

NORTHWEST WASHINGTON SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

SYNOD OFFICE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

“The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” (Northwest Washington Synod Constitution, Chapter S6.01, Statement of Purpose). The Northwest Washington Synod (“the Synod”) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (“ELCA”) is one of the geographic program units of the ELCA. In all of its service in this synod, in the region, and throughout the Church, the employees of the Synod shall carry out the duties to which they are assigned, in faithfulness to the faith and mission of the ELCA.

The Synod Personnel Committee shall recommend to the Synod Council personnel policies for the Synod, including salaries, fair practices, staff position descriptions, and training. This committee shall be responsible for the annual review of the Synod Office Employee Handbook and recommendations to the Synod Council for revision.

This handbook has been prepared in order that every employee of the Synod may know the terms of employment that will govern his or her relationship with this synod. It is the responsibility of the Bishop and supervisors to administer these policies, with respect to persons in the employ of the Synod. Questions regarding interpretation of policies should be directed to the Synod Council.

These personnel policies do not create, imply, or express a promise of continued employment of any employee by the Northwest Washington Synod (“the Synod”).

1.0 GENERAL

1.1 Authority

Adoption of this handbook by the Synod Council is granted by the general authority in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod. Nothing in this handbook shall conflict with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod or the ELCA.

1.2 Scope

These personnel policies apply to all staff, budgeted or non-budgeted, in the Synod, except where the Synod Council has granted a written exception.

1.3 Synod Personnel Committee

The Synod Personnel Committee will bring reports and recommend policies to the Synod Council and will prepare budget recommendations for staff salaries.

1.4 Exceptions

Exceptions to these personnel policies may be granted by the Synod Council, in consultation with the Synod Personnel Committee, when it is judged that such exceptions are in the best interest of both the Synod and the employees concerned. No exception will be valid unless it is a recorded action of the Synod Council.

1.5 Amendments

The Synod Council may adopt amendments, corrections, additions or deletions to this handbook in its sole discretion. Any such changes shall apply both to persons employed at the time the change is adopted and to persons employed thereafter, unless the Synod Council's action specifically provides to the contrary.

1.6 Distribution of Personnel Policies

The Synod's handbook shall be distributed to all existing staff, when the document is adopted by the Synod Council, and to new employees at the time of employment. A form indicating reception of these policies will be included in each employee's personnel file.

2.0 EMPLOYMENT AT WILL

The goal is that all employees have a productive and rewarding employment relationship with the Synod. Nonetheless, employment is at will. This means that just as employees are free to resign at any time, the Synod has the right to discharge an employee at any time, with or without cause or advance notice, and without compensation except for time actually worked. Nothing in this handbook or that is said or written any place else should be construed as a promise of permanent employment, of employment for any particular length of time, of discharge only for cause, or of a right to any particular corrective action or discharge procedures.

No one except the current Bishop has authority to bind the Synod to policies or agreements that conflict with this policy of employment at will. Any such policy or agreement must be in a written employment agreement signed by the current Bishop. This means that at the election of a new Bishop, employees will submit a letter of resignation for the Bishop's consideration.

3.0 EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATIONS

All employees are considered staff of the Synod and the underlying organizational principle shall be that of a unified work force. Where it is required by law, distinctions will be made between those considered exempt and those considered non-exempt by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

3.1 Regular Full-Time Employees

Regular full-time employees are employees on the Synod's regular payroll when scheduled to work at least 40 hours per week. In general, regular full-time employees are eligible for the benefits outlined in this handbook, subject to other eligibility rules described in the Synod's benefit policies and plans.

3.2 Regular Part-Time Employees

Regular part-time employees are employees on the Synod's regular payroll who are regularly scheduled to work at least 20 but fewer than 40 hours per week. Regular part-time employees are not entitled to Synod benefits unless otherwise specified in the relevant benefit plan document.

Part-time employees will accrue vacation credits on a pro-rated basis, reflecting their fraction of full-time employment, pursuant to procedures established for full-time employees as described in section 12.2.

- A. Part-time employees will be eligible for holidays (section 10.4). Other absences will be as outlined in sections 12.1 - 12.12.
- B. The benefits described in sections 11.1 through 11.9 are provided through Portico and are available only to part-time employees who satisfy the requirements established by Portico.
- C. Survivor benefits, under section 11.7 and the employee assistance program, under section 11.8, are available to part-time employees.

3.3 Temporary Employees

Workers who are on the regular payroll as temporary employees are not entitled to Synod benefits unless otherwise specified in the relevant benefit plan document. Temporary employees are subject to Social Security (FICA) contributions on their wages

3.4 Volunteers

Persons who volunteer in the Synod Office on a regular or occasional basis are subject to the direction and supervision of the Bishop or the Bishop's designee. It is understood that volunteers will be treated with the same care and respect as that accorded to paid staff.

The following sections of these personnel policies apply to volunteers: 10.4 and 5.0 (all articles).

3.5 Exempt and Non-Exempt Employees

Every position in the Synod is categorized as either exempt or non-exempt under the wage and hour laws. Non-exempt employees are eligible for overtime pay. Exempt employees are not eligible for overtime pay. Overtime pay must be pre-approved by supervisor(s).

3.6 Letter of Call or Contract

Those rostered persons serving the Synod under a Letter of Call or Contract are subject to the terms and conditions of the Letter of Call or Contract. Employees under a Letter of Call or Contract are subject to these policies, except where they conflict with the terms and conditions of the Letter of Call or Contract in which case the Letter shall control.

4.0 SERVICE TIME

4.1 General Principle

No rights shall accrue to an employee by virtue of service time, except as specifically stated in these policies; however, in the selection of vacation periods and similar matters, if other factors are equal, preference will be given to employees with the longest period of service.

