

**West Virginia- Western Maryland Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Guidelines for a Family Leave Policy**

Background

The issues of family leave policy and practice has become an important one in recent years. The questions of “who should receive leave?” and “for what purposes?” have become complicated as both parents in many families have joined the work force. In addition, the list of situations for which leave is necessary has grown.

This synod is concerned for its congregations as well as its Rostered Leaders. Bishop Dunkin has asked the Committee for Pastoral Support to explore the issue of Family leaves, to determine a fair and reasonable policy. We have explored the policy of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod which has been in force since 1994 and found it useful in meeting our needs.

General Statements Concerning Leave Policy Included In This Report

The Church should include benefits for its called personnel comparable to those of other professionals. However, the Church should not be bound by or confined to the limitations or scope of the policies of other organizations. Therefore, although the decisions contained in these guidelines reflect the general environment of Family and Medical Leave policy, they are not merely copies of some other policy. Instead, they provide policy that will benefit both the called person and the congregation or affiliated agency.

Congregations and affiliated agencies should be familiar with state and federal Family and Medical Acts that apply to secular employers.

It is hoped that in all matters of leave, the called person and the congregation or its affiliated agency, will work together to determine the level of need and a reasonable response. It is hoped that all issues of policy will be approached in the love and care for each other that reflects who we are.

The policy suggested by this report assumes full-time employment. Part-time will be adjusted according to each given situation in a manner acceptable to both the called person and the congregation or affiliated agency.

Definitions

Rostered Person – Pastors, Diaconal Ministers, Deaconesses and Associates in Ministry rostered with the ELCA

Family – Included among members of one’s family may be any or all of the following: spouse, children, parents and in-laws, siblings, spouse’s siblings, grandparents or other family members for whom the Rostered Person has primary responsibility

Illness – “Serious Health Condition”. It is an illness, injury, impairment or physical or mental condition that involves:

- Inpatient care in a hospital, hospice or residential medical care facility or
- Continuing medical treatment by a health care provider

Leave – Time off work agreed upon by called personnel and congregation or affiliated agencies for specific situations involving self or family. At the end of the period of leave, the rostered person will return to his or her same position.

Parents - Includes actual parents or one standing in the place of a parent (i.e. a guardian with whom a person resided as a child)

Primary Caregiver – The parent who is responsible for the daily care of the child or a child caring for a parent.

Siblings – One’s own brothers and sisters, and those of one’s spouse.

Policy Recommendations

Addition of a Family Member

Addition of children to a family includes birth or adoption. In each case the dynamics to family structure and patterns are modified in similar ways. Each addition means a need for a certain amount of time for adjustment to reach an acceptable level of comfort with the changes.

The ELCA recommends six weeks paid maternity leave. In complicated births or other medical concerns, a longer period of leave may be appropriate. In these cases, request for additional leave should be made with a doctor’s recommendation.

In all cases when a child is added to the family, it is recommended that six weeks be granted the Primary Caregiver. In special situations, request for additional leave may be made.

It is recommended that congregations and other affiliated agencies consider instituting a “Phase Back” policy. “Phase Back” refers to a parent returning to work after the addition of a family member with a modified schedule for a specific period of time. For example:

A female pastor gives birth to a child and receives six weeks of paid leave. Then, the pastor returns to her work on a modified schedule. For a time, she might work afternoons making visits and lead worship Sundays. After several weeks, she might add to her schedule by attending evening meetings. After a certain set amount of time, the pastor would work into a full-time schedule.

Such a pattern allows for both parent and child to become comfortable with the changes and demands that are placed upon the church professional.

Family Leave

Family leave refers to extended leave for the rostered person to care for a family member of the rostered person. Such leave begins after all provided paid leave has been used. When family leave is needed to care for a seriously ill family member, the rostered person should state the care he or she will provide and estimate the period during which this care will be provided.

Total family leave should not exceed six weeks during a calendar year. While salary is not paid during family leave, housing and health insurance will continue to be paid by the congregation or affiliated agency. Unpaid salary during this period of leave will be used as compensation provided to an interim pastor or church professional.

Bereavement

At the death of a family member, the called person will be eligible for up to one week of paid leave. If additional leave is necessary for travel or personal need, such extension of leave will be discussed with Congregational Council, Board of affiliated agency or appointed personnel officer. Such agent may grant additional leave.

Sick Leave

The ELCA recommends that up to eight weeks of paid sick leave be granted. Provision is made for partial disability in accordance with ELCA Pension and Benefits guidelines.

Education Leave

See the Call document and Pastoral Compensation notes.