

## **Synod Policy #107**

# **SABBATICAL GUIDELINES FOR ROSTERED LEADERS**

Board for Rostered Ministries February 19, 2005

### **A. BACKGROUND**

1. The Scripture points to the renewing power of “Sabbath time.” We usually think of Sabbath as the seventh day of creation when God finished creating and rested. More than an after thought of creation, the Sabbath is a gift from God of rest, renewal and hope. In today’s busy life, God comes again and again offering rest and refreshment for the soul.
2. The first books of Scripture speak of “Sabbath” days and years. Even the land was given a Sabbath when it was left to lie fallow and replenish itself.
3. Sabbaticals allow for possible new directions. Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in his ministry. Moses’ time spent tending sheep helped change his perspective on life. David tended sheep, too, and learned valuable lessons about God’s care and provision. Paul struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years and emerged with a new vision.

### **B. DEFINITION OF A SABBATICAL**

1. A sabbatical is understood to be a time of release from normal duties in order that a rostered person may devote time to study and renewal. This is beneficial to the maturing staff person, as it also brings benefits to the congregation and the church as a whole.
2. Any place the word “congregation” is used, the terms “employer” or “agency” or Synod could also apply.
3. A sabbatical is not to be confused with continuing education which entail study opportunities of shorter duration and with much greater frequency. A sabbatical is at least a three month period devoted to the rostered person’s intellectual, spiritual and vocational growth and renewal.

### **C. PURPOSE OF A SABBATICAL**

1. A sabbatical should provide stimulation for rostered persons to continue their mental and spiritual growth by contact with scholars, teachers, pastors, and others, so as to be competent in their ministries.
2. A sabbatical will provide strong leadership for the churches through rostered people who are kept abreast of new developments and stimulated to effective ministries.
3. A sabbatical nurtures and feed the body and soul for renewed ministry. Hope builds on the dreams that God awakens in his people as they walk in pilgrimage with him, and renews them to lead again the people committed to their charge.

4. Since the congregation and the church are ultimately enriched by the rostered person's sabbatical, it is desirable that there be shared planning with the rostered person's Staff Support Committee or Congregational Council. In the situation of a rostered person on Synod staff, the shared planning should be between the person and the Synod Bishop.

#### **D. ELIGIBILITY AND LENGTH OF LEAVE**

1. Rostered persons shall be eligible for a sabbatical and renewal time of at least three months every seven years in their present call. For rostered persons involved in the First Call Theological Education Program, this seven year period begins upon completion of that program.
2. Recipients of sabbatical opportunities will return to their ministry setting for at least a year after the leave, unless noted otherwise in the shared planning with their Staff Support Committee or Mutual Ministry Committee and Congregation Council. In the case of the Synod staff this should be done in consultation with the Synod Bishop.
3. Vacation time and Continuing Education time are not included as sabbatical but are granted as in any other year. Variations from the three months sabbatical are to be approved by the congregation agency, or Synod Bishop in case of Synod staff.

#### **E. GUIDELINES**

1. A sabbatical should be intentional but allow enough freedom to change direction or let go of an old dream if a new vision emerges while planning. Sabbatical planning should take place at least one year prior to a sabbatical.
2. The best sabbaticals usually are more open-ended than rigid allowing for the surprises and the new directions that may come in the planning.
3. An experience of renewal is the hope of most everyone who takes a sabbatical. But creating such an experience requires more than luck, it takes imagination and planning and willingness to be surprised by God.
4. The plan and program should be one's own. Do not borrow or try to repeat or duplicate another's plan or program.
5. In terms of current job responsibilities, planning should always be in consultation with congregation council and Bishop while the rostered person is on sabbatical.

#### **F. PROCEDURE**

1. Rostered persons of the Synod shall submit in writing a plan for study and renewal to their Staff Support Committee and Congregation Council or employer or in case of the synod staff, with synod Bishop, at least six months before the program is to begin. The plan may include formal study at a seminary or university, a quarter of Clinical Pastor Education, independent study and travel, or a combination of the above. The proposal is to be in consultation by both the

rostered person's Staff Support Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Congregation Council or employer and receive their endorsement.

2. The rostered person will submit a brief written report and evaluation of the sabbatical to the Staff Support Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee or Congregational Council or employer or Synod Bishop, in case of Synod staff, within a month after completing the program.
3. It is recommended that the Letters of Call shall include a statement that congregations grant financial support and support in principle to the sabbatical program.
4. Information shall be sent annually to the chairperson of each congregation and each pastor of the Synod encouraging the use of the sabbatical program. This information shall be placed on the agenda of each Congregation Council for discussion. The Board for Rostered Ministries will encourage each rostered person, congregation and the Synod to study and consider the implication of a sabbatical fund.
5. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America looks to its rostered persons in ministry to be educated and dedicated servant-leaders. To become such a church is an ongoing challenge. A sabbatical program is one means by which rostered persons and the Staff Support Committees and Congregation Councils can work together to strengthen both ministry and the church's mission.

The Board and the Synod will attempt to provide non-financial resources in implementing a sabbatical program.

#### **H. COVERAGE AND COSTS DURING SABBATICALS**

1. During the sabbatical the rostered person shall receive from the congregation or employer the equivalent of their current base salary and congregation/employer salary; 100% of housing allowance; 100% of pension and medical-dental benefits; all other compensation and benefits remain unaffected.
2. The congregation or employer is responsible to provide for interim ministry during the sabbatical. Increased use of lay members or collegial coverage is recommended. This may be done by an employed pastoral leader or lay congregational leadership.
3. The rostered person on sabbatical will be responsible for the costs of tuition, books, supplies, travel and living expenses while on sabbatical, unless congregation or employer chooses to contribute to these.