4.2 Determination of Service Time

Service time depends on the duration of the employee's full-time employment or full-time equivalencies as determined by the Synod Personnel Committee with the Synod or its institutions, a congregation or other unit of the ELCA or one of its predecessor church bodies. The Synod Personnel Committee will determine the nature and extent of the employee's service time and will communicate such determination to the employee in writing.

5.0 EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

5.1 Inclusiveness in Employment

The Synod is committed to both the spirit and the applicable legal requirements of equal employment opportunity. Consistent with this commitment, the continuing policy of the Synod is to afford equal employment opportunity to qualified persons in all aspects of the employment relationship, including hiring, compensation, promotion, demotion, transfer, selection for training opportunities, layoffs, discharges, and retirement.

When the Bishop in consultation with the Synod Personnel Committee or the Synod Council, determines that there is a need for an ordained, clergy employee and/or an employee with Lutheran theological background, training, or experience, only individuals with those qualifications will be considered.

5.2 Employees with Disabilities

While the Synod is exempt from the American with Disabilities Act under provision 101.5.B of the Act, the Synod shall not discriminate in the hiring or employment of individuals who with or without reasonable accommodation can perform the essential employment functions of the position the person holds or seeks to hold. A written job description prepared by the Synod shall define what employment functions are essential.

5.3 Equal Employment Opportunity

As part of the Synod's commitment to equal employment opportunity, the Synod actively seeks to increase the diversity of job applicants and workforce.

5.4 Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment

The Synod is committed to providing a work environment free from all verbal, physical, social media and visual forms of harassment. All employees are expected to be sensitive to and respectful of co-workers and others with whom they come into contact while representing the Synod. All forms of harassment, including inappropriate references to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, age, disability, veteran status or any other reason are strictly prohibited.

A. Examples of prohibited conduct include, but are not limited to:

- Epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping or threatening, intimidating or hostile acts that relate to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, age or disability.
- Written or graphic material brought to, displayed or circulated in the workplace that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group because of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, age or disability.
- Intimidating, hostile, derogatory, contemptuous or otherwise offensive conduct or remarks that are directed at a person because of that person's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, creed, religion, age or disability.
- Using company resources (such as voicemail, e-mail or Internet access) to obtain, deliver, forward, circulate or store inappropriate or offensive materials.

B. With respect to sexual harassment, examples of prohibited conduct include, but are not limited to:

- Vulgar or sexual comments, jokes, stories and innuendo.
- Graphic or suggestive comments about someone's body or manner of dress.
- Gossip or questions about someone's sexual conduct or orientation.
- Vulgarity, leering, inappropriate touching and obscene or suggestive gestures.
- Displaying, accessing or circulating in the work place (including via Internet or e-mail) sexually suggestive photographs, cartoons, graffiti, jokes and the like.

- Unwelcome and repeated flirtations, requests for dates and the like.
 - Subtle pressure for sexual activity.
 - Solicitation or coercion of sexual activity, dates or the like by the implied or express promise of rewards or preferential treatment.
 - Solicitation or coercion of sexual activity, dates or the like by the implied or express threat of punishment.
 - Sexual assault.
 - Intimidating, hostile, derogatory, contemptuous or otherwise offensive conduct or remarks that are directed at a person because of that person's gender, regardless of whether the remarks themselves are sexual in nature or sexual orientation.
 - Retaliation against an employee for refusing sexual or social overtures, for complaining in good faith about sexual harassment, or for cooperating in good faith with the investigation of a complaint.
- C. Harassment, particularly sexual harassment, can be difficult to define. For this reason, the Synod strongly urges employees to use the harassment reporting policy without worrying about whether the conduct involved would be considered harassment in a legal sense. This policy is intended to assist the Synod in addressing not only illegal harassment, but also conduct that is offensive and inappropriate.
- D. Because of the potential for miscommunication, misunderstandings and conflicts of interest, the Synod does not permit supervisors to date those they directly or indirectly supervise. This policy applies to all employees who have the authority or practical power to supervise, appoint, remove, or discipline another employee and those who are responsible for auditing the work of another employee.

5.5 Reporting Harassment or Other Discriminatory Behavior

If at any time an employee believes he/she is being subjected to harassment or discrimination, if an employee becomes aware of such conduct being directed toward someone else, or if an employee believes another employee has received more favorable treatment because of discrimination, that employee is required to promptly notify the Chair of the Synod Personnel Committee, or the Chair of the Synod Council. Any complaint received must be reported to the Bishop and the Synod Personnel Committee. This applies to harassment or discrimination caused by anyone with whom an employee comes into contact as part of the employee's job: supervisors, co-workers, customers, vendors or others. All reported incidents will be investigated under the following guidelines:

- Those in conflict may be separated to protect claimed victims from further harm.
- The accused may be suspended with pay until an investigation is complete.

- All complaints will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible. This means they will be disclosed only as necessary to investigate and respond to the complaint, to management and as may be required by law.
- Anyone who has violated the Synod's anti-harassment or anti-discrimination policies is subject to corrective action, up to and including immediate discharge.
- The Synod will not permit retaliation against anyone who makes a good-faith complaint or who cooperates in good faith in an investigation.

We strongly urge employees to report all incidents of harassment, discrimination or other inappropriate behavior in as timely a manner as possible.

6.0 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

6.1 Employee Eligibility

An employment application form will be prepared for use by applicants. Within three business days of hire or rehire, all new employees are required to provide documentation sufficient to establish their identity and eligibility to work in the United States.

6.2 Personnel Records

The Synod Office will maintain and update annually an individual file for each employee, containing his/her job description, employment application form, interview evaluations, offer letter of employment, letter of acceptance, payroll authorizations, salary information, attendance records, performance appraisals, and other pertinent documents (*e.g.*, sabbatical leaves, continuing education leave). In addition, the Synod Office shall maintain the hours worked each workweek for all non-exempt employees. All personnel files and information are the property of the Synod which reserves the right to use and disclose this information as it deems appropriate. In general, however, it is the Synod's policy to keep personnel records in a locked file with access by only persons authorized by the Bishop.

