

Parsonage Guidelines

Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA

Since there are so few parsonages in our Synod, the helps in this document are not offered as “policy”—but rather as guidelines for those who have parsonages.

ⁱⁱA parsonage is the home provided by the congregation for its minister. It should not only be a comfortable home for the minister and family, but one that also provides an environment that will be helpful to foster partnership and serve to enhance the ministry.

These guidelines are designed to help both the minister and the congregation. Following them will help the congregation become aware of needed improvements and let them know if their parsonage meets the synod-wide standards for their minister. These guidelines will also alert the congregation and minister of any abuses of the parsonage property.

Since the parsonage is the minister’s home, privacy should be respected. Members of the congregation should follow the same standards of politeness for such things as entering the parsonage as they would for any other home in the community. Because it is the home of the minister, his/her desires should be consulted when changes are necessary. The quality of the parsonage should meet a standard set by the homes of the majority of the congregation’s members. The size should be adequate to accommodate families.

The tenant/landlord model may apply on occasion, but its application is quite limited. Contrary to renters, the minister normally has little choice of residence. The relationship between the minister and congregation is not based on a lease or rental agreement, but upon a common bond in the ministry of the congregation. These guidelines are suggested for congregations and their minister to use to discuss the matters of maintenance, repair and responsibilities relative to a church-owned home.

1. Before a minister moves into a parsonage, the congregation should see that it is thoroughly cleaned and may want to use this occasion to update and redecorate the parsonage.
 - The colors, fabric, design, etc., selected in the redecoration would normally be selected by those who will be living in the house in consultation with the appropriate committee. The congregation, of course, shall determine the price ranges for these items.
2. Annual Inspection of the Parsonage and Dealing with Needs
 - As part of the call process, the new minister (and spouse) should tour the parsonage with a member of the call committee, congregational council chairperson and appropriate property committee person and agree as to what repairs and redecorating are to be done before the new minister arrives.
 - There should be an annual inspection of the parsonage by persons designated by the congregational council. The purpose of the inspection is to discover needed repairs, improvements, and refurbishing, and to make short-term and long-term plans for

accomplishing these, with prompt attention given to safety and health factors. This annual inspection is important so that appropriate attention is provided to the home.

- Needs which arise between inspections should be taken care of promptly. It is the responsibility of the minister to promptly make known to the council or appropriate committee the need for any repairs or improvements. It is expected that once a need is expressed, the council or committee will respond appropriately to the request and will coordinate with the minister and family to schedule repairs.
3. It is expected that the following appliances be provided in the parsonage:
 - Stove with oven
 - Refrigerator
 - Dishwasher
 - TV antenna/cable/satellite
 - Air conditioning
 - Humidifier/de-humidifier (if needed)
 - Soft water conditioner (if needed)
 - Washer & dryer
 4. It is expected that the following utilities be paid directly by the congregation or an adequate utilities allowance be provided for the minister to pay for them:
 - Electricity
 - Gas
 - Water/sewer/garbage
 - Telephone (except personal long distance)
 5. Items that would normally be supplied by the congregation include:
 - Paint
 - Wall coverings
 - Floor coverings
 - Ceiling fans
 - Window coverings
 - Light fixtures
 6. Appropriate to the community setting, the following are also recommended:
 - A two-car garage
 - An outdoor living space (such as porch, deck, or patio)
 - A safe and adequate area in which children can play
 7. Services
 - An adequate supply of hot and cold water, in all rooms using water
 - Proper sewage system
 - Weekly trash pick-up when available
 - Water treatment if needed
 - Regular professional pest control if needed
 - Smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, fire extinguishers, and radon inspection where deemed necessary
 - Outside water faucets and electrical outlets
 - Snow removal and lawn service to be determined at time of call
 - Internet service if the Minister maintains an office in the parsonage
 - Every congregation should have internet service to the church office. Wireless modem application might be considered to broadcast to the parsonage as well.
 8. Maintenance and Improvements

