

MONTANA SYNOD
SABBATICAL GUIDELINES FOR ROSTERED MINISTERS
Pastors, Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers and Deaconesses
Approved by the Synod Council on February 27, 2016

RATIONALE

Wholeness and wellness are important principles in the life of the church and in the practice of its ministry. Congregations and agencies will be served best by pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and deaconesses who are healthy--both spiritually and physically--and who are committed to grow both in their understanding of the faith and in enhancing their skills in ministry. As your representatives on the Montana Synod Council, it is our belief that granting sabbaticals or renewal leaves to rostered persons can be an expression of our care for one another. To help promote health and wholeness in the church, the Synod Council has approved the following sabbatical guidelines.

A sabbatical provides an opportunity for a rostered person to reflect on the call to ministry and his/her relationship with God and God's people. The renewal leave is expected to be beneficial to the congregation/institution, to the wider church, and to the rostered person. While continuing education provides regular short-term opportunities for growth in learning, a sabbatical provides not only rest from labor, but also opportunities for more in-depth learning and renewal. Such a leave should be holistic--in that it includes time for prayer, reflection, and care of the self--as well as offering a time to develop and enhance gifts for ministry.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Renewal Leave: Renewal Leave and Sabbatical are terms used interchangeably. Both refer to a leave generally of three or more months in duration.

Rostered Person: An ordained ELCA pastor, an ELCA deaconess, a commissioned Associate in Ministry (AIM), or a consecrated diaconal minister in the ELCA who is on the roster of the Montana Synod.

Continuing Education: Any specialized instruction in ministry-related subjects which are offered to church professionals. Examples of continuing education opportunities include: offerings of the Northern Rockies Institute of Theology (www.nrit.org), (and other ELCA Continuing Education Centers); summer theological institutes; summer sessions at theological seminaries, colleges and universities; pastoral conferences; online courses such as offered by The Fisher's Net (www.fishersnet.net), clinical pastoral education programs; and workshops offered by organizations such as the Alban Institute. Multiple opportunities for lifelong learning are listed on the ELCA-initiated multiple listing web site, www.faithandwisdom.org.

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

1. A sabbatical of twelve weeks (three months) may be granted to rostered clergy, normally after serving in a ministry site for five years and every five years thereafter. This recommendation also applies to rostered associates in ministry (AIMs), diaconal ministers and deaconesses. In some cases, after considering the length of the rostered person's tenure in a ministry prior to his/her current call, it may be desirable to offer a renewal study leave before the completion of five years of service in the present setting.
2. Congregations/institutions are encouraged to provide the rostered person full pay and benefits during the sabbatical. In order to meet congregational needs for Word and Sacrament ministry while an ordained pastor is on sabbatical, the Montana Synod Office can assist congregations in arranging for pulpit supply and pastoral care.
3. Expenses incurred during the sabbatical--e.g., tuition, books, supplies, travel and living expenses-- will be borne by the rostered person. These expenses may be covered by continuing education funds.
4. The rostered person is normally expected to serve the congregation/institution for a period of at least one year after the completion of the sabbatical. (In some cases, it may be counterproductive for both the rostered person and the congregation for the latter to insist on further service upon completion of the sabbatical.)
5. The rostered person will submit a report to the congregation/institution within a mutually agreed upon period of time following completion of the sabbatical.
6. It is understood that the sabbatical and its terms are to be negotiated mutually between the rostered person and the congregation/institution.
7. Congregations/institutions are encouraged to approve a standing sabbatical policy and include it as is helpful and appropriate in Letters of Call, Personnel Handbooks, Continuing Resolutions and/or other official documents.

RESOURCES FOR SABBATICALS

Congregations and rostered persons can find additional information on sabbaticals through ELCA websites and others, including The Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs, the Louisville Institute, and Wheat Ridge Ministry Sabbatical Resource Center. Search web resources for “sabbatical resources for pastors” to access the most up-to-date information.