and vacation, which shall be granted as in any other year.
5. A pastor shall continue to receive normal compensation and benefits during the period of the sabbatical leave.
6. The pastor on sabbatical leave shall be responsible for the costs of the sabbatical, unless the congregation chooses to contribute to such costs. The pastor may choose to use accumulated continuing education funds for such purpose.
7. Within a month of return from sabbatical leave, the pastor shall submit a written report and evaluation of the leave to the Congregational Council.

Calvary Lutheran Church, Bemidji

Definition: For the purpose of this policy, a sabbatical is understood to be a time of release from normal duties in order for a rostered leader to devote time to study, renewal enrichment, spiritual growth, travel, skills development and/or research. Sabbatical leave is not continuing education, which entails study opportunities of shorter duration and with much greater frequency.

Sabbatical time is beneficial to the rostered leaders and it also brings benefits to the congregation and the church as a whole. In the process of a sabbatical, long range ministry is revitalized and stimulated.

Eligibility and Length of Leave:

1. To be eligible, the rostered leader must have served full-time at Calvary Lutheran for a minimum of five years.
2. Sabbatical time will be up to 3 months in duration.
3. Eligibility will be every 5 years.
4. Vacation time may be included in sabbatical time, under the following schedule:
 - a. 3-month sabbatical = 25% of vacation hours for the year.
 - b. 10-week sabbatical = 20% of vacation hours for the year.
 - c. 8-week sabbatical = 15% of vacation time for the year.
 - d. 6-week sabbatical = no vacation time for the year.

5. The rostered leader is expected to remain in employment with Calvary Lutheran for at least one year following the sabbatical. If the rostered leader leaves before the year following the sabbatical, Calvary Lutheran church will be reimbursed for wages paid during the sabbatical period. Accrued vacation hours will be accepted as form of payment for reimbursed wages, if available.
6. Married rostered leaders whom are both employed by Calvary Lutheran shall be allowed to “overlap” sabbatical leaves for no more than 1 month.

Planning:

1. Planned sabbatical shall begin at least one year prior to the sabbatical. Notification shall be given to church council.
2. Written plan needs to be presented to the church council at least four months before beginning of proposed sabbatical start time. Written plan shall include at a minimum:
 - a. Beginning and end date.
 - b. Sabbatical Plan (What are you planning to do?).
 - c. Rationale / justification for the sabbatical.
 - d. Expected benefit.
 - e. Expected benefit for the congregation.

Costs to Calvary Lutheran Church:

1. Calvary will continue to pay full salary and benefits (base salary, housing allowance, pension and insurance).
2. Any accrued continuing education funds may be used for any education costs of the sabbatical. There must be a direct correlation to the sabbatical plan and this must be requested in the written plan.
3. Calvary Lutheran will pay to provide for interim supply pastors during sabbatical time (as needed).
4. Calvary will not be responsible for the costs of the sabbatical, other than those indicated above. Any materials, plans, classes, travel costs, etc, will be the sole responsibility of the rostered leader. Calvary Lutheran, and the congregation at large, may elect to contribute to the costs, but is under no obligation to do so.