Employees have the right to review their individual personnel file and all documents contained therein, at a time mutually convenient to the employee and the Bishop. Information obtained from the Synod and personal references are maintained separate from the employee's personnel file and are not made available to the employee.

The Synod will comply with all applicable state and federal laws regarding the confidentiality of medical records.

6.3 Employment of Relatives

The Synod does not discriminate in employment decisions or policies in violation of law on the basis of marital status. Within the Synod Office, persons who are related shall not be employed or engaged under contract in a relationship wherein one relative reports to the other; however, two related persons may share one

position. “Relatives” include spouses, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, first cousins, and corresponding in-laws or “step” relations.

This policy also applies to employees who marry while employed by the Synod. If employees marry or are placed in a position where one reports to the other, one spousal partner must resign within 60 days of the date of marriage, which decision shall be made by the employees. As much as is possible, efforts will be made to transfer one of them to another position within an ELCA organization.

The Synod Personnel Committee will be consulted before a decision is made to employ, contract with, or relocate an employee under this policy.

6.4 Employment and Hiring Procedures

Once the Synod Council selects an employee (6.6), a Letter of Employment will be sent by the Synod Council to the new employee. In addition, Letters of Call will be issued for those on the ELCA rosters of Clergy and Deacons. Letters of Term Call setting forth the specific start and end dates of employment may be issued for rostered persons, in conjunction with Letters of Employment. Staff position vacancies shall be posted in the Synod Office and such positions may be posted at other church related offices. Positions also shall be announced by the Synod’s official media. Such postings will include the position’s description and salary range.

Exceptional situations may require filling positions without a posting. The appropriateness of this action shall be determined by the Synod Personnel Committee in consultation with the Bishop.

The Synod may enter into contractual agreements with employees for particular positions. These contracts shall provide for a start date, a specific compensation, and an end date of employment.

6.5 Promotion and Transfer

The Synod is committed to encouraging employees in their professional growth. Opportunities for such growth may include promotion and/or transfer to another position.

To be eligible to apply, employees generally must have been in their current position for at least six months and have been performing satisfactorily their current job. Employees who are interested in an open position are encouraged to discuss their interest with the Bishop.

Transfers and promotions must take into account staffing needs in the employee’s current area, and will be granted only when determined by the Synod Personnel Committee in consultation with the Bishop to be in the best overall interest of the Synod.

6.6 Hiring Procedures

The Bishop or his/her designee will review applications, select and interview candidates for each position and choose one candidate to be presented to the Synod Council for ratification. All offers of employment are to be sent to the ratified candidate by the Chair of the Synod Council.

No promises, commitments or representations which are inconsistent with or override these hiring procedures may be made to an employee or prospective employee without the prior written approval of the Synod Council. Any such promise, commitment or representation shall be void unless it is in writing and signed by the Chair of the Synod Council. This policy also applies when a change of status or responsibility is being considered for a current employee.

7.0 ANNUAL EVALUATION

- A. A formal written evaluation process for all employees will be conducted annually by the Bishop. A member of the Synod Personnel Committee may be present during the review. The Synod Personnel Committee is responsible for developing and implementing evaluation procedures, and reporting the completion of the evaluation process to the Synod Council. The written evaluation will be reviewed with the employee.
- B. Employee evaluations are intended to provide constructive and useful assessments of the employees' performance, support, and nurture, to assist in the development and fulfillment of the employees' career or occupational goals, and to provide information for the salary recommendation process. Employees are encouraged to provide feedback about their work conditions and resources.
- C. An unsatisfactory review indicates employment may not continue unless performance improves. Depending upon the circumstances, an unsatisfactory review may result in immediate discharge.
- D. A summary evaluation and recommendations will be provided to the employee for mutual conversation and signatures. Following conversation, a copy of the written evaluation will be filed in the employee's personnel file in the Synod Office. Disputed evaluations will be handled according to the grievance procedures outlined in section 14.

8.0 COMPENSATION PROGRAM

All decisions about compensation are made by the Synod Council at its discretion. Compensation adjustments do not take effect until confirmed in writing by the Synod Personnel Committee.

8.1 Salary Recommendation

The Synod Personnel Committee, after consultation with the Synod Finance Committee and Synod staff, will recommend to Synod Council all compensation changes for each employee of the Synod.

8.2 Overtime

- A. The Synod pays overtime to non-exempt employees according to federal and state law.
- B. A non-exempt employee must record the number of regular and overtime hours worked each workweek. The employee must certify he/she has accounted for all hours worked each week. Working overtime without recording time, or without prior permission, is strictly prohibited and will result in corrective action, not reward. Exempt employees may also be asked to record the number of hours worked (for workers' compensation reporting/billing/other) purposes, and for keeping track of full days taken as vacation or sick leave.
- C. For overtime calculation purposes, a new workweek begins at 1:00 am, Monday.

8.3 Pay Periods

Paychecks are issued the 15th of every month. If a normal payday falls on a non-working day, paychecks will be issued on the last working day preceding the non-working day. Deductions will be made from gross pay as required or allowed by law or as authorized by the employee.

Although the Synod shall endeavor to be accurate in maintaining payroll records, occasionally an employee may be paid more or less than appropriate. If the employee or the Synod determines a paycheck is more than it should be, the Synod will make a corresponding deduction from the next paycheck or arrange for the employee to pay the overage back over several paychecks. If the employee or the Synod determines a paycheck is less than it should be, the Synod will make a corresponding payment in the next paycheck or the employee may arrange to have the shortage repaid at another time.

As a rule, the Synod does not advance pay or benefits.

