



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Sabbatical Information

Guidelines for Sabbatical for Rostered Persons

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 Guidelines

A sabbatical is a carefully planned period of time - usually three months after the first seven years of service to a congregation/agency - in which a pastor/deacon is granted time away from normal duties in order to study, reflect, and renew. A sabbatical is not a vacation, nor is it only continuing education; it is to renew the leader for a new season of ministry benefitting the mission of the congregation/agency.

1. A sabbatical 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, retirement contributions, and other remuneration of the rostered person. Continuing education monies 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. While the Spirit moves as it will, normally a pastor/deacon is asked to stay at least one year after the sabbatical.

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 interest bearing 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 journal of events during the rostered person's absence so that the rostered person might be "caught up" on return.

Considerations for Planning a Sabbatical

A sabbatical 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 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