

Part-Time Ministry Guidelines for Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands shared-time ministry to exist when an ordained minister is called to serve in one or more settings of this church while earning income from other employment or while devoting substantial time to other activities.

The ELCA defines ministry that is less than full-time to be “shared-time.” However, we will use “part-time” throughout this document, because it provides more clarity as to the type of work we are describing, which is primarily that of a solo pastor in a ministry setting which is not large enough to support them in full-time ministry.

The expectations for pastors have changed in terms of the types of work they are now expected to do beyond worship leadership, visitation and teaching. It is a challenge to both pastors and congregations to strike a balance in terms of what they expect and what the pastor can realistically do in an average work week. It is a challenge for those who work in full-time ministry. It is even more of a challenge for those who have part-time calls. But it can also provide opportunities for more flexibility on the part of Pastor and parish, and more growth in the lay leadership of the congregation.

Congregational mission and ministry needs do not change when a pastor is called less than full-time. The shift must happen in who takes responsibility for various tasks and aspects of mission and ministry. This is a conversation that is essential to happen in an open and honest way during the negotiating of the call process, and revised along the way during the tenure of the pastor serving the congregation. This is particularly important if the pastor has been under full-time call and is shifting to part-time; which missional areas will be fulfilled by the laity rather than the pastor?

This document is considered supplemental to the existing Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Synod Compensation Guidelines.

While a part-time pastor in a staff situation may be called to serve in a particular ministry that is limited in scope (visitation, youth, education, for example), a part-time pastor in a solo pastor role (most common in new part-time calls), will result in some things that will either not be done in that parish, or will be done by lay staff or volunteers. Congregations thinking of calling a part-time pastor will have to choose the focus of their leadership position, which may be:

- Focus on community relations, outreach and evangelism
- Focus on weekly worship
- Focus on adult congregational programming (Bible study, Sunday school, etc.)
- Focus on youth and children’s programming (Bible study, Sunday school, confirmation, etc.)
- Focus on visitation (sick and homebound members, hospital, etc.)
- Other focus

One of these could be chosen as the primary focus for a part-time pastor, and one or two as secondary foci (which will be attended to if time permits after primary focus). Secondary areas will need solid lay leadership to assist the pastor. The other areas will have to move to lay leadership and staffing. This focus exercise and prioritization will be crucial for

congregations preparing for a part-time call. **While equipping leaders is an explicit and distinct role of all rostered leaders, it is especially important in part-time calls so they are feasible and reasonable for the good of the called leader as well as the mission of the congregation.**

For congregations considering calling a part-time pastor, a conversation defining the expectations of the pastor is an essential part of the call process. These expectations and boundaries need to be overtly respected, the role of the pastor and congregation clearly defined, and an emergency plan, for when the pastor is not available, established and broadly understood. This emergency plan could include previous agreements with retired pastors, neighboring clergy, lay staff or other leaders.

Two Models for Part-Time Ministry

For most professionals, there is a societal assumption that the person will work at least 40 hours per week, on a somewhat predictable schedule (that the person will be in the office most weekdays- 5 days- from 8 am to 5 pm, for example). But most pastors will work more than that, because the job of a professional (as opposed to an hourly employee) is to work until the job is done.

For our purposes, the following are approximate guidelines:

- Full-time = 40-45 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-15 additional unscheduled hours
- 3/4-time = 30 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-10 additional unscheduled hours
- 1/2-time = 20 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-7 additional unscheduled hours

Pastors often define their job not in hours, but in number of days worked per week. Full-time pastors work 6 days a week, with one full day off during the week (usually Friday or Monday). Often pastors do not work every Saturday, but are scheduled frequently for special events. Sunday is almost always a mandatory work day, and vacation is usually determined by Sundays: the pastor has some flexibility in taking other days of the week off, but is expected, and usually covenanted, to be present 48 Sundays per year, with 4 off for vacation, and sometimes an additional 1 or 2 for continuing education.

The two broad models presented here should be part of the conversation between a call committee, Council and pastor. No one model will work for every situation and each call is contextual: but congregations must be aware that **calling a part-time pastor means a different model of ministry**, with more lay leadership, in any size congregation or ministry situation. This all needs to be negotiated between the congregation leadership and the pastor, and then communicated continually with the congregation.