To the extent allowed by law, the Synod reserves the right to offset against an employee's compensation the amount of any loss suffered as a result of the employee's misconduct or negligence.

8.4 Fees for Services

Additional income for performing the normal duties and responsibilities of a position is not to be expected or accepted by an employee.

8.5 Gifts; Conflicts of Interest

An employee may not directly or indirectly solicit or accept personal fees or commissions in connection with Synod activities. An employee may not solicit gifts or gratuities from suppliers or anyone else doing business with the Synod. An employee may accept occasional gifts from business acquaintances as a by-product of a healthy business relationship, but only if the gift is of a modest or nominal value (less than \$50) and only if there is no conceivable connection between the gift and any transaction with the Synod.

Employees are to avoid placing themselves in positions that may create or lead to a conflict of interest or the appearance of one. Employees are also prohibited from having any personal interest, directly or indirectly, in any transaction with the Synod. Owning one percent or less of the stock in a company is not a violation of this policy nor is a personal IRA or pension fund. If an employee becomes aware of a situation that presents a conflict of interest for him/her, he/she must disclose to his/her supervisor the nature of the conflict of interest and must refrain from participating on behalf of the Synod in any transaction or discussion involving the conflict of interest.

8.6 Garnishments and Wage Assignments

The Synod is bound to honor wage assignments as they represent a legal order to withhold and pay out a specified amount of an employee earnings. If wages are attached, the employee will be notified, and must obtain a court order or withdrawal of the attachment/garnishment by the attaching party to prevent said deductions from being made.

9.0 REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES

9.1 General Principle

Costs for transportation and lodging associated with reimbursable travel associated with Synod business must be approved by the employee's supervisor prior to travel commencing. Food and other appropriate expenses are to be obtained from moderately-priced vendors. All air travel will be paid at coach fares.

The use of Synod credit cards for reimbursable expenses must be in accordance with the Synod Credit Card policy.

9.2 Use of Personal Automobile

Reimbursement shall be made for the use of an employee's personal automobile in accordance with the current rate published by the Internal Revenue Service.

10.0 WORKING HOURS, HOLIDAYS AND ON THE JOB

10.1 Working Hours

The public office hours for the Synod Office are Monday through Thursday, 9:00 AM. to 4:00 PM. Staff schedules will be coordinated by the Bishop based on each employee's job description. Work schedules will normally be on the basis of a 40-hour work week. The actual times an employee works may or may not be the same as the Synod's public office hours, depending on the employee's position, the needs of the Synod. Schedules will be set to ensure coverage of the office hours as stated above.

10.2 Lunch Periods and Breaks

Non-exempt employees are entitled to an unpaid one-half hour lunch period approximately mid-way through the workday. Non-exempt employees are also entitled to a paid 10-minute break every four hours, unless the job allows them to take equivalent intermittent rest periods.

10.3 Attendance

Absenteeism and tardiness can cause problems for employees who cover for or depend on the work of the absent or late employee. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness will affect performance evaluations and may result in suspension or discharge. The Synod and the employee will maintain adequate attendance records for payroll purposes and for meeting appropriate wage and hour requirements.

10.4 Overtime and Holidays

Non-exempt employees who work in excess of 40 hours a week will be compensated one and one-half times their regular hourly pay rate.

The Synod Office will be closed on the following official holidays. Employees who are eligible for overtime and who are required or requested to work on holidays will be compensated at one and one-half times their regular hourly pay rate.

Labor Day	New Year's Day
Day before Thanksgiving	Martin Luther King's Birthday
Thanksgiving Day	Presidents' Day
Christmas Eve Day	Maundy Thursday
Christmas Day	Memorial Day
Independence Day	

The Synod Office will also be closed the day following the Synod assembly.

When one of the listed holidays falls on a Saturday, the Synod Office normally will be closed on Thursday. If the holiday falls on Sunday, the Synod Office normally will be closed on Monday.

10.5 Personal Days

Each employee will be entitled to two personal days on an annual basis. Personal days must be approved by the supervisor. Except in special circumstances, personal leave usually will not be granted to employees who have not completed their first three months of employment. Persons hired during the first half of the year will be eligible for two personal days. Those hired during the second half of the year will be eligible for one in their year of hire.

If personal days are not taken, they may not be carried over to the following year. Persons leaving the employ of the Synod will not be reimbursed for unused personal days.

10.6 Donation of Vacation and Personal Days

In cases of emergency, as determined by the Synod in its sole discretion, employees may be allowed to donate their unused vacation and personal days to a colleague in the Synod office.

10.7 Drug-Free Workplace

The Synod maintains a drug-free workplace. Except as specifically described below, we strictly prohibit:

- A. Trafficking of alcohol or drugs, legal or illegal, while on the Synod's premises, or time, or while representing the Synod.
- B. The possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs at any time, on or off the job.
- C. Being impaired by alcohol or drugs, legal or illegal, while on the Synod's premises, or time, or while representing the Synod.

Employees who violate this policy are subject to corrective action, including discharge.

The use of legal (over-the-counter or prescription) medications is not a violation of this policy, provided that if the employee is taking a legal medication that may affect his/her job performance or safety, the Synod may require said employee to provide a medical opinion that he/she is able to carry out his/her job responsibilities while taking such medication before being allowed to work.

The responsible consumption of alcohol at Synod-sanctioned events (*e.g.*, holiday parties or dinners) is not a violation of this policy. Employees are expected to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the event and are strictly prohibited from operating motor vehicles or other equipment while under the influence of alcohol.

10.8 Substance Abuse

Any employee whose abuse of alcohol or drugs, legal or illegal, results in job performance problems (*e.g.*, absenteeism, tardiness, poor work) or misconduct is subject to corrective action for the performance problems or misconduct. The

Synod may, at its discretion, agree to reduce the severity of the corrective action if the employee participates in a rehabilitation program.

