



Sabbatical Guidelines for Pastors & Rostered Laity of the Florida-Bahamas Synod ELCA

INTRODUCTION

Professionals throughout our society often suffer from stress and emotional fatigue related to their particular vocations. Some corporations have recognized the negative impact of such occurrences and have decided to offer positive solutions. For example,

Intel, Apple Computers, Ralston Purina, McDonald's, Wells Fargo, Nike and others have discovered that paid sabbaticals after 4-7 years of service energize their leaders for greater vision and productivity. Many use sabbaticals as a recruitment and retention tool.

Roy Oswald, Senior Consultant at the Alban Institute indicates that studies identify the ordained ministry as the #1 "burnout" profession in the country. The primary cause is what pastors refer to as "compassion fatigue":

- Being on call 24 hours with a workday that is 12-14 hours long.
- Taking only one day off per week when most other working people take two.
- Working on holidays such as Christmas and Easter.
- Sabbaticals have a way of renewing perspectives and revitalizing ministries.

WHAT IS A SABBATICAL?

The sabbatical tradition began in the university at the time when the university was part of the church. The idea then was that Doctors of the church, who were the university professors, needed one year in every seven to become students again and to refresh their calling. That tradition is alive and well in all universities and colleges around the world. In recent years sabbaticals have grown in importance among church professionals. Most ELCA synods have a Sabbatical policy. Many congregations have policies for their pastors and lay professional leaders.

WHY SHOULD PASTORS AND ROSTERED LAY LEADERS TAKE SABBATICALS?

Not only are sabbaticals the healthy thing to do, they also have a way of revitalizing ministries. A strong sense of call to ministry and devout loyalty to their ministry settings enable many pastors and professional leaders to persevere in spite of the hardships. However, most will eventually function with diminished effectiveness. Others will seek and accept a call to another ministry setting. Often the stress and "compassion fatigue" have a cumulative effect. Tragically, sometimes pastors and professional leaders depart the ministry altogether.

To prevent this situation from occurring, every congregation and specialized ministry should have a policy of regularly scheduled sabbaticals for its full-time professional staff.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS?

- A GRATEFUL pastor/rostered lay person who returns to God's calling with renewed vigor, insight, appreciation and vision.
- An even MORE GRATEFUL pastor/rostered lay person.
- Pastor/rostered lay person's children who may be thoroughly delighted at the change that has come over their parents.
- A pastor/rostered lay person better equipped for leadership and service in their ministry setting.
- Congregations and other agencies discover resources; perhaps formerly unused when the pastor/lay professional leader was present.

WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED LENGTH OF A SABBATICAL?

The Bishop and the Florida Bahamas Synod recommend that each full time pastor and rostered lay person receive two months of sabbatical leave after four years of service in the same ministry setting.

HOW SHOULD A SABBATICAL BE SPENT?

The Bishop suggests that sabbatical time be devoted to rest, personal study and reflection, and study that will directly benefit the ministry setting.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

The ELCA recommends full salary plus benefits (excluding business expenses) be continued while the pastor/lay professional leader is on sabbatical.

Other expenses might include the salary and business related expenses of a "Sabbatical Associate Pastor." After mobilizing lay leaders and faithful volunteers, most congregations discover that their pastoral care and worship needs require only part time coverage during a sabbatical leave. Cost for part time coverage can range between \$150-250 per day plus business expenses. Full time coverage will often include salary, housing and a full benefit package.

The congregation is under no obligation to fund a sabbatical in any other way.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Scholarships and grants are available for many areas of study and reflection. Contact the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership Development for a current listing. Contact the Office of the Bishop for details.

GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING A SABBATICAL

- Gather resources, consult the Office of the Bishop and develop a plan for your sabbatical. Establish personal goals and objectives.
- Begin discussions with your Mutual Ministry Committee at least 12 months before the sabbatical time.
- Together with representatives from your Mutual Ministry Committee submit a detailed proposal for a sabbatical at least 8 months prior. Anticipate questions and concerns. Be prepared to address funding and cost issues. Secure advocates as needed.
- Contact the Synod Office to request information about grants, study opportunities and candidates for "Sabbatical Associate Pastor."
- Negotiate a contract with a "Sabbatical Associate Pastor" at least 4 months in advance and begin training soon thereafter. The Congregation Council President should be involved in the negotiations.

SUGGESTED READING

Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning by Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff.