

Part-Time Ministry and Part-Time Ministers

*Guidelines and Guidance
for Rostered Ministers and Congregations
in the Sierra Pacific Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

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This document is designed as a tool for congregations, congregational leaders and rostered ministers within the Sierra Pacific Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is offered to provide clarity as to what it means to be a part-time minister and what it means to be served by a part-time minister. Additionally, it is intended to facilitate meaningful, mutually-supportive conversations about the scope of responsibilities assigned to part-time ministers and their requisite compensation. This document is considered supplemental to the existing Sierra Pacific Synod Compensation Guidelines.

The Sierra Pacific Synod operates within the boundaries of both the State of California and the State of Nevada – each of which has its own minimum wage levels and employment rules. Congregations (and other calling institutions) should seek pertinent local legal guidance in conjunction with the issuance of a Letter of Call.

The Sierra Pacific Synod is committed to fostering cultures of honesty and mutuality in each of its worshiping communities. We seek to facilitate vital relationships between rostered ministers and those congregations they are called to serve. While such relationships may begin in a pastoral call process, they need to be regularly nurtured and nourished. We understand this to mean that congregational leaders and rostered ministers will review the responsibilities and compensation agreement established by mutual agreement in an initial Letter of Call after 90 days (and annually thereafter) – and together modify those documents as appropriate.

Part One: Thinking about Part-Time Ministry?

WHAT is Part-Time Ministry?

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – in its governing documents¹ – describes ministerial service which is less than full-time and fully-compensated as “shared-time ministry.” “Shared-time ministry” is understood to exist “when an ordained minister is called to serve in one or more settings of this church while earning income from other employment or while devoting substantial time to other activities.”²

While the term “shared-time ministry” is used to be respectful of the need for rostered ministers to earn a living wage, it may be heard as restrictive. Life situations do arise in which a rostered minister may neither need nor seek ‘full-time’ responsibilities and compensation. Similarly, congregations may neither need nor seek the services of a ‘full-time’ minister. We will use the phrase “part-time” throughout this document, believing it provides more clarity as to the type of work we are describing. Additionally, naming the challenge that comes when considering “part-time” ministry may invite congregations and rostered ministers to think creatively about the shape of ministerial service in a given context.

WHY Part-Time Ministry?

The world in which we live is constantly changing. Though our calling to be the gathered people of God remains constant, HOW we best be the gathered people of God within our own communities is not constant. Since the ELCA was formed in 1988, the context of the Church has moved from the center of society toward its edges. Likewise, the society in which we live has changed radically. The advent of the Electronic Age – replete with the internet, smart phones and social networking – has changed the way we think about work and play, about connections and community.

To respond to the needs of this ever-changing world, the shape and our understandings of pastoral ministry may also need to change. Pastors can now stay connected to their parishioners through a variety of electronic means. Visitations which used to occur in homes now often happen in local coffee shops. The expectations for pastors have changed in terms of the types of work they are now expected to do beyond worship leadership, visitation and teaching. It is a challenge for those who work in full-time ministry. It is even more of a challenge for those who serve in part-time calls. Yet we trust that the same Holy Spirit – who has called, gathered and equipped the Church of Jesus Christ for the past two millennia – is at work today, calling, gathering and equipping this church for ministry in this world in which we live.

Part-time ministry may be one effective component of an answer to the question ***“How do we – as the gathered people of God – best be the church in our context today?”***

WHERE is Part-Time Ministry?

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach when it comes to thinking about part-time ministry. Congregational mission contexts change. Unique opportunities may arise when a rostered minister is seeking part-time pastoral work or when a congregation has need of added leadership by a rostered minister.

Some examples of contexts and settings for which part-time ministries may be appropriate are:

- Small-membership congregations seeking a sole pastor in a ministry setting which is unable to support them in full-time ministry.
- New ministries so limited in development that they would require an unwise investment of time and money, if the more typical mission-development approach were employed.
- Ministries wherein rostered ministers receive substantial financial support from other employment.
- Multi-staff congregations looking for ministry specialties, in addition to the services of pastors, deacons, and contracted laypersons.
- Parishes that would benefit from having two or more persons serving a single congregation or multiple congregations but cannot afford full-time salaries for several persons.
- Specialized pastoral or ministry needs of institutions and agencies that may call for a high degree of training and skill but neither warrant investment of appropriate full-time salary nor justify the engagement of a full-time staff person in that position.

The foregoing list is illustrative but not exhaustive. Creative thinking is both encouraged and required when thinking about the appropriateness of part-time ministry in a given congregational context.

THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGE of Part-Time Ministry

The process of calling rostered ministers within the life of the church begins with the discernment of God's will for the congregation or ministry in which they will serve. Prayerfully, the church calls forth those whom they believe God can best use to equip and help them carry out their mission together. Congregations and rostered ministers are continually to seek out Christ's calling to ministry in their context.

"A call expresses a relationship between this church and the person called involving mutual service, support, accountability, supervision and discipline."³

This relationship – between a congregation and a person called – is at the heart of rostered ministry. The church and the called rostered minister work together as members of one body, supporting each other and holding each other accountable as they carry out the mission and ministries to which God has called the congregation.

Because a call to ministry is grounded in relationships rather than the number of hours, the concept of a part-time call to ministry contains an inherent challenge: ***“How does one maintain a full-time relationship amid part-time hours?”*** The need (and desire) to serve and support the congregation must be balanced against the need (and desire) to limit one’s service to the number of hours agreed to in the Letter of Call. Managing this tension requires establishing clear expectations about the responsibilities and the availability of the rostered minister.

Part Two: The Nuts and Bolts of Part-Time Ministry

SHAPING Part-Time Ministry

When considering calling a rostered minister on a part-time basis, it is essential to consider what that person can be expected to accomplish each week. Part-time hours do not provide the same opportunity for ministry responsibilities as full-time hours. This is particularly important to recognize if the minister has been under full-time call and is shifting to part-time, or if the congregation is shifting from the support of a full-time minister to that of a part-time minister.

Hourly Approach

One fruitful way to understand how best to shape part-time ministry is to reasonably identify the amount of time required to accomplish the most essential tasks in relation to the number of hours in the call. For instance, weekly sermon preparation requires 10-15 hours of focused time. Add to that tasks related to worship planning, bulletin preparation and worship leadership, and one will quickly discover that tasks related just to the maintenance of weekly Sunday worship demand upwards of 20 hours per week!

Using an hourly approach, it may be possible to identify the tasks required to accomplish the mission and ministry of the congregation and determine how these tasks will be accomplished, whether by the part-time minister or with the help and support of lay leaders.

Typical pastoral responsibilities include:

- Sunday Worship (approximately 20 hours, as detailed above)
- Bible Study, Confirmation and other educational opportunities (including preparation)
- Council and Executive Meetings (including preparation and follow-up)
- Committee/Team meetings and other administrative or supervisory details
- Pastoral Care including home and hospital visits, counseling members, prayer, etc.
- Pastoral self-care, study and personal development

- Special worship services: weddings, funerals, etc.
- Communications, including phone calls, email, newsletters, social media, etc.
- Involvement in activities sponsored by the congregation
- Involvement in community events
- Attention to matters related to facilities used by the congregation
- Attendance and participation at Synod Assembly, conference gatherings, the Synod's annual Professional Leaders Conference, and other synodical activities
- Other duties as assigned

Focus-Area Approach

Another manner which some congregations find helpful is thinking of part-time ministry as attending to areas of particular focus – choosing an area of primary focus (and perhaps one or two secondary foci) for the rostered minister.

These focus areas might be:

- Weekly worship (as noted above)
- Adult congregational programming (Bible study, Sunday school, etc.)
- Youth and Children's programming (Sunday school, confirmation, Youth Group, etc.)
- Visitation (sick and homebound members, hospital, etc.)
- Community relations, outreach and evangelism
- Stewardship and administration

Secondary areas will be attended to by the minister only as time permits, and will need solid lay leadership. The other areas will have to be the responsibility of lay leadership and/or other staff.