If an employee voluntarily requests assistance for drug or alcohol problems (before being referred for drug or alcohol testing), the employee will be encouraged to enroll in a rehabilitation program. After available vacation and sick leave benefits are exhausted, the employee may be placed on a medical or personal leave of absence for the period of rehabilitation. A voluntary decision to seek assistance will not be used as a basis for corrective action. The synod strongly encourages employees to obtain immediate help with any substance abuse problem.

The employee will be responsible for all costs associated with rehabilitation treatment. However, drug and alcohol rehabilitation may be covered in part by the Synod's group medical insurance plan.

The Synod will do its best to ensure information about any substance abuse problem or treatment is disclosed only to those with a need-to-know.

10.9 Smoke-Free Workplace

The Synod maintains a smoke-free workplace. Smoking is prohibited everywhere in Synod buildings. If an employee chooses to smoke, he/she must smoke outside and must stand far enough away from entrances and air intakes so that the smoke stays outside.

10.10 Confidential Information

The Synod considers all information about the Synod, the congregations and the rosters of the Synod that is not generally known to the public, to be confidential. Employees are reminded of their duty to keep all of this information confidential and not to disclose confidential information except as required by law.

11.0 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

11.1 Social Security

The Synod shall make contributions for its lay employees only as required of employers under the Social Security Act. "Social Security Offset" may be provided to ordained persons who are employees of the Synod.

11.2 Workers' Compensation

As required by state law the Synod provides workers' compensation insurance coverage for all employees at no cost to the employee.

11.3 Pension Plan and Other Benefit Plans

The Synod provides a pension plan for the benefit of its full-time employees and other employees according to the requirements of the ELCA Board of Pensions. In addition, there are plans which provide for disability, survivor, medical and dental benefits.

Detailed information regarding benefits provided to Northwest Washington Synod employees are maintained by Portico and are available to all employees. Further inquiries or questions should be directed to Portico or the Synod Personnel Committee.

Employees who choose not to participate in the ELCA Managed Care Plan may have funds that otherwise would be expended for this purpose on their behalf utilized for their benefit through participation in a “cafeteria plan.”

If an employee opts out of the health benefits program, that person’s salary will be increased by the amount of savings to the Synod. Funds placed in the cafeteria plan would then be used for medical/dental expenses not covered by the employee’s health program. At the end of the fiscal year any funds not used would revert to the Synod. A salary increase for reduction in the number of family members covered would be granted only if the person deleted was the spouse, or if other than the spouse, the person deleted continued to qualify as a dependent (that is, the person continued as a member of the employee’s household and the employee provided more than half of the dependent’s total support).

11.4 Travel Accident Insurance

Business travel accident insurance is provided for all employees at the Synod’s expense, and covers accidents involving death or dismemberment while traveling in the interest of the Synod. The principal sum of this coverage is five times the current annual salary of the respective employee (minimum of \$100,000 and maximum of \$400,000). It is also possible for employees, at their own expense, to increase the total amount of this coverage, for themselves and their families, and to extend coverage to non-working hours and days.

11.5 Voluntary Salary Reduction Contributions and Additional Participant Contributions

Under provisions of the Optional Pension Plan, the employee may enter into a signed agreement with the Synod, to reduce the employee’s compensation and have the reduced amount credited on a before-tax basis to the employee’s account, under the Optional Pension Plan. The employee may also contribute to another pension or annuity plan of his/her choice, provided the total of all amounts contributed to all such plans, including the employer’s contribution, do not exceed the current allowable limits under the Internal Revenue Code.

11.6 Survivor Benefit

In the event of death of an employee, his/her salary will be paid to their surviving spouse or designated beneficiary of his/her pension plan through the month in which death occurs, plus one additional month. Where there is no surviving spouse or designated beneficiary, a decision concerning payment to surviving dependents shall be made by the Synod Council in consultation with the Synod Personnel Committee.

11.7 Employee Assistance Program

This Synod offers an Employee Assistance Program (“EAP”) to employees and their dependents. The program is designed to assist in solving human problems that affect job performance and overall lifestyle. Employees and their dependents have access to this confidential assessment and referral service for problems including: chemical dependency, depression, family communications, health, financial or legal difficulties. This 24-hour service is provided as an employee benefit.

11.8 Unemployment Compensation

Synod office staff employees are eligible for unemployment compensation and the Synod will cover the cost of unemployment insurance contributions for office staff level employees who work at least 75% of full time.

11.9 Revisions to Benefits

This handbook generally describes the current benefits package of the Synod. It does not promise that any particular kind or level of benefit will continue in the future. The Synod reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to terminate or modify benefits at any time at its discretion with or without advance notice. Changes in benefits, however, will not affect rights that have vested under the terms of any written benefit plan as determined under the federal employee benefits law (“ERISA”).

12.0 ABSENCE FROM WORK

12.1 Sick Leave

It is the philosophy of this Synod that being paid for sick leave is a privilege, not a right. Consequently, all employees are expected to be at work except when actually ill or when their absence is specifically approved for some other valid reason.

An employee who finds that he/she is going to be absent from work shall inform the Bishop of the nature and duration of the absence. An absence of one day without proper notification and communication from the employee shall be cause for dismissal.

Commencing on the first day of employment, employees shall receive paid sick leave for absences due to illness or injury at a rate of two days per month worked. For purposes of these personnel policies, illness may include disability resulting from pregnancy or childbirth. Sick leave must be used during the calendar year in which it accrues, or within the first three months of the following calendar year. No payments are made for accrued unused sick leave at any time, including upon termination of employment. Exempt salaried employees (salaried employees who are not eligible for overtime) may use sick leave only in one day increments and will not have their sick leave accounts charged for absences of less than one day.

