

**Southwestern Texas Synod**

# Part-Time Ministry Guidelines

Approved by Synod Council September 14, 2013

Version 1  
September 14, 2013

## OVERVIEW

This report outlines recommendations made by a task force of the Leadership Team to the Southwestern Texas Synod concerning how to more effectively do ministry in the increasing number of congregations being served by pastors in less than full-time calls.

This task force consisted of pastors serving in part-time and full-time calls: the Rev. Sue Briner, the Rev. Carmen Retzlaff, the Rev. Lori Ruge-Jones, and the Rev. Bill Swantner. The task force acknowledges that this is a working document and can be fairly modified to meet the needs of the various congregations.

This document is divided into the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** A definition of Part-time Ministry, background and a Philosophy of Call (pp. 2-4)
2. **Part-time Ministry Work:** How to think about prioritizing part-time work, and some suggested models for part time ministry (pp. 4-8)
3. **Just Compensation** (pp. 8-9)
4. **Pension and Healthcare Benefits** (p. 9)
5. **Expense Reimbursement:** Travel and Professional Expenses (p. 9)
6. **Renewal and Self-Care:** Vacation and Time off, Compensatory Time, Sick Leave and Disability (pp. 9-10)
7. **Mutual Benefit:** Continuing Education and other Synodical and Churchwide Events, Sabbatical, Mutual Ministry Committee (p. 10)
8. **Supply Preaching and Presiding** (p. 11)
9. **Open Issues:** Training for Pastors and Congregations, Coaches, Thinking Theologically and Practically about the Eucharist
10. **Conclusion** (p. 13-14)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Definition of Shared-Time Ministry** (from the ELCA Roster Manual)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands shared-time ministry 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.

Mission contexts change. Some examples of contexts and settings for which shared-time ministries may be appropriate are:

- Small-membership congregations with significant opportunities for mission and service.
- New ministries so limited in size or slow in development that they would require a disproportionate and unwise investment of time and money, if the more typical mission-development approach were employed.
- Ministries (e.g., inner city, ethnic, and rural) where the community's expectation is that the ordained ministers or rostered lay ministers will receive primary financial support from secular employment.
- Multi-staff congregations looking for ministry specialties, in addition to the services of pastors, rostered lay ministers, and contracted laypersons.
- Parishes that would benefit from having two or more persons serving a single congregation or multiple congregations but that 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 that may 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, not exhaustive. The particular settings for shared-time ministry will become more evident as this church gains experience with this style of ministry.

### **1.2 Background**

The ELCA defines ministry that is less than full-time to be "shared-time" (see above). However, we will use "part-time" throughout this document, because it provides more clarity as to the type of work we are describing, which is primarily that of a solo pastor in a ministry setting which is not large enough to support them in full-time ministry.

The context of the Church has changed radically since the ELCA was formed. It has moved from the center of society to its edges. There has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of people in our country who identify themselves with no religious affiliation. People who grew up as part of a faith community are choosing not to join a congregation. Across denominations, on average worship attendance and giving to the Church have declined dramatically. Much like the rise of Walmart drove out lots of smaller businesses, the growth of "mega-churches" has come largely at the expense of smaller congregations who cannot "compete" in what has become a consumer-driven culture, where people "church-shop" to find the one that best "fits their needs."

The world has radically changed as well. The advent of the internet, social networking, smart phones that keep people connected 24x7 has changed the way we think about work and play. Pastors, like other working professionals, can now stay connected to their parishioners not just in the office, but by keeping their cell phones close by, hanging out in coffee shops, connecting on Facebook and Twitter.

Where Pastors used to do ministry by visiting in homes, many of the younger generation no longer expect that, and so Pastors have to learn new ways to relate to this younger generation, while still connecting with many in the older generations in more traditional ways.

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 to both pastors and congregations to strike a balance in terms of what they expect and what the pastor can realistically do in an average work week. It is a challenge for those who work in full-time ministry. It is even more of a challenge for those who have part-time calls. But it can also provide opportunities for more flexibility on the part of Pastor and parish, and more growth in the lay leadership of the congregation.

