

**NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN ELCA  
SABBATICAL LEAVE GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY AND ASSOCIATES IN  
MINISTRY**

**A. BACKGROUND**

1. The Scripture points to the renewing power of “sabbath time.” We usually think of Sabbath as the seventh day of creation when God finished creating and rested. More than an after thought of creation, the Sabbath is a gift from God of rest, renewal and hope. In today’s busy life, God comes again and again offering rest and refreshment for the soul.
2. The first books of Scripture speak of “sabbath” days and years. Even the land was given a sabbath when it was left to lie fallow and replenish itself.
3. Sabbaticals allow for possible new directions. Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness marked a turning point in his ministry. Moses’ time spent tending sheep helped change his perspective on life. David tended sheep, too, and learned valuable lessons about God’s care and provision. Paul struck down on the road to Damascus, disappeared into the desert of Arabia for three years and emerged with a new vision.

**B. DEFINITION OF SABBATICAL LEAVE**

1. For the purpose of this policy, “extended study leave” is to be considered the same as “sabbatical.” Any place the word “congregation” is used, the terms “employer” or “agency” could also apply.
2. An extended study leave is understood to be a time of release from normal duties in order that a rostered person may devote time to study and renewal. This is beneficial to the maturing staff person, as it also brings benefits to the congregation and the church as a whole.
3. An extended study leave is not to be confused with continuing education which entail study opportunities of shorter duration and with much greater frequency. An extended study leave is at least a one to three month period devoted to the rostered person’s intellectual, spiritual and vocational growth and renewal.

**C. PURPOSE OF EXTENDED STUDY LEAVE**

1. Extended Study Leaves should provide stimulation for rostered persons to continue their mental and spiritual growth by contact with scholars, teachers, pastors, and others, so as to be competent in their ministries.
2. Extended Study Leaves should provide strong leadership for the churches through rostered people who are kept abreast of new developments and stimulated to effective ministries.

3. Extended Study Leaves nurture and feed the body and soul for renewed ministry. Hope builds on the dreams that God awakens in his people as they walk in pilgrimage with him, and renews them to lead again the people committed to their charge.
4. Since the congregation and the church are ultimately enriched by the rostered person's extended study leave, it is desirable that there be shared planning with the person's Staff Support Committee or Congregation Council and the Synod Leadership Support Committee or the Bishop.

#### D. ELIGIBILITY AND LENGTH OF LEAVE

1. Rostered persons shall be eligible for an extended study and renewal time of a minimum of one to three months every three to five years in their present call. For rostered persons involved in the the First Call Theological Education Program, this three to five year period begins upon completion of that program.
2. Recipients of extended study leave opportunities will normally return to their charges for at least a year after the leave unless noted otherwise in the shared planning with their Staff Support Committee or Congregation Council.
3. A typical extended study leave will be one to three months away from one's charge. Vacation time and Continuing Education time are not included as extended study leave but are granted as in any other year. Variations from the one to three months extended study leave are to be approved by the congregation or agency.

#### E. GUIDELINES

1. Be intentional but allow enough freedom to change direction or let go of an old dream if a new vision emerges while planning.
2. The best extended study leaves usually are more open-ended than rigid allowing for the surprises and the new directions that may come.
3. An experience of renewal is the hope of most everyone who takes an extended study leave. But creating such an experience requires more than luck, it takes imagination and planning and willingness to be surprised by God.
4. The plan and program should be one's own. Do not borrow or try to repeat or duplicate another's plan or program.

## F. CONSIDERATIONS

1. Personal objectives and program objectives.
2. Description of the major elements of the learning experience.
3. Specific competencies, abilities and skills hoped to be acquired.
4. Problems that need to be resolved before going and possible proposed solutions.
5. How current job responsibilities are to be handled while on leave.
6. Health and age of family members especially if leaving the country.
7. Spouse, spouse's career, children, children's school, pets, etc.

## G. PROCEDURE

1. The Synod will administer the extended study leave program through its Leadership Support Committee.
2. Rostered persons of the Synod shall submit in writing a plan for study and renewal to their Staff Support Committee or Congregation Council or employer at least six months before the program is to begin. The plan may include formal study at a seminary or university, a quarter of Clinical Pastoral Education, independent study and travel, or a combination of the above. The proposal is to be approved by both the rostered person's Staff Support Committee or Congregation Council or employer.
3. The rostered person will submit a brief written report and evaluation of the extended study leave to the Staff Support Committee or Congregation Council or employer within a month after completing the program.
4. Letters of Call shall include a statement that congregations grant financial support and support in principle to the extended study leave program.
5. Information shall be sent annually to the chairperson of each congregation and each pastor of the Synod encouraging the use of the extended study leave program. This information shall be placed on the agenda of each Congregation Council for discussion.
6. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America looks to its rostered persons in ministry to be educated and dedicated servant-leaders. To become such a church is an ongoing challenge. An extended study leave program is one means by which rostered persons and the Staff Support Committees and Congregation Councils can work together to strengthen both ministry and the church's mission.

## H. COVERAGE AND COSTS DURING SABBATICALS

1. During the extended study leave the rostered person shall receive the equivalent of their current base salary through a combination of any grants received for the purpose of the extended study leave (such as Growth in Excellence in Ministry - GEM) and congregation/employer salary; 100% of housing allowance; 100% of pension and medical-dental benefits; all other compensation and benefits remain unaffected.
2. The congregation or employer is responsible to provide for interim ministry during the extended study leave. Increased use of lay members or collegial coverage is recommended. The reduction of salary paid by the congregation or employer because of any grants received for the purpose of the extended study leave (such as GEM) will help offset expenses for replacement services such as interim pulpit supply, hospital and shut-in visitation, confirmation instruction, etc.
3. The rostered person on extended study leave will be responsible for the costs of tuition, books, supplies, travel and living expenses while on leave, unless congregation or employer chooses to contribute to these.

Salary Standards Committee