

SABBATICAL GUIDELINES
Northwest Washington Synod
Adopted by the Synod Council on 14 July 2012

The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath in the Lord. Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you--for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.'
" Leviticus 25:1-7

Preface

Healthy Pastors, Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses and Diaconal Ministers (rostered leaders) are one key to effective ministry. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that extended Sabbaticals for rostered leaders offer benefits for both the leader and the congregation. The Northwest Washington Synod (NWWA Synod) has developed Sabbatical Guidelines to help promote the health and wholeness of all our congregations and rostered leaders.

As spiritual leaders of the congregation, our rostered leaders spend most of their working life engaged in day to day administration, visitation, preparation, teaching, counseling, etc. and are often "on call" in their time off as well. Continuing education addresses their academic health but is not normally designed to nurture the physical and spiritual health of the leader(s). An extended period in which the leader can structure a holistic package of renewal is valuable not only for him/herself, but also for the congregation he/she leads, and God's work in the world. A Sabbatical period provides an opportunity for a rostered leader to reflect on the call to ministry and on her/his relationship with God and God's people.

The Sabbatical period is different from ongoing continuing education in that it provides an opportunity for rest and renewal in whatever form best serves the leader. This may include in depth study but is not limited to that pursuit. Other examples of Sabbatical plans may include personal spiritual enrichment retreats, travel in this country or abroad, work on an advanced degree, service in an alternative setting, the addressing of health issues, and/or other uniquely specific endeavors.

During the Sabbatical period, the congregation may expect to hear fresh voices from the pulpit, entertain fresh ideas from interim teachers and leaders, and experience its own time of renewal, reflection, and recharging. When the Sabbatical period is over, the congregation and leader have the opportunity to share new visions about where God is leading them both individually and collectively.

Sabbatical Guidelines

1. The NWWA Synod recommends that each congregation adopt plans to allow a Sabbatical period of a minimum of twelve weeks (three months) during each seventh (7th) year of continuous service for rostered leaders. In some cases, in consideration of prior and current service in ministry, it may be desirable to plan a Sabbatical period after fewer than six years of service within a single congregation based on the continuous service since the leader's ordination/commissioning/consecration or earlier Sabbatical.
2. Congregations/institutions are encouraged to provide the rostered leader full pay and benefits during the Sabbatical period. Portico Benefit Services is willing to establish an annuity to allow the congregation to fund those costs over the interval between Sabbatical periods. In that way, a rostered leader may start in a new call with a substantial portion of the funding for his/her next Sabbatical period already apportioned in that annuity. Congregations are encouraged to be creative in providing for Sabbatical time for rostered leaders and may consider cooperating with other congregations to manage the costs.
3. Expenses incurred during the Sabbatical will be borne by the rostered leader (eg. supplies, travel, living expenses, tuition, books, etc.). Those expenses may be covered in part or in full by continuing education funds carried forward within guidelines established with the congregation/institution.
4. It should be understood that the Sabbatical time is a period of discovery and renewal for both the rostered leader and the congregation/institution. However, any expectation for continued service by the rostered leader to the congregation after the Sabbatical period is completed should be explicitly discussed and agreed upon prior to the commencement of the Sabbatical period.
5. The rostered leader will report on the activities and insights gained during the Sabbatical time to the congregation/institution leadership within a mutually agreed upon period of time following completion of the Sabbatical period. It is hoped that the congregation will share insights and visions that it has had during the Sabbatical time as well.
6. The Sabbatical period and the terms of it are a mutually negotiated agreement (covenant) between the rostered leader and the congregation/institution. It is recommended that this covenant be made in writing, signed by the rostered leader and the elected leadership of the congregation (usually the council president).