Resource Guide for Clergy Renewal (Sabbatical) Leave

This Resource Guide for Clergy Renewal (Sabbatical) Leave is a recommendation for congregations to consider. It is realized that all congregations may not be able to incorporate these guidelines. Other ideas and resources for sabbaticals may be obtained from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Introduction

Congregations considering this resource are encouraged to contact the synod office or a congregation that has participated in a recent leave for additional guidance. This is a recommendation not a requirement in any call document. All numbers and figures in this document are recommendations only. Individual congregations are free to adapt the following recommendations in a way that is best for them.

A sabbatical leave is a time of release from normal duties in order that the pastor may devote time to renewal. It can be an integral and important part of an overall strategy for enhancing the mission of the congregation through pastoral renewal, enrichment, study, spiritual growth, travel, personal and family time, skill development, and/or research. Sabbatical leaves can be of any duration decided upon by the congregation. Up to three months in duration is considered a reasonable time to be considered. The pastor's call or negotiations with the pastor may mention the fact that a sabbatical or clergy renewal time is authorized and will reference this resource.

A full-time pastor will be eligible for a sabbatical leave, if it is a part of the pastoral call, after serving the congregation for six years. During the sabbatical leave, the pastor will be relieved of all congregational responsibilities. During the sabbatical, the pastor is not allowed to be employed by another organization. Pastors who participate in a sabbatical leave will be expected to serve the congregation for at least one year following their return from the sabbatical leave. If the pastor leaves prior to one year, they will be required to return a percent his salary equal to the portion of the unfulfilled year. If the pastor elects to take a sabbatical leave, the pastor will become eligible for another sabbatical once a period of six years has passed and may take as many sabbatical leaves as they are eligible for. Each additional six-year eligibility period will be calculated from the first day of the pastor's most recently initiated sabbatical leave. The Congregation Council will make any and all decisions for granting or negotiating any portions of the sabbatical.

Procedure

After four years of full-time service to the congregation, the Mutual Ministry Committee shall remind the pastor of the possibility of a sabbatical leave after six years and encourage the pastor to take advantage of that part of the call. The pastor must announce their intention to take a sabbatical leave at least one year prior to the anticipated time of the sabbatical leave in order to give the congregation sufficient time to make the appropriate arrangements for the pastor's absence.

Sabbatical Committee

Once a pastor decides to take a sabbatical leave, the congregation should form a Sabbatical Committee of several members of the congregation. The purpose of the Sabbatical Committee is to assist the pastor in arranging for the sabbatical leave and to assist in various administrative issues that coincide with those arrangements.

Once the Sabbatical Committee has been formed, it will review this resource with the pastor and establish appropriate procedures to carry out the committee's responsibilities. The Sabbatical Committee will meet as often as required to ensure a responsible and efficient execution of the pastor's sabbatical leave.

The pastor and members of the Sabbatical Committee will create a written sabbatical plan at least six months in advance of the requested sabbatical. This proposal should address the following:

- Personal objectives
- Program objectives
- A description of the major elements of the experience
- Proposed beginning and end date
- Suggestions of how current job responsibilities will be met during leave
- A plan monitoring expenses incurred during the leave should be formulated
- Demonstration of how the sabbatical will be used to help the ongoing growth and development of the congregation

This written sabbatical plan will then be presented to the Congregation Council during a regularly scheduled council meeting. The Congregation Council may then provide items to be considered by the pastor and the Sabbatical Committee regarding the plan.

The Sabbatical Committee will also assist the pastor in drafting any grants that may apply to the support of the sabbatical.

Funding

The pastor will continue to receive normal compensation and benefits during the sabbatical leave period. The Congregation Council will coordinate with the pastor to find and finance replacement staff as required to be covered during the pastor's absence.

The Congregation Treasurer may establish a separate Sabbatical Fund. Congregations are encouraged to contribute to a sabbatical leave fund on a regular basis. This allows a congregation to have monies set aside for expenses incurred during the sabbatical period. Each pastor may contribute funds from their continuing education fund into the Sabbatical Fund.

The pastor and Sabbatical Committee may apply for any applicable grants to support the sabbatical leave as well. Monies disbursed from a grant will be handled in accordance with the guidelines established by the granting institution. Contact the synod office for information concerning additional funding.

Conclusion of Sabbatical

Upon the pastor's return, the pastor will submit a written report to the synod office and the congregation (no later than three months following his/her return), describing their experiences. This report will include a copy of the final sabbatical plan, any copies of applicable grant applications, a synopsis of the pastor's experience and a final financial report. The congregation will retain this report for future reference and make changes to the guide as applicable. The pastor should also give a report to the congregation in an appropriate format.