Over 50% of the congregations in our synod are now or will shortly be served by Rostered Leaders or Synodically Authorized Ministers on a part-time basis. Congregations and their pastors are seeking guidance on how to structure their work and life together and how to compensate these leaders justly for the sake of the mission they share. A synod task force was formed under the Leadership Team to provide recommendations to congregations and their leaders about things to consider in calling and compensating a pastor for part-time ministry. As part of their work, they interviewed 10 pastors currently serving in part-time calls in order to get a sense of the challenges and ideas on how part-time ministry can work well. This document applies specifically to rostered leaders, although many of the principles and guidance could also be used for consideration with Synodically Authorized Ministers.

This document is considered supplemental to the existing Southwestern Texas Synod Compensation Guidelines.

### **1.3 Philosophy of Call**

Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rostered leaders may serve as pastors, associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, or deaconesses. The process of calling rostered leaders within the life of the church is therefore primarily about discerning God's will for and God's call upon the congregation or ministry in which they will serve. Prayerfully, the church calls forth those they believe God can best use to help them carry out their mission together.

Rostered leadership is not a self-called vocation but a unique calling from God through the church to serve and equip the whole people of God. This is so that the church can live together faithfully as the body of Christ, equip the baptized for their work, and fulfill its purpose to proclaim and embody the redemptive intentions of God in the world. -- **"A Theology of Call" - ELCA Website**

A "calling" implies mutuality between those rostered people being called and the agency or congregation issuing the call. This mutuality means that congregations and other ministry sites are to live for the well being of the rostered leaders that they call, and rostered leaders are to live for the well being of the communities into which they are called, so that together – with the whole church – they might live in Christ for the life of the world. "We do not live to ourselves..." (Romans 14:7)

The Southwestern Texas Synod embraces Biblical values<sup>1</sup> with regard to the relationship between rostered leadership and congregational life and mission:

- The church is the body of Christ; called to live out the implications of the gospel for the sake of the world. As members of the body of Christ, all members of a congregation provide ministry in the name of Christ. **Rostered leaders who equip the church for the work of mutual ministry are valued. (Ephesians 4:11ff)**
- In the Lutheran tradition, in order that the church may be equipped for ministry, high value is placed on equipping rostered leadership. **The personal, ethical, and educational standards required of leaders are valued. (1st Timothy 3:1ff)**
- Congregations are to be centers of "word and sacrament" as well as caring compassionate communities that are evangelical in seeking and welcoming the "homeless" and the "stranger." **Rostered leaders who equip the church to be so Christ centered that it is outwardly focused are valued. (Matthew 25:31ff)**
- Congregations are continually to seek out Christ's calling to mutual ministry in their context. **Rostered leaders that inspire an ongoing mutual discernment for ministry are valued. (Romans 12:1-3)**

Whether a pastor is called into full-time or part-time ministry, this expectation of mutuality and these Biblical values should be honored.

## **2. PART-TIME MINISTRY WORK**

### **2.1 Prioritizing Work – A Shared Responsibility**

Congregational mission and ministry needs do not change when a pastor is called less than full-time. The shift must happen in who takes responsibility for various tasks and aspects of mission and ministry. This is a conversation that is essential to happen in an open and honest way during the negotiating of the call process, and revised along the way during the tenure of the pastor serving the congregation. This is particularly important if the pastor has been under full-time call and is shifting to part-time; which missional areas will be fulfilled by the laity rather than the pastor?

Expectations for the pastor's role within the ministry ought to be shaped around the gifts the person brings and the percentage of time s/he is called. Part-time hours do not provide the same opportunity for ministry responsibilities as full-time; how will the congregation's mission be re-shaped accordingly?

Areas commonly considered the pastor's responsibility include:

- Hospital visitation
- Shut-in visitation
- Worship planning
- Confirmation planning and teaching
- Preaching preparation
- Congregational Meetings

- Synod committee Meetings
- Email correspondence, Face Book evangelism and communication

In a survey of 10 pastors in the Southwestern Texas Synod who are involved in part-time ministry, most of the time available was used in worship preparation (preparing the worship service and preparing a sermon); the least amount of time was available for visitation (whether being present in the community or visiting the ill and homebound). The survey also indicated that most part-time pastors worked longer hours than was agreed to in the letter of call. While the reasons “why” longer hours were worked vary, many pastors work longer hours because of their sense of “call”; however this could create a problem for future pastors called by the congregation who might not have the time available because of other commitments (secondary employment, family responsibilities, geographic considerations, etc).

