

Suggestions for Chaplains and Congregations in Time of Military Involuntary Call-up

Involuntary call-up for military chaplains is a term applied: (a) to a reserve component chaplain who is assigned to a reserve unit that is activated for federal duty, or (b) to an individual reserve chaplain who is called to active duty when he or she has not requested it. The suggestions provided here for chaplains serving under call to congregations may be used as guidance for other employing entities, institutions, or agencies where pastors are serving under call outside of the congregational setting.

A. Procedures for Pastors

1. If you have not already done so, make your congregation aware of your status as a military reservist.
2. Notify your Congregation Council President and Executive Committee and arrange for a meeting with the Congregation Council to discuss your involuntary call-up to military service.
3. Notify your synod bishop and invite the bishop or a member of the bishop's staff to participate in the Congregation Council meeting where the issues related to your call-up will be considered.
4. Contact the ELCA Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Federal Chaplaincy Ministries, at telephone 202.822.6414 in Washington, D.C., or [email darrell.morton@elca.org](mailto:darrell.morton@elca.org)
5. Contact the ELCA Board of Pensions Service Center at 800.352.2876 for essential ELCA Retirement Plan and ELCA Health Benefits Plan information.
6. Note that no new ecclesiastical endorsement is necessary in order for you to respond to the call-up.

B. Considerations for Congregations

1. The federal Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) was passed in 1994 to encourage military service by making it easier for service personnel to return to civilian life after duty. While it is doubtful that this law is directly applicable to pastors under call to congregations, efforts should be made to insure that members of the clergy are not placed at a disadvantage by their involuntary call-up.
2. For a call-up of 18 months or less, a leave of absence should be granted to the pastor by the Congregation Council. The synod should assist the congregation in arranging for interim or supply pastoral care during the leave of absence.
3. If the call extends for more than 18 months, the situation should be reviewed and possibly renegotiated. The leave of absence may be extended, or the pastor could submit a letter of resignation, allowing a new pastor to be called by the congregation.

4. The salary of the pastor should continue until military pay is received by the pastor or the pastor's family.
5. Although the congregation cannot sponsor the pastor in the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program during her/his active duty service, the congregation should continue the pastor and the pastor's family's health benefits coverage until health benefits coverage is provided by the military. If the congregation does not continue the health benefits coverage, the Act does give employees on leave the right to continue their health insurance for 18 months at her/his own expense.
6. The congregation should consider accumulating make-up contributions for the pastor's ELCA Retirement Plan account for at least the 18 months of the leave of absence. It is necessary to confer with the Board of Pensions to determine what is appropriate and permissible under these circumstances.

C. Other Considerations:

1. There will be a delay of approximately thirty days for the chaplain's family members to be incorporated into the military medical system. For this reason, it is important that family members have copies of both (a) the military member's orders activating him or her to active duty, and (b) a reserve identification card. These items could help a family member to receive medical care during the thirty-day period.
2. Medical services for military members and their families are administered under the [Tricare System](#).
3. While on leave of absence, the pastor's housing allowance should continue until the military housing allowance is activated. If a pastor's family is living in a parsonage, arrangements should be made for their continuing in that setting during the leave of absence, or until a new pastor is called. When the military housing allowance is received, that amount should either be offered to the congregation in lieu of rent for the parsonage or used to pay utility costs.

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