For congregations considering calling a part-time minister, a conversation defining the expectations of the minister is an essential part of the call process. These expectations and boundaries need to be overtly respected, the role of the minister and congregation clearly defined, and an emergency plan established and broadly understood for when the minister is not available. This emergency plan could include agreements with retired ministers, neighboring clergy, lay staff or other leaders.

PARAMETERS of Part-time Ministry

Rostered ministers are understood to hold 'professional' positions in our society and 'relational' positions in our church. Such positions are not hourly, and not defined by hours worked. Rather, persons in such positions are expected – within reasonable limits – to do the work needed regardless of the time taken. In exchange for what is usually more than normal 40-hour work weeks, professionals are granted more flexibility in when to work those hours (several long days, an evening instead of a morning, etc.) than are hourly employees.

On average, full-time ELCA rostered ministers work approximately 40 'regular' hours per week,

inclusive of office hours, Sunday and other worship service times, Bible studies, meetings, confirmation classes, etc. Additionally, they work an average of 15 'irregular hours', including such things as retreats, emergency visits, community functions, reading, prayer, and social and social-media interactions.

For our purposes, the following are appropriate approximations:

Full-time = 40 hours per week 'regular' hours + 15 additional irregular hours
3/4-time = 30 hours per week 'regular' hours + 10 additional irregular hours
1/2-time = 20 hours per week 'regular' hours + 7 additional irregular hours
1/3-time = 14 hours per week 'regular' hours + 5 additional irregular hours

For the purposes of these guidelines, positions envisioned to be less than 1/3-time are considered "contracted service" and are not covered under these "part-time ministry" guidelines.

It is vitally important to note that the governing documents of the ELCA require that "the work-load for the call must be no less than an average of 15 hours per week." Positions descriptions averaging less than 15 hours per week are NOT compliant with those governing documents and may not be the basis of a Letter of Call.⁴

MODELS for Part-time Ministry

When considering the development of a position description for ministers in a part-time call, congregations and call committees have found several models useful. These include (but are not limited to) the models listed below.

Model 1: Additional Days Off Each Week

This is currently the most common part-time model practiced within the ELCA. At a minimum, this will mean that the congregation will need lay visitation people and some lay assistance with office tasks (phone messages, etc.), so that the part-time minister truly is off those days, including being free to work at another job. As indicated in the benefits section of these recommendations (below), the part-time minister working in this model should receive the full-time number of Sundays off (vacation), which is often 4 Sundays per year. In this model, a part-time minister will have days completely free of pastoral responsibility, wherein no work is expected.

For 3/4 time calls, 3 days per week off (plus standard 4 weeks annual vacation)
For 1/2 time calls, 4 days per week off (plus standard 4 weeks annual vacation)

Model 2: Weeks (Including Sundays) Off Per Month

This model allows for a congregation to have a true picture of what part-time ministry looks like

on a Sunday, and many ministers who have worked part-time consider a model that includes proportionate Sundays off the only fair model for ministers, who are otherwise simply expected to do a full-time job at a lower salary. This approach would give a part-time minister the benefit of being able to have some full weekends with family who are often on more traditional work and school schedules. In this model, the minister's vacation would be proportional as well.

*For 3/4 time calls, 1 week (including Sunday) per month off (plus 3 weeks of vacation)
For 1/2 time calls, 2 weeks (including Sundays) per month off (plus 2 weeks of vacation)*

Model 3: Months Off Per Year

This model is a variation of Model 2 noted above. This model might make part-time ministry an attractive option (rather than just a lower-paying option) for ministers who are parents of school-aged children or spouses of teachers/school staff. This might involve either the summer months and/or January off (including Sundays.) In this model, the minister's vacation would be proportional as well (3/4 time ministers would have 3 weeks, 1/2 time ministers would have 2 weeks, etc.).