A professional who is contracting on a part-time basis must limit the scope of work they do in a particular job to make the expectations reasonable. In the case of parish pastors, the pastor and congregation will have to decide on what parts of a full-time pastor job the part-time pastor will not do, and over what areas they will not have responsibility but will be covered by lay leaders.

While in staff situations a part-time pastor may be called to serve in a particular ministry, by nature limited in scope (visitation, youth, education, for example), in a solo pastor role (most common in new part-time calls), some things will either not be done in that parish, or will be done by lay staff or volunteers. Congregations thinking of calling a part-time pastor will have to choose the focus of their leadership position, which may be:

- Focus on community relations, outreach and evangelism
- Focus on weekly worship
- Focus on adult congregational programming (Bible study, Sunday school, etc.)
- Focus on youth and children’s programming (Bible study, Sunday school, confirmation, etc.)
- Focus on visitation (sick and homebound members, hospital, etc.)
- Other focus

One of these could be chosen as the primary focus for a part-time pastor, and one or two as secondary foci (which will be attended to if time after primary focus). Secondary areas will need solid lay leadership to assist the pastor. The other areas will have to move to lay leadership and staffing. This focus exercise and prioritization will be crucial for congregations preparing for a part-time call. **While equipping leaders is an explicit and distinct role of all rostered leaders, it is especially important in part-time calls so they are feasible and reasonable for the good of the called leader as well as the mission of the congregation.**

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

## 2.2 Some Models for Part-Time Ministry

As our synod includes more and more part-time pastors, it is helpful for congregations preparing to call a part-time pastor to have some models from which to draw as they shape this special call.

A challenge for all part-time professionals is that professional positions are, by nature, not hourly, and not defined by hours: the professional is expected, within reasonable limits, to do the work needed regardless of the time taken. In exchange for what is usually more than normal full-time 40-hour work weeks, the professional has more flexibility in when to work those hours (several long days, an evening instead of a morning, etc.) than an hourly employee.

For most professionals, there is a societal assumption that the person will work at least 40 hours per week, on a somewhat predictable schedule (that the person will be in the office most weekdays- 5 days- from 8 am to 5 pm, for example). But most pastors will work more than that, because the job of a professional (as opposed to an hourly employee) is to work until the job is done.

There is not accurate data about how many hours, on average, a full-time ELCA pastor works: some estimates range from 45 to 65. **For the purposes of these recommendations, we will assume**, as do other professional positions, **that full-time is 40 hours per week**, with the assumption that professionals will typically work 5-15 more hours per week. The 40 hours are somewhat regularly scheduled (see days of week discussion below), and the 5-15 additional hours are unscheduled, and as-needed. Regular hours are those often scheduled: office hours, Sunday and other worship service times, Bible studies, meetings, confirmation classes, etc. Unscheduled hours often include retreats, emergency visits, social media (Facebook, etc.), after hours calls and e-mails, etc. For our purposes, the following are approximate guidelines:

- Full-time = 40 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-15 additional unscheduled hours
- 3/4-time = 30 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-10 additional unscheduled hours
- 1/2-time = 20 hours per week “regular” hours + 5-7 additional unscheduled hours

Less than half-time, for the purposes of these recommendations, will be considered “contract” work and not covered under these “part-time” recommendations (usually meaning that “contract” positions will not be call situations, and will not include regular ELCA benefits.)

Pastors often define their job not in hours, but in number of days worked per week. Full-time pastors work 6 days a week, with one full day off during the week (usually Friday or Monday). Often pastors do not work every Saturday, but are scheduled frequently for special events. Sunday is almost always a mandatory work day, and vacation is usually determined by Sundays: the pastor has some flexibility in taking other days of the week off, but is expected, and usually covenanted, to be present 48 Sundays per year, with 4 off for vacation, and sometimes an additional 1 or 2 for continuing education.

Any professional who is contracting on a part-time basis must limit the scope of work they do in a particular job to make the expectations reasonable. (See more on this in section 2.1 above.) If a part-time pastor also has another job, there must be flexibility within the congregation to work around that second job.

