

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:**
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.
- b. **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.