*For 3/4 time calls, 3 months (12 weeks) per year off (plus 3 weeks vacation)
For 1/2 time calls, 6 months (24 weeks) per year off (plus 2 weeks vacation)*

Model 4: 1/3 Time Minimal Service Model

This model is built upon Model 1: Additional Days Off Each Week as noted above. It is designed to recognize and comply with the minimum standards for called and rostered service in the Sierra Pacific Synod, as defined by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Portico Benefit Services. (Positions which do not rise to this minimal level are not recognized as calls by the synod or the ELCA as noted above.)

The 1/3 Time Minimal Service Model presumes that the calling congregation desires to maintain a weekly pattern of worship, that lay leaders within the congregation are willing to shoulder many of the responsibilities normally expected of pastors and that the pastor called into such a situation is effectively able to maintain healthy boundaries around their calendar.

The rigors of quality worship planning, sermon preparation and worship leadership demand no less than 14 hours per week of focused pastoral attention. Thus the 1/3 Time Minimal Service Model singularly concentrates the rostered minister's attention and energies into that arena.

Nothing beyond worship planning, preparation and leadership, minimal pastoral crisis care and (at most) one regular meeting a month would be understood to be in the portfolio of a part-time minister under this model.

Combination Models

Many part-time ministers and congregations have chosen a compromise model between Model 1 and Models 2 and/or 3 in an effort to make the part-time position workable for the congregation and also a benefit for the minister. For instance, one congregation and minister might agree to a 2/3 time call that builds off Model 1's 3 days per week being off and expands the standard 4 weeks annual vacation to 12 weeks. Another minister and congregation in a seasonal community might negotiate a 1/2 time call that melds Models 2 and 3 that allows 1 week (including Sunday) per month off plus four months off during the 'off-season' (effectively creating a position which is 3/4 time for 2/3rds of the calendar year.)

While the combinations and permutations of such models are limitless, recognize that they must be mutually agreeable to the congregation(s) AND the rostered minister. (Additionally, they must be approved by the Bishop of our synod – potentially in consultation with the Conference of Bishops.) It is also important to note that time off that is part and parcel of being part-time (unpaid time, including unpaid Sundays) is different from vacation time (paid time off, including Sundays.)

Regardless of what model – or combination of models – is agreed upon, it is the understanding of the Sierra Pacific Synod that the particular expectations of the part-time call as agreed upon will be detailed in writing and approved by the entire congregation at the time such a call is extended. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the calling body to regularly and repeatedly remind the congregation of the limitations of the call which has been agreed upon.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS for Part-time Ministry

In developing a position description for part-time ministry, be aware that congregations are required to submit a completed copy of the form Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities for Ministers Under Call⁵ in conjunction with the call process and in advance of authorization by our synodical bishop. In completing that document, congregations must be attentive to the following considerations:

FAIR AND JUST COMPENSATION

The Sierra Pacific Synod is committed to fair and just compensation for its rostered ministers – which is understood to mean compensation comparable to other professionals in the local community of similar education and responsibilities in organizations that are not-for-profit, rendering a service to society and mission-driven. We affirm that ministers in part-time calls are no less deserving of this expectation than those serving in full-time calls. The Sierra Pacific Synod's Compensation Guidelines and Worksheet are the synodically-approved tools for the calculation of appropriate compensation of rostered ministers within our synod, and are available on the synod's website at www.spselca.org.

NEED FOR OTHER EMPLOYMENT

While part-time ministry may be seen as way by some to relieve financial pressures faced by the congregation, it likely shifts those financial pressures directly onto the shoulders of the part-time minister. The part-time minister may well need to seek additional outside employment in order to meet one's basic financial needs – and that other employer may make demands upon the time of the part-time minister which conflict with the desires of the congregation. While each situations is unique, congregations must be respectful of those burdens which additional outside employment may place on their part-time rostered minister.