Within these broad parameters, congregations and pastors in part-time call processes have found several models useful. These include but are not limited to the following:

### 2.2.1 Part-Time Pastor Model 1: More Days a Week Off

This is currently the most common part-time model. As indicated in the benefits section of these recommendations (below), the part-time pastor working in this model should receive the full-time number of Sundays off (vacation), which is often 4 Sundays per year. (Note: Otherwise part-time pastors will be working more Sundays than full-time pastors.) In addition to this, a part-time pastor will have more than one day completely off, when no work is expected. 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 pastor truly is off those days, including being free to work at another job.

- For 3/4 time, 2 days per week will be off (plus standard 4 weeks of vacation)
- For 1/2 time, 3 days per week will be off (plus standard 4 weeks of vacation)

### 2.2.2 Part-Time Pastor 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 pastors who have worked part-time consider a model that includes proportionate Sundays off the only fair model for pastors, who are otherwise simply expected to do a full-time job at a lower salary. This approach would give a part-time pastor 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 pastor's vacation would be proportional as well (3/4 time pastors would have 3 weeks, 1/2 time pastors would have 2 weeks).

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

### 2.2.3 Part-Time Pastor Model 3: Months Off Per Year

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

- For 3/4 time, 3 months (12 weeks, incl. Sundays) per year will be off (plus 3 weeks vacation)
- For 1/2 time, 6 months (24 weeks, incl. Sundays) per month will be off (plus 2 weeks vacation)

### 2.2.4 Part-Time Pastor Model 4: Combination Models

Some pastors have chosen a compromise model between Model 1 and Models 2 and 3 in an effort to make the part-time position workable for the small congregation and also a benefit for the pastor. In this model, the pastor might take extra days or partial days off a week, and additional Sundays off, with less official vacation; OR work full-time most of the year, take full 4 weeks of vacation, and take more Sundays off. These off Sundays can be Sundays not crucial liturgically, but important for families



(Thanksgiving, Spring Break, and some during summer vacation months). This could look like one of the following scenarios:

- For 3/4 time, 1.5 days off per week, and 8 Sundays off per year (plus 3 weeks of vacation).
- For 1/2 time, 2.5 days off per week, and 16 Sundays off per year (plus 2 weeks of vacation).
- For 3/4 time, work full-time hours/days, and 6 Sundays off per year (plus 4 weeks of vacation).
- For 1/2 time, work full-time hours/days, and 6 Sundays off per year (plus 4 weeks of vacation).
- Other combinations, worked out between congregation and pastor for mutual minimization of inconvenience and mutual benefit.

Note: In order for these true part-time models (Models 2, 3 and 4) to work for congregations, and as these situations become more common, the synod will need to equip and support congregational ministry in pastoral absences, including administration of the Sacraments. See section 9 below for more discussion of this.

It is an unreasonable expectation for a part-time pastor to work as many Sundays as a full-time pastor. Thus, in Model 1 above, a part-time pastor who does not take Sundays as part of his or her part-time compensation still receives the same number of weeks (and Sundays) off as a full-time pastor. But this move toward part-time ministry will also mean the church (pastors, congregations, synods, and the ELCA) will need to think about different ways for a congregation to offer additional time off to equalize this. Additional Sundays off per month/quarter/year are discussed in models 2, 3, and 4 above, and could include an extra Sunday each quarter, or additional Sundays off during the summer (50% = 26 Sundays off; 75% = 13 Sundays off). NOTE: Time off that is part of being part-time (unpaid time, including unpaid Sundays) is different from vacation time (paid time off, including Sundays). In Model 1, above, the pastor receives 4 paid Sundays off for vacation. In Models 2, 3, and 4, the pastor receives 3 (3/4 time) or 2 (1/2 time) paid Sundays for vacation, and some Sundays are included in her or his part-time plan.

In order for these true part-time models--those that include Sundays off as part of being part-time (Models 2, 3 and 4)--to work for small congregations, and as these situations become more common, the synod will need to equip and support congregational ministry in pastoral absences, including administration of the Sacraments. Can worship be shaped differently to allow for pastoral absence? How can neighboring congregations or mission partners support pastoral ministry to facilitate these additional Sundays? See section 9 below for more discussion of this.

