

EXTENDED STUDY LEAVE GUIDELINES

Southwestern Texas Synod

An Extended Study Leave provides an ordained or lay-rostered individual with significant time away from his or her ministerial responsibilities so that he or she may pursue a plan for personal, professional, and spiritual growth and renewal. It is intended to enliven the rostered person's energy and skills for ministry and to enrich the mission and ministry of the sponsoring congregation or agency.

The purposes of Extended Study Leave are (1) education and (2) renewal. For the first purpose to be achieved, a plan for study must be carefully investigated and described. In order for the second to be achieved, a sufficient amount of time and freedom must be permitted to allow for the renewal to take place. The first purpose requires consultation with ones sponsoring congregation or agency and ones synod bishop; the second purpose requires that the individual have integrity, clarity, and commitment to the process and experience.

The Southwestern Texas Synod encourages congregations and employing agencies to have an Extended Study Leave program in place for their rostered persons and to actively encourage its use. Discussion of Extended Study Leave plans may be a part of the Call Process as well as on-going conversations within the Mutual Ministry, Personnel, or Executive committee of the congregation.

Uses of an Extended Study Leave

An Extended Study Leave may provide professional growth, skill enhancement, intellectual stimulation, or in-depth topical study. It may promote health and wholeness for the rostered person or add enthusiasm and motivation for ministry. It may provide spiritual renewal and refreshment by providing opportunities to be in prayer and worship, or in reflection on one's life and calling, or in community with God's people. It may involve working on an advanced degree, visiting a mission field, serving in a clinical setting, taking a personal enrichment retreat, returning to seminary, or travel to increase understanding or to observe other ministries.

Eligibility

1. Rostered persons are eligible to take an Extended Study Leave after having served a minimum of seven years in the ministry.
2. Rostered persons are eligible after having served at least three years in their current call.
3. In general, a rostered person will not take an Extended Study Leave more than once each seven years.
4. Rostered persons over age 50 are particularly encouraged to engage in Extended Study activity.
5. An Extended Study Leave should not be taken at a time when the rostered person or the congregation/agency is under high stress or conflict.
6. The rostered person will agree to continue serving in the present call for at least one year following the Extended Study Leave.

Planning should begin at least a year in advance and should involve detailed conversations with congregational/agency leaders and consultation with the synodical bishop. A study plan might typically include one month of learning to benefit the rostered person, a month in study to benefit the congregation/agency, and a month of activity for personal and spiritual renewal. The study plan should be written, signed by the rostered person and congregational leadership, and endorsed by the bishop. Following the study leave, the rostered person should submit a written summary of the experience to the congregation/agency leaders and synodical bishop. A congregational committee may be established to help promote, plan, interpret, and monitor the Leave and the interim ministry.

Length of Leave

1. **Three months is recommended; one month is minimum.**
2. **Vacation time is not included in the calculation of leave time.**
3. **The Extended Study Leave will take the place of Continuing Education time for that year.**

Expenses

1. **The congregation/agency will agree in advance with the rostered person about the delegation of expenses.**
2. **Normally, the congregation/agency will continue the rostered person on full salary and benefits (not car allowance) and will cover the cost of interim/supply ministerial services.**
3. **Normally, the rostered person will cover the cost of the study program (fees, books, transportation, registration). Accumulated continuing education funds may be used for Extended Study expenses.**

Other Models

Rostered persons and their congregation/agency may look at these guidelines and feel that it is an impossibility for them. Rather than abandoning the idea altogether, consider other creative approaches to an Extended Study Leave:

1. **Though three months is recommended, it might be possible to shorten the three months to one or two months.**
2. **Though a continuous period of time is recommended, it might be possible to divide the three months into segments of two, three, four weeks to be taken in a year's time or over a two to four year period.**
3. **Consider any other model by asking the question, "How can we help our pastor or lay rostered professional grow, be renewed, and better equipped in skills?"**