Bethany Lutheran Church
West Branch, Iowa
Rostered Leader Sabbatical Policy

Purpose
In keeping with the encouragement of the Southeastern Iowa Synod and the biblical rhythm of Sabbath, a sabbatical provides an intentional time for rest, renewal, and growth in ministry. As described by the Alban Institute:

A sabbatical offers an opportunity to get off the treadmill and provides an opportunity for renewal of vision and hope. It is more than just a chance to recharge your batteries for another year. It can be a life and soul-changing time, a time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together.

A sabbatical is intended to strengthen both the rostered leader and the congregation for sustained, faithful ministry.

Eligibility
A rostered leader is eligible for sabbatical after 6–8 years of continuous service within the same ministry setting.

Duration
A sabbatical shall be no less than six (6) weeks and no more than three (3) months.

Vacation time shall not be considered part of a sabbatical.

Compensation

- The rostered leader will continue to receive full salary and benefits during the sabbatical.
- Unused continuing education funds may be applied toward sabbatical expenses.
- If an interim or supply leader is engaged, compensation will follow Synod minimum compensation guidelines.

Congregational Coverage and Leadership
The congregation is responsible for arranging and funding ministry coverage during the sabbatical period. Routine administrative matters shall be handled by the Congregation Council and its officers. The congregation is encouraged to view the sabbatical as an opportunity for shared leadership and ministry. Consultation with the Office of the Bishop regarding ministry coverage and interim arrangements is encouraged as needed.

Planning and Approval
Planning for a sabbatical shall begin at least one (1) year in advance.

A Sabbatical Committee that includes at least one council member shall be formed to work with the rostered leader. Together they will:

- Develop a written sabbatical plan
- Assist with congregational preparation
- Ensure clear communication and expectations

The written sabbatical plan shall include:

1. The purpose of the sabbatical
2. Hoped-for outcomes
3. A description of how the sabbatical will benefit both the rostered leader and the congregation

The plan will reflect a healthy balance of:

- Rest and renewal
- Personal and professional development
- Learning for the benefit of the ministry setting

A finalized plan, including dates and coverage arrangements, shall be submitted to and approved by the Congregation Council no later than three (3) months prior to the sabbatical.

Expectations During Sabbatical

The rostered leader will be fully released from regular ministry responsibilities, including communication and decision-making, except in rare and pre-arranged circumstances.
The congregation is encouraged to view this time as an opportunity for shared ministry and leadership growth.

Re-entry and Commitment

In accordance with Synod guidelines:

- The rostered leader is expected to remain in their call for at least one (1) year following the sabbatical.
- Upon return, the rostered leader will share reflections with the congregation, including insights and possible implications for ministry.

Relationship to Synod Guidelines

This policy was created in consultation with the Sabbatical Planning guidelines of the Office of the Bishop of the Southeastern Iowa Synod and is intended to align with those recommendations.

Review

This policy will be reviewed periodically by the Congregation Council.

Adopted by Congregation Council on: August 10, 2026