

Sabbatical Leave Policy

Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

*I have been made free
by the tide's pendulum truth
that the heart that is low now
will be at the full tomorrow.*

~R. S. Thomas

I. A Brief Theology of Sabbatical

Beginning with the Bible's story of creation, and quietly echoing down through all the generations and communities of the people of God, is the concept of Sabbath: the rhythm of work and rest, and how the wholeness of life is to be found in that harmony. Genesis reports that God rested after the labor of creation, and the writer of Hebrews invites us (with some urgency) to enter into the "rest of God."

Likewise, our word "inspiration" is literally connected to the need to "breathe in" after a period of "breathing out." Those who study parish ministry have found that healthy pastorates (especially those of longer duration) require that attention be paid to this "sabbatical" rhythm if that health – for both pastor and parish – is to be maintained. Far from simply being a "favor" to the pastor, the synod's sabbatical program (outlined below) is designed to offer refreshment and renewal for the whole ministry of the congregation by taking seriously the need for our called leaders to be renewed and, yes, "inspired" by all of the dimensions – rest, reflection, study, prayer, and more – that are included in a period called "sabbatical."

II. General Themes for Sabbatical Leaves

- A. Rest
- B. Time for family and friends
- C. Spiritual growth and renewal.
- D. Intellectual stimulation
- E. Time to explore or pursue a "dream" or "interest."

III. Criteria of eligibility for Sabbatical Leave

- A. Rostered leaders in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod who have served a congregation or institution in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod full time for at least five years (or the equivalent, i.e. 13 years part-time) may apply.
- B. Non-rostered program staff who have served full time in a Southeastern Minnesota Synod congregation for five years (or the equivalent) may apply. (see "IV. Priority for Funding Allocation")
- C. "Second" sabbaticals will be considered after seven years (or the equivalent).
- D. Exceptions to the above criteria will be considered on the basis of urgent need.

IV. Priority for Funding Allocation

Sabbatical funding monies may vary from year to year depending on the synod budget. If funds are available for the calendar year the grant applicant may receive up to \$2,000 from the sabbatical fund, (salary and benefits to continue) and the congregation or institution may receive up to \$2,000 from the sabbatical funds for interim ministry during the applicant sabbatical time.

- A. Rostered leaders will receive priority in funding for sabbatical leaves.
- B. When sufficient funds are available, other applications from the following list will be considered in the following order:
 - a. Rostered staff who have already received funds from the synod for a previous
 - b. Sabbatical leave will be considered if previous leave was seven years or earlier.
 - c. Non-rostered program staff who meet the above criteria.

V. Other Considerations

- A. The general practice is that a sabbatical leave is normally to be considered a period of 3 months.
- B. It is encouraged that following a sabbatical leave, rostered personnel continue to serve the congregation or institution for at least one to two years following the leave.
- C. Rostered personnel and lay staff are encouraged to take all vacation and study leave time allowed in their call/contract.
- D. If it would be helpful to have a Sabbatical Committee member visit a congregation's council to support the rostered staff's sabbatical request, please contact the synod office.

VI. Staffing Issues

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod office will assist congregations in staffing. Multi-staffed congregations may be enlisted to assist smaller congregations.

VII. Other Concerns

- A. The encouragement, interpretation, and promotion of the sabbatical program shall be carried out by the bishop of the synod and by the sabbatical committee.
- B. Resources need to be distributed in such a way that pastors serving small and large congregations may be provided opportunities for sabbatical leaves.
- C. Applications shall be submitted to the Southeastern Minnesota Synod office by July 1 of the year preceding the sabbatical.
- D. Each sabbatical leave applicant should have a "sabbatical committee" in the congregation or institution for guidance, encouragement, and disseminating information following the leave.
- E. A personal interview with the Sabbatical Committee will be required before action is taken on the grant application. Further, the Sabbatical Committee will contact the grant recipient for a sabbatical debriefing in September of the leave year.
- F. The Congregation will continue to provide the rostered/lay staff with the same, previous level of salary and benefits during the sabbatical.
- G. In addition to the synod, the congregation is encouraged to contribute to the rostered/lay staff support for sabbatical.