- It is important to plan ahead for repairs and improvements. These should be a line item in the church budget in the amount of at least 1.5% of the insured value of the parsonage to take care of routine and emergency expenses. If these funds are not used in any given year, they should be held in escrow for when it is needed. There should be a clear understanding in writing of who can use these funds and to what extent they can be used without the consent of the appropriate committee.
- The electrical service should be inspected, and all wiring, including the installation of circuit breakers, required number of outlets, wall switches, and light fixtures are to meet the National Electrical Code.
- It is important in the interest of both comfort and stewardship that all windows and doors be weather tight, with either storms or thermal pane glass, and that there be screens for all windows. If new windows are installed, they shall be high-performance energy efficient type.
- Both the interior and exterior of the parsonage should be kept in such repair as to preserve not only its physical condition, but also its aesthetic value, and this includes sensitivity to the historical design of a building when making changes. Painting and papering should be done regularly, in consultation with the parsonage family.
- It should be the responsibility of the minister to provide for the cleanliness of it and the repair of any damage that they or their pets have caused to the interior, exterior, or grounds. An exiting minister should also be responsible for removing swing sets, above ground pools, and other personal nonpermanent additions. If, when leaving, the cleaning, restoration, and repair of damage have not been done, the minister will be billed for it. If he/she does not pay this bill, or contests it, a recording of refusal or negations should become a permanent part of the minister's record.

9. Safety and Security

- If security is an issue in the community, whatever is needed to make the dwelling secure should be provided, i.e. dead-bolt locks, security systems, outdoor lighting, etc. A key change is suggested at the time of change of call.
- To make access to the house safe for occupants and guests, the driveway and the steps and sidewalks to all doors need to be of an even surface and kept in good repair.
- All outside steps should have safe and secure railings.
- As noted above, radon detection kits, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors should be provided. Regular testing of detectors should be done, and it is strongly suggested that a mitigation plan be put in place of how to address radon concerns if they arise.

10. Pets in the Parsonage

While it is recognized that it is the right of the parsonage family to have pets, it is also recognized that the ownership of pets requires the minister to assume responsibility for them. At minimum these responsibilities include:

- Caring for the pets in a humane and responsible manner.
- Securing permission of the local church for the construction of any needed facility.

- Assuming financial responsibility for construction, maintenance, and eventual removal (at time of move) of any facility, such as a dog house, fenced enclosure, etc.
- Replacing/repairing any damage done by pets to the carpets, floors, drapes, doors, lawn, etc., as well as cleaning and deodorizing to the approval of the appropriate committee and the incoming minister.
- Any cleaning, repair, or removal resulting from the ownership of pets that is not done by an outgoing minister shall be billed to him/her.

11. A Parsonage Notebook or File -

It is recommended that every parsonage family maintain and pass on to the next minister a notebook or file of records and helpful household data, including, but not limited to:

- A record of the date and place of purchase of all appliances and equipment. Manuals and service contracts for these are to be kept together.
- A record of the date and name of contractor and a description of any work done on the parsonage.
- A record of any decorating or refurbishing, to include paint color, type, brand, etc.
- Any special information necessary regarding shrubs, flowers, etc.

12. When a minister moves out of a parsonage, and before all financial obligations are completed, there should be an inspection of the property to see that it is left clean and in good repair. The minister should be held responsible for any excess wear or damage caused to the parsonage while he or she was living there. This would include any damage caused by children or pets.

13. The grounds around the parsonage are usually the responsibility of the congregation. The congregation should see that the lawn, shrubbery and flowerbeds are in good condition when a minister moves into the parsonage. It should be determined if the minister is expected to care for these grounds (mow, rake, remove snow, apply fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides) or the congregation will bear these responsibilities. (The minister and a person from congregational council should negotiate the division of labor immediately after the minister's arrival.) Congregations should consider taking care of the grounds around the parsonage while the minister is on vacation or study leave if it has been decided this is the congregation's responsibility.

Parsonage Guidelines from other Synods:

- [Eastern Washington Idaho Synod, ELCA](#)
- [Southwest Washington Synod, ELCA](#), p 11 ff.
- [Northern-Illinois Synod, ELCA](#)
- [South Dakota Synod, ELCA](#), also concentrates on "housing equity"

ⁱⁱ From: [Nebraska Synod, ELCA](#)