The four broad models presented here should be part of the conversation between a call committee, Council and pastor. No one model will work for every situation and each call is contextual: but congregations must be aware that **calling a part-time pastor means a different model of ministry**, with more lay leadership, in any size congregation or ministry situation. This all needs to be negotiated between the congregation leadership and the pastor, and then communicated continually with the congregation.

### 3. FAIR AND JUST COMPENSATION

The Southwestern Texas Synod Compensation Guidelines call for fair and just compensation for pastors, which should be 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 for pastors in part-time calls, this should also be the case. An average hourly wage could be derived by taking an average full-time salary, dividing by **an assumed 40 hour work week** to get an hourly wage. This would be then be multiplied by the number of expected work hours to come up with a salary. The congregation should also pay for or provide for housing and a Social Security Tax Allowance. More information on this can be found in the Southwestern Texas Synod Compensation Guidelines.

#### **4. PENSION AND HEALTHCARE BENEFITS**

Rostered leaders who are under a part-time call receive less than full-time pay and work less than full-time. Some benefits are easily calculated by a straight percentage; others cannot be negotiated in the same way.

- **Full percentage (at least 10%) calculation for pension (Portico) contributions** (contribution calculators are available at [www.porticobenefits.org](http://www.porticobenefits.org) to assist congregations in figuring out these total costs)
- **Full coverage for pastor + family for insurance** (as recommended by the ELCA). 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 spending plan and as a benefit for the rostered leader.

#### **5. EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

##### **5.1 Travel Expense**

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

##### **5.2 Professional Expenses**

Pastors 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.

#### **6. RENEWAL AND SELF-CARE**

##### **6.1 Vacation and Days off**

It is expected that pastors will receive the full benefit of vacation and that they will also have regular days off as part of their ministry (sabbath) as prescribed in Genesis 2:1-2 and Exodus 20:8-11. This time is important for pastors to maintain the health of their families and other relationships and for rest. This time off and vacation are just as important for part-time pastors as for those working full-time.

Vacation is a benefit but is different than regular time off because a pastor is not full-time. Days off and vacation time are both parts of negotiating a part-time call, and different models can include

modifications of number of days off and number of Sundays included in vacation time. See section 2.2 for a further discussion of this topic.

### **6.2 Compensatory (Comp) Time**

It can be mutually beneficial to offer comp time for working more extraordinary hours in a single week, particularly overnight events such as summer camp. An example might be providing a week of comp time per week spent at camp, for example, which may vary year to year.

### **6.3 Sick Leave and Disability**

Sick leave that is reasonable and necessary for personal illness is assumed, with the congregation paying 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 pastor is physically or mentally disabled.<sup>ii</sup>

No sick leave or disability time should be considered cumulative or compensated for at the end of a call.

## **7. MUTUAL BENEFIT**

### **7.1 Continuing Education and other Synodical and Churchwide Events**

If at all possible, the congregation shall offer standard amounts of time and money for continuing education. Pastors on part-time salaries have less of their own money to spend on continuing education, and but still need continuing education as full-time leaders do.

Also, the congregation shall provide full allowance for synod and churchwide events, such as Synod Assembly and Tri-Synodical Theological Conference, which are expectations for all rostered leaders. Time and money for synodical and churchwide events does not count against continuing education allowance or vacation; it is part of the ministry to the wider church which is part of the call. The congregation and clergy are encouraged to apply for scholarships as necessary.

### **7.2 Sabbatical**

The ELCA recommends sabbatical leave, at regular intervals, for extended study and a time of renewal. Sabbatical time of 3 months for every 7 years of ordained ministry, and after at least 4 years of service in the current call, is highly encouraged.

### **7.3 Mutual Ministry Committee**

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

## **8. SUPPLY PREACHING AND PRESIDING**

It may be desirable that pastors raise up lay leaders within the congregation who could preach on Sundays when the pastor is not available to hearing different voices proclaiming the good news in the congregation. This would require an investment on the part of the pastor and/or synod to train/coach these preachers. They could be youth or adult preachers. Preaching could creatively involve different ways of proclaiming the