Part-Time Pastor Model 1: Weeks (Including Sundays) Off Per Month

This model allows for a congregation to have a true picture of what part-time ministry looks like on a Sunday, and many pastors who have worked part-time consider a model that includes proportionate Sundays off the only fair model for pastors, who are otherwise simply expected to do a full-time job at a lower salary. This approach would give a part-time pastor the benefit of being able to have some full weekends with family who are often on more traditional work and school schedules. In this model, the pastor’s vacation would be proportional as well (3/4 time pastors would have 3 weeks, 1/2 time pastors would have 2 weeks).

For 3/4 time, 1 week (including Sunday) per month will be off (plus 3 weeks of vacation)

For 1/2 time, 2 weeks (including Sundays) per month will be off (plus 2 weeks of vacation)

Part-Time Pastor Model 2: More Days a Week Off

As indicated in the benefits section of these recommendations (below), the part-time pastor working in this model should receive the full-time number of Sundays off (vacation), which is often 4 Sundays per year. (Note: Otherwise part-time pastors will be working more Sundays than full-time pastors.) In addition to this, a part-time pastor will have more than one day completely off, when no work is expected. At a minimum, this will mean that the congregation will need lay visitation people and some lay assistance with office tasks (phone messages, etc.), so that the part-time pastor truly is off those days, including being free to work at another job.

For 3/4 time, 2 days per week will be off (plus standard 4 weeks of vacation)

For 1/2 time, 3 days per week will be off (plus standard 4 weeks of vacation)

Implications of Part-time Ministry

As mentioned above, part-time ministry requires a radical rethinking of the role of the pastor, the role of the congregation, and the kind of training that is necessary for both clergy and lay persons. The following is a list of implications for congregations and pastors to consider in regards to part-time ministry.

- Using a Coach – It is highly recommended for congregations to use a coach to walk with them as they move into part-time ministry. This coach would be available to both congregation and pastor to assist each in developing their own support structures so that their joint ministry may be enhanced. The synod encourages congregations to utilize the program called Healthy Start.
- Having Mutual Ministry Support – Part-time ministry requires a change in how the work of the congregation gets done. A strong ministry support system is required for the health of the pastor and the congregation so that the congregation can make sure the pastor is not overworking and so that they are not expecting too much of the pastor.
- Training of Laity – Congregations are encouraged to utilize programs such as Stephen Ministry, Befrienders, and Lay School which equips lay persons with skills to provide coverage when the need arises on those days and/or weeks the pastor is off.
- Strong Collegiality – Congregations in part-time ministry will need strong, collegial relationships with their ELCA and ecumenical peers so that there is pastoral presence when tragedy strikes and their pastor is unavailable to be present.

Rostered leaders are professionals by training, qualification, and function. Whether a rostered leader is in a full-time or part-time call, certain needs exist for the rostered leader to maintain their health and relationships with their families, congregations and the church. There are simply some things a rostered leader cannot do without if they are to faithfully carry out their role in the church. These necessities include participation in continuing education, First Call Theological Education, official meetings, and local gatherings of clergy. Congregations are encouraged to pay these expenses as well as any professional ministry dues and subscriptions. Please refer to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Synod

Compensation Guidelines for recommended amounts.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this document is to start a series of conversations. The first is a conversation in a congregation considering a part-time call. A call committee and/or Council must engage the congregation in a conversation about what a part-time call will look like, and specifically, what pastoral tasks will not be part of the call, what tasks will be prioritized, and what tasks will be taken over by lay staff and members of the congregation. The congregation and call committee/Council should also be in conversation with the synod as they shape this new call.

Second, these congregational conversations must be supported by a conversation in our synod about how we as a body support congregations with part-time pastors and pastors in part-time calls. This must include addressing things like supply presiders, funding for synod events and training, and many other issues. These synod conversations also need to include larger congregations that might be able to help their neighbors.

Third, this is clearly part of a larger conversation in the ELCA. The question of what the church will look like in the future includes what it will look like in the growing number of congregations that cannot support full-time ordained pastors. For instance, how will we adapt seminary education so that pastors do not leave seminary with large amounts of debt and arrive at part-time calls? If we expect some pastors to be bi-vocational, how will we create seminary programs and church work schedules that actually allow for that? How will we adjust to more part-time pastors at the same time as we continue to move toward most ELCA congregations offering communion at every worship service? As with many other issues, finding our way into the next generation of the church in this place will require deep theological thinking, working and talking together, and much prayer.

We pray that these conversations will result not only in ways to make part-time ministry possible, but to allow it to be a blessing to congregations, strengthen lay leadership, widen career and family options for clergy, and witness to the creativity and tenacity of the Christ's church.