This policy relating to time off from work is included as a part of the Synod’s concern for the welfare of the employee and entails a mutual respect and trust

relationship between the Synod and the employee. Should extended and/or recurring health problems prevent an employee from satisfactory work performance, that employee should notify the Synod Office. Sick leave is not to be interpreted as a benefit accruing to the employee. Ordinarily, sick leave in excess of 24 working days in a calendar year will be without pay.

Please note that absenteeism may result in corrective action, including discharge, even if available time off (*e.g.*, vacation, sick leave) has not been exhausted, unless otherwise required by law.

Employees may use their sick leave to care for a sick child or other relative under certain circumstances. The person to be cared for must be a child with a health condition that requires treatment or supervision or a spouse, parent, parent-in-law, or grandparent with a serious health condition or an emergency condition. Sick leave cannot be taken for this purpose before it is earned.

12.2 Vacations

- A. All vacation time must be used during the calendar year in which it is earned, except as indicated in paragraph E below.
- B. Regular full-time employees will be granted vacation time based on years of service in accordance with the following schedule:

one to two years	10 working days
three through five years	15 working days
six years and beyond	20 working days
- C. Regular full-time employees shall accrue vacation time monthly, on a pro-rated basis, during their first calendar year of service with the Synod in accordance with the schedule above. A calendar year is defined as January 1 through December 31. No vacation may be taken until the employee has completed 90 days of employment with the Synod.
- D. The above schedule applies to all employees except rostered staff. Vacation time for rostered staff is specified in the Letter of Call.
- E. An employee may carry up to ten days of unused vacation into the following calendar year subject to approval of the Bishop. The maximum number of vacation days taken in any calendar year may not exceed six weeks (30 days).
- F. For purposes of determining the amount of vacation to be granted to them, persons who previously have been employed by an ELCA-related organization (regional center for mission, synod, congregation, institution and/or agency affiliated with or related to any unit of the ELCA) at any time within a five year period preceding their employment with this Synod, shall have 100% of that service counted.
- G. Part-time employees will receive pro-rated vacation, as described in section 3.2.

- H. An employee who becomes ill or injured during vacation may request that the time be counted as sick leave rather than charged against accrued vacation. Substitution of sick leave for vacation must be approved by the Bishop and confirmed by the employee's physician.
- I. A non-exempt employee will be paid for normally scheduled hours at the employee's regular rate for each day of vacation. The pay for exempt employees will be continued as if the employee were working. In addition, exempt employees may use vacation in only one-day increments and will not have their vacation accounts charged for absences of less than one day.
- J. An employee may not take vacation before he/she actually earns it. Vacation days may be taken only with the approval of the Bishop or his/her designee and are to be recorded on a form provided by the Synod Office. The Synod Office shall schedule vacations in a manner that provides for maintenance of office functions.
- K. Departing employees who have completed one year of employment generally will receive payment for accrued unused vacation. If, however, the Synod determines that the employee is discharged for misconduct or if an employee resigns without giving two weeks advance notice, no payment for accrued vacation shall be made, unless otherwise required by the law.

12.3 Medical Leave

In situations where paid sick leave or paid disability leave is not available, the Synod may choose to provide an unpaid medical leave of absence. Available vacation shall be used first to continue compensation during what would otherwise be an unpaid medical leave. The granting of such leave is entirely at the discretion of the Synod unless otherwise required by law.

Total medical leave including paid sick leave and paid disability leave normally is limited to 12 weeks in any 12-month period. Cases of disabilities that qualify for protection under federal, state or local disability discrimination laws shall be governed by those requirements.

The Synod requires medical certification to support a request for medical leave whenever the leave is expected to extend beyond five consecutive working days or will involve intermittent or part-time leave. Furthermore, the Synod may require second or third opinions at its option and expense.

During medical leave an employee is expected to keep the Bishop apprised of the status of his/her condition and anticipated date of return.

Medical leave automatically ends when the employee is physically able to return to work. However, the Synod requires the employee to provide a medical certification of fitness for duty to return to work after a medical leave that extends beyond ten consecutive working days, that involves a mental disability or substance abuse, or that involves a medical condition which may present a serious risk of injury.

12.4 Jury Duty

Regular full-time and part-time employees who have completed their first three months of employment shall be entitled to full pay during jury duty leave of up to two weeks each time they are called for jury service. All other periods of jury duty are unpaid. An employee must provide the Bishop with a copy of the jury duty summons as soon as possible after receiving it and documentation upon completion.

12.5 Church Activities

An employee who is a delegate to an ELCA national convention or a member of an ELCA national committee may be granted paid leave by the Bishop while serving in that capacity, provided his/her absence does not seriously impair the functioning of the Synod Office.

12.6 Leave Without Pay

Leave without pay may be granted by the Bishop for personal reasons, after due consideration has been given to the work requirements of this synod. Leave without pay may be granted for a period up to six months. Such leaves of absence are granted by the Bishop. Service credits and other benefits do not accrue to an employee while on a leave without pay.

The person granted the leave without pay shall be authorized to return to the same position at the end of the authorized absence. Any replacement hired to fill the position during the absence shall be clearly informed that his/her employment is temporary. If the person does not return to work at the conclusion of the authorized absence or requests additional time off, a determination as to whether the position shall remain open shall be made by the Bishop in consultation with the Synod Personnel Committee.

12.7 Military Leave

The Synod follows federal law regarding the granting of time off for military duty.

12.8 Bereavement Leave

The Synod provides regular, full-time and part-time employees who have completed their first three months of employment with paid leave for up to five days in the event of the death of a spouse, domestic-living partner, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or corresponding in-laws or “step” relations. In emergency situations leave with pay may be granted for a reasonable period of time by the Bishop in consultation with the Synod Personnel Committee.

12.9 Family Leave

- A. The Synod complies with the current Washington State’s Paid Family and Medical Leave laws, and all applicable state laws related to family and medical leave. This means that, in cases where the law grants an employee more leave than the leave policies outlined in this handbook provide, the Synod will give the employee the leave required by law.

