

MONTANA SYNOD
SABBATICAL GUIDELINES FOR ROSTERED MINISTERS
Pastors and Deacons
Approved by the Synod Council on February 23, 2019

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 and deacons 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 ministers 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 minister 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 minister. 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 Minister: An ordained ELCA pastor (Minister of Word and Sacrament) or an ELCA Deacon (Minister of Word and Service) 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 (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 Select Learning/Fisher's Net, clinical pastoral education programs; and workshops offered by other organizations. Multiple opportunities for lifelong learning are listed on the ELCA-initiated multiple listing web site, faithandwisdom.org.

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES

1. A sabbatical of twelve weeks/three months (unless otherwise determined) may be granted to rostered ministers (pastors and deacons), normally after serving in a ministry site for five years and every five years thereafter. In some cases, after considering the length of the rostered minister'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 minister 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 minister. These expenses may be covered by continuing education funds.
4. The rostered minister 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 minister and the congregation for the latter to insist on further service upon completion of the sabbatical.)
5. The rostered minister 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 minister 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 ministers 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.