PENSION AND HEALTHCARE BENEFITS

Rostered ministers who are under a part-time call receive less than full-time pay and work less than full-time hours. While some benefits are easily calculated by a straight percentage; others cannot be. A minimum pension contribution equal to 10% of the minister's Defined Compensation through Portico Benefit Services is requisite to all pastoral calls in the ELCA, and is easily calculated using the tools available through Portico's website. However, healthcare coverage cannot be calculated by straight percentages. **Regardless of the whether the rostered minister is 1/3-time or 3/4 time, there MUST be provision for adequate healthcare coverage for the rostered minister and their dependant family.** If a leader is covered by a spouse/partner's insurance, a contribution could be made to a supplemental pension account in order to keep this benefit in the congregation's spending plan and as a benefit for the rostered leader. Note that our synodical bishop is precluded from authorizing Letters of Call without assurance of adequate insurance coverage for the rostered minister.

EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

Travel Expense Full mileage allowance according to current IRS guidelines should be paid to the minister for all travel expenses over and above transportation to and from the office.

Professional Expenses Ministers have routine expenses such as the purchase and care of robes and stoles, magazines, books and other professional expenses. A set annual limit on professional expense reimbursement may be agreed to each year.

SELF-CARE

Vacation and Days Off It is expected that ministers will receive the full benefit of vacation and that they will also have regular days off as part of their ministry. The value of sabbath is clearly detailed in Genesis 2:1-2 and Exodus 20:8-11. This time is important for ministers to maintain the health of their families and other relationships and for rest.

Compensatory (Comp) Time Some congregations have found it beneficial to offer the equivalent of “compensatory time” to their rostered minister – whether part or full-time – in recognition of extraordinary commitments over a single brief time period. Such may be particularly appropriate when overnight events such as summer camp or extended youth activity are involved. While each situation is unique, it is important to recognize the toll which such demanding times of service may place on the rostered minister.

Sick Leave and Disability Sick leave that is reasonable and necessary for personal illness is assumed, with the congregation paying for pulpit supply as needed. In this event, conversation with congregational leaders is also assumed. Disability compensation of up to two months in a 12-month period and contributions to the ELCA Pension and/or other benefits program should be provided in the event that the minister is physically or mentally disabled. Note that no sick leave or disability time should be considered cumulative or compensated for at the end of a call.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Whether ministry is “full-time” or “part-time”, the Sierra Pacific Synod expects that all of its rostered ministers will participate in the life of the larger church and nurture their personal development as leaders among the people of God. The following items are presumed to be part of each and every call to ministry within our synod:

Continuing Education Rostered ministers – like all professionals – are expected to be diligent in continuing their education. Continuing education is shown to benefit both those serving and those served. To this end (and if at all possible), the congregation shall offer standard amounts of time and money for continuing education. Part-time ministers often have less of their own financial resources to spend on continuing education, yet need continuing education even as full-time leaders do.

Annual Synodical Events Congregations of any size are expected to provide full allowance for participation in both Synod Assembly and the annual Professional Leaders Conference. Time and money provided for such mandatory events does not count against continuing education allowance or vacation. It is part of the ministry to the wider church entailed within every Letter of Call.

Sabbatical The ELCA recommends sabbatical leave, at regular intervals — for extended study and a time of renewal. Sabbatical time of 3 months following upon 7 years of ordained ministry (and after at least 5 years of service in one’s current call) is highly encouraged.

Mutual Ministry Committee It is beneficial to establish a Mutual Ministry Committee so that any issues that arise between minister and congregation can be better mediated. This committee can also be used to offer direction for the minister in setting priorities for the congregation, and could continue to remind the minister and the congregation of their mutual boundaries and responsibilities to one another.

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1. See particularly the "Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America", available online at www.elca.org.
 2. "Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America", pg. 21.
 3. ELCA Constitution, Article 7.44.A16
 4. See page 21 of the "Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America"
 5. The form Definition of Compensation, Benefits, And Responsibilities for Ministers of Word and Sacrament Under Call or is available online at www.elca.org. Additionally, there is a companion "Steps to Complete" guide for that form provided online by the ELCA Office of the Secretary.