

**Montana Synod**

**Synod Parsonage Guidelines**

Approval by the Synod Council September 2018

A parsonage is a home provided by the congregation for its pastors. It is to be an aid in the carrying out of ministry. In its care of the church, the congregation will want to provide a good home.

The guidelines on the following pages are a way to help both pastor and congregation navigate a healthy relationship by clarifying mutual expectations around the parsonage. These guidelines are set by the Montana Synod to provide guidance for both pastor and congregation when it comes to providing and maintaining a parsonage. Following them will help the congregation become aware of needed improvements and let it know if a synod-wide standard has been achieved.

Since the parsonage is the pastor's home, privacy should be respected. Congregation members are expected to follow the same stands of politeness for such things as entering the parsonage as they would for any other home in the community.

Because it is the home of the pastor, the desires of the pastor should be consulted, as changes are necessary. Further details about this are in the following guidelines. The quality of the parsonage should meet a standard set by the homes of the majority of the congregation's members. The size should be adequate to accommodate families.

The tenant/landlord model may apply on occasion, but its application is quite limited. Contrary to renters, the pastor normally has little choice of residence. The relationship between the pastor and congregation is not based on a lease or rental agreement, but upon a common bond in the service of Christ Jesus.

The following items below list more specific guidelines:

These are the suggested guidelines for congregations with a parsonage. These are guidelines that congregations and pastors may use to discuss the maintenance, repair and responsibilities relative to a church owned home.

1. It is recommended that following appliances be provided in the parsonage:

Stove

Refrigerator

Dishwasher

Washer and Dryer

2. It is recommended that the following utilities be paid directly by the congregation.

Electricity

Basic Telephone

Gas

Internet (if not provided at the church)

3. Items that would normally be supplied by the congregation include:

Paint

Window Coverings

Light fixtures

Wallpaper

Floor coverings

Ceiling fans

4. When a pastor first moves into a parsonage, the congregation should see that it is thoroughly

clean and should usually plan to redecorate.

5. The colors, fabric, design, etc, selected in the redecoration would normally be selected by who

will be living in the house, in consultation with the appropriate committee. The congregation, of

course would determine the price ranges for these items.

6. Parsonage maintenance and repair should be listed as a separate line item in the annual budget,

with a clear understanding of who has the authority to spend these budgeted funds.

7. There should be an annual inspection of the parsonage as conducted with the pastor.

8. The pastor and congregation should develop and annually update a list of necessary and desired

repairs, maintenance, modernization, redecorating and remodeling projects and together

prioritize these projects.

9. There should be a clear understanding about how regular maintenance and emergency repairs are

to be handled. It is suggested that the pastor be authorized to spend a specific dollar amount at

his or her discretion. Any repairs more than this amount would require approval of the property

committee or the congregation council.

10. When a pastor moves out of a parsonage, and before all financial obligations are completed,

there should be an inspection of the property to see that it is left clean and in good repair. The

pastor should be held responsible for any excess wear or damage caused to the parsonage while

he or she was living there. This would include damage caused by children and pets.

11. The grounds around the parsonage are primarily the responsibility of the congregation. The

congregation should see that the lawn, shrubbery and flowerbeds are in good condition when

pastor moves into the parsonage. The pastor may be expected to care for these grounds (mow,

rake, remove snow, apply fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides) or these responsibilities may be

shared by the congregation. (The division of labor should be negotiated by the pastor and the

council immediately after the pastor's arrival).

12. Congregations should consider taking care of the grounds around the parsonage while the

pastor is on vacation or sabbatical (study leave), if it is decided that this is the pastor's responsibility.

A Note to Pastors: The congregation(s) are entrusting to you the parsonage as a gift. While it is “your” house while you are serving them, it is ultimately in the care and responsibility of the congregation. How you care for this property is a direct reflection of your stewardship practices. Mistreating or misusing the parsonage can and does have a direct effect on your ministry. Use common sense.

A congregation should not be expected to cover the cost of excessive damage due to negligence or abuse. Wear and tear outside of normal use should be the responsibility of the pastor, and an agreement on how and when the parsonage will be fixed shall be made with the congregational council prior to the pastor leaving. This expectation follows the ELCA model constitution’s bylaws (C9.08) wherein the pastor shall make satisfactory settlement of all financial obligations before receiving another call.