Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Sabbatical Leave Policy for
Ordained Ministers and Associates in Ministry

PURPOSE

This policy specifies the manner in which sabbatical leaves for clergy and associates in ministry* will be provided. Extended Study/Health Leave should be considered by both pastor/associate in ministry and congregation as an integral feature of a parish pastor's/associate in ministry's life and ministry. The pastor/associate in ministry and congregation should plan together a definite study program/recuperation schedule which provides benefits in ministry for both.

The distinct benefits of an extended study (sabbatical) leave are twofold:

a) The mission of the congregation benefits from the presence of a pastor/associate in ministry whose skills and creativity have been renewed or enhanced through a planned program of study.
b) The ministry of the pastor/associate in ministry benefits from the personal renewal that comes from participation in a planned program of study.

The distinct benefits of an extended health leave (health here is defined as physical, emotional, spiritual well-being) are twofold:

a) The mission of a congregation benefits from the presence of a pastor/associate in ministry
who has been allowed to recuperate fully when their health has been threatened.
b) The ministry of the pastor/associate in ministry benefits from the personal renewal that comes from being able to accept the ministering of others when the need arises.

GUIDELINES

A. Eligibility

1) The pastor/associate in ministry shall have been in the ordained/commissioned ministry for seven years, and three years in their current call. A pastor/associate in ministry shall be eligible for an extended study leave every five years.

2) The pastor/associate in ministry is expected to stay in the current call for two years following the extended study leave.

3) The extended study leave normally is not to be less than two weeks and not more than three months. Longer or shorter leave can be considered where appropriate.

4) The extended study leave plan is to be developed in cooperation with and/or reviewed by the Mutual Ministry Committee of the congregation and presented to the Congregation Council for approval six months to one year before the leave is to begin. Special

circumstances shall be considered. The pastor/associate in ministry and the calling body shall seek the counsel of the Bishop before finalizing the agreement.

*This policy can also be utilized for persons on the other lay roasters who are under call by congregations of the Southwestern Pennsylvania.

B. Arrangements for Coverage and Compensation

1) The congregation shall assume the responsibility of the arrangements for pastoral coverage, including pulpit supply, during the pastor's/associate in ministry's absence. The congregation may consider beginning a savings plan which would allow for funds to be set aside prior to the time of eligibility for a sabbatical leave. The compensation guidelines should be consulted for direction.

2) Normally the financial consideration for the extended study/health leave shall be negotiated by the pastor/associate in ministry and the congregation or agency. It is suggested, however, that the defined compensation (base salary, housing, and Social Security allowance) and ELCA Pensions and Benefits program be maintained at the current budget level.

C. Available Assistance

1) Congregations and/or pastors/associates in ministry who want assistance in developing extended study/health leave (sabbatical) plans should contact the synod staff or synodical Committee on Ministry. Assistance may also be requested in helping to establish the compensation agreement.

2) Congregations/pastors/associates in ministry considering a health leave should contact the Board of Pensions or Synod Staff for help in determining whether this type of leave is the most appropriate option.

D. Documentation

1) Any pastor/associate in ministry who is engaged in an extended study leave for more than one month shall make monthly updates to the congregation.

2) Within six weeks of the completion of the extended study leave, the pastor/associate in ministry shall present to the congregation a written reflection on the experience and the implications for the ministry of the congregation and ministry in the parish. This written reflection shall be appended to the pastor's/associate in ministry's annual Continuing Education Report to the Bishop.

3) Any pastor/associate in ministry who is engaged in an extended health leave shall at both the approximate midpoint of the leave and at least thirty (30) days prior to the conclusion of the leave, submit a health professional's (i.e., physician, spiritual director, psychologist) statement to the Bishop, indicating the extent to which the purpose of the leave has been achieved and evaluating the health status of the pastor/associate in ministry relative to his/her ability to return to his/her present call.