- B. Substitution of paid leave: At the employee's request, or the Synod's, certain kinds of paid leave may be substituted for unpaid FMLA leave.

Accrued vacation and paid personal leave may be substituted for any type of FMLA leave. Accrued medical/sick leave, and accrued paid family leave, may be substituted only in the circumstances where state law or Synod policies allow use of paid leave. In general, sick leave may be used only for leave taken because of an employee's health condition. You may use accrued sick leave may be used to care for your child under 18 years of age who has a health condition that requires treatment or supervision, as allowed by Washington law.

If any accrued paid leave that may be used for the kind of FMLA leave you are taking, it is our policy that you must use that paid leave as part of your FMLA leave. For example, if you wish to take twelve (12) weeks of FMLA leave due to your own serious illness and you have accrued two weeks of vacation and two weeks of sick leave, you would first take two weeks of sick leave, then two weeks of vacation, and then have eight weeks of unpaid FMLA leave available.

If you use paid leave for a purpose for which FMLA leave would be available, it is our policy to designate your paid leave as counting against your FMLA leave allowance. You are required to notify us if you use paid leave for a reason covered by the FMLA so that we may properly account for the leave.

- C. Leave due to the birth of a child, or the placement of a son or daughter with an employee for adoptive or foster care may not be taken on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis without the mutual consent of the Bishop and the employee. Leave for serious health conditions (either of the employee, or the employee's spouse, child or parent) may be taken intermittently or on a reduced schedule basis when medically necessary. Leave taken on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis will reduce the total amount of leave to which the employee is entitled by the amount of leave actually taken.
- D. Whenever possible the employee shall provide 30 days' notice of the leave or such notice as is practicable. Similar notice shall be given when leave is scheduled on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis. The employee also shall make a reasonable effort to schedule intermittent absences so as not to unduly disrupt the operation of the Synod Office.
- E. In circumstances where a leave exceeds two weeks or ten working days, the employee shall keep the Synod informed regarding status and intent to return to work at least every two weeks.

The employee also shall provide medical certification of his/her fitness to return to work after medical leave: that extends beyond ten consecutive working days, that involves a mental disability or substance abuse, or that the medical condition may present a serious risk of injury.

- F. While on an approved, unpaid family leave, the payment of premiums to maintain continued medical and dental insurance coverage is the responsibility of the Synod. Synod payments to the group pension plan also will continue to be made in the usual manner.
- G. Except as provided by legislation, the Synod will hold an employee's position open while he/she is on an approved family leave, and he/she shall be entitled to equivalent employment benefits, pay and other forms and conditions of employment.

Service credits and other benefits do not accrue to an employee while on an approved, unpaid family leave.

12.10 Maternity and Parenting Leave

- A. Maternity Leave. Maternity leave is treated under Paid Family and Medical Leave, section 12.9, for any other short-term disability, except that leave shall be granted for the entire period of temporary disability due to pregnancy or childbirth. Maternity leave is for the period of disability only, and not for the child rearing after the disability ends. The Synod's pregnant staff members also shall be permitted to use accrued vacation and/or personal days in conjunction with a pregnancy, and are eligible for parenting leave (12.9.C). Employees who will be absent due to maternity leave shall provide as much advance notice as possible. Employees desiring additional leave may apply for leave without pay under sections 12.6 and 12.9.

Disabilities relating to maternity and childbirth are treated the same as any other disabilities, for purposes of sick leave, under section 12.1.

- B. Parenting Leave. Parenting leave is treated under Paid Family and Medical Leave, section 12.9. Employees who wish to use this benefit shall provide as much advance notice as possible. Parenting leave shall be granted at the time requested by the employee, unless the Bishop determines that rescheduling is necessary to meet the work requirements of this synod.

12.11 Requests For Leave

Requests for leave should be submitted in writing to the Bishop or his/her designee as far in advance as possible. All requests for leave must indicate the date anticipated of return to work.

12.12 Absence Due to Weather or Travel Conditions

An employee will not forfeit pay for a day on which he/she is unable to report for work because of the closing of the office, a breakdown in public transportation facilities due to an accident, strike, or hazardous weather conditions, provided the employee has made every reasonable effort to utilize alternate methods of

transportation and has notified the Synod Office and/or the Bishop. However, when the Synod Office is open, non-exempt employees who do not report to work will not be compensated for time missed, but may use a day of vacation to compensate for time lost. Exempt employees, who are not paid for overtime work, will have their salaries continued.

If an employee is not able to report to work as scheduled due to bad weather, he/she shall advise the Synod Office and/or the Bishop as soon as possible.

13.0 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

13.1 Continuing Education

Continuing education is an opportunity in which the Synod's employees develop knowledge, acquire new skills, and experience growth for more effective service. Continuing education activity shall be related to the employee's job responsibilities.

- A. Funding. Funds for continuing education shall be budgeted by this Synod and sent annually to the Financial Services Office (FSO) at Region 1 for the specific leader. The employee and the Bishop may negotiate to bank funds and time allocated to continuing education for a period up to three years. Expenditures shall be authorized by the Bishop. Funds remaining in a rostered leader's account at the end of their synod call will be available to that rostered leader for future continuing education.
- B. Time. With the approval of the Bishop, employees shall be eligible to take up to five days of time each year for continuing education purposes. Time for continuing education is to be arranged in consultation with the Bishop.
- C. Planning. The determination of an employee's plan for continuing education for the coming year is part of their annual evaluation. A plan is made in consideration of both the employee's and the Synod's needs.
- D. Cancellation of Continuing Education Courses. An employee may not cancel a continuing education course for which the tuition has been paid without the approval of the Bishop or his/her designee.

13.2 Ongoing Educational Opportunities

Discussion of ongoing educational needs and support are to be part of the annual performance evaluation of each employee. Such opportunities normally require one week of the employee's time and may be of the following kinds:

- A. Opportunities provided by units of the church-wide organization; or
- B. Professional and personal growth opportunities as determined, recommended, or approved by the Bishop and/or Synod Personnel Committee.

Ongoing educational opportunities shall be based on the employee's need, and the need to enhance the work of the Synod.

Ongoing educational opportunities are granted at the discretion of the Bishop and the Synod Personnel Committee, and may not be available each year, and do not accumulate.

14.0 SEPARATION AND RETIREMENT

Except for employees elected by the Synod assembly, all employment is at will. This means that both employees and the Synod are free to terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause or advance notice, and without compensation except for time actually worked. Any exception to this policy must be in a written agreement signed by the Bishop.

14.1 Career Counseling/Outplacement

At its discretion, the Synod may provide terminated employees outplacement services to assist them in locating a new position. This may include such things as assistance in preparing resumes and counseling on job search and interview techniques. Departing employees who are interested in outplacement services may speak to the Bishop, who will advise them of what services are available. The cost of outplacement services shall be the responsibility of the terminated employee.

14.2 Discharge

A discharge is an involuntary termination of employment that is not due to a reduction of force. A discharge may occur at any time and shall be effective at the time notice is given. Normally all discharges shall be reviewed by the Synod Personnel Committee and the Bishop before the discharge decision is communicated to the employee.

14.3 Resignation

An employee may resign by giving written notice of the resignation to the Bishop stating the reason(s) for resignation and the anticipated final day of work. The employee shall give the Synod at least two weeks advance notice of his/her resignation. Failure to do so makes the employee ineligible to receive payment for accrued but unused vacation unless otherwise required by the law of the state in which you work. Employees who resign without providing the Synod two weeks notice normally will be ineligible for rehire.

The Synod shall determine how a notice period will be completed once a resignation has been tendered.

An employee who does not report for work as scheduled without notifying the Bishop and/or the Synod Office of his/her reason for absence, or fails to return to work after being told the absence is not authorized, normally will be treated as having voluntarily resigned without having given advance notice.

14.4 Final Paycheck

A departing employee's final paycheck will have deducted from it any paid time off (*e.g.*, vacation or sick leave) that the employee used in excess of the accrued amounts available to him or her.

14.5 Severance Pay

The Synod is not legally obligated to provide severance pay under any circumstances but may at its own discretion decide that severance pay will be provided in a particular circumstance.

15.0 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

The Synod strives to provide fair and equitable consideration of all employee grievances and appeals. Grievances shall be discussed initially with the employee's immediate supervisor and every effort made to settle the matter at that point.

15.1 Grievance Committee

The Synod Personnel Committee shall handle grievances of employees who do not obtain satisfaction in their initial complaint to a supervisor.

15.2 Filing of Grievance

If a grievance cannot be resolved informally, an employee may file a written grievance with the Synod Personnel Committee with a copy to the Chair of the Executive Committee. The Chair of the Personnel Committee will provide a written response to the grievant within ten working days after the grievance is filed.

The filing of a grievance under this procedure will not delay implementation of any personnel action, including discipline or discharge of the employee. If the grievance is subsequently sustained, the Synod Personnel Committee in consultation with the Executive Committee will determine what, if any, remedial steps should be taken.

15.3 Hearing on Grievance

The Synod Personnel Committee shall schedule the hearing within ten working days of receiving the grievance. The hearing shall be held no later than 60 days from the scheduling date. Notice of hearing will be given at least five working days in advance of the date set for the hearing to the grievant, the grievant's supervisor, the Executive Committee and any other person who the Synod Personnel Committee determines should be notified of the hearing. All hearings will be closed to the public.

Employee grievances shall be processed promptly; however, time limits may be waived or extended with the written consent of both parties.

15.4 Response to Grievance

The Synod Personnel Committee will make a written disposition of the grievance within ten working days of the hearing. If the employee is not satisfied with the disposition by the Personnel Committee, the employee may submit a written request for a hearing by the Synod Executive Committee within ten working days of receiving the disposition by the Personnel Committee.

15.5 Appeal of Grievance Decision

When the Synod Executive Committee receives a grievance appeal, it shall meet with the grievant within 15 working days of the date on which the appeal is received. The action of the Executive Committee shall be final and shall be conveyed to all parties of the grievance in writing.

**NORTHWEST WASHINGTON SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
SYNOD OFFICE HANDBOOK RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I have received a copy of the Synod's Office Employee Handbook dated _____, containing any revisions made through today's date. I will read the handbook and follow the policies in it.

I understand that all of the Synod's policies, including those in the handbook, are subject to changes and exceptions without prior notice at its discretion. I understand that both the Synod and I (the employee) are free to terminate my employment at any time, with or without cause or advance notice, and without compensation except for time actually worked. I understand that exceptions to this at-will policy must be in a written employment agreement signed by the Bishop

The Synod may deduct from my paycheck any amounts I owe to it, including any mistaken overpayments made to me and any paid time off (vacation or sick leave) that I may have used in excess of the accrued amounts available to me.

I acknowledge that the Synod has the right to access all information created or stored on or with company equipment, including e-mail and documents stored on any company computer. I also acknowledge that the Synod has the right to access all physical areas on its premises, including areas that may be assigned to me, such as desks, files or lockers.

I agree to submit to alcohol and/or drug tests if directed by the Synod as a condition of continued employment.

The Synod directs the employee's attention to the introductory sections in the handbook titled "General" and "Employment at Will." Those sections contain important statements about the handbook and our policies. Employee acknowledges having read those statements.

Date: _____

Employee Signature

Employee Name (Please Print)

Please keep a copy of this receipt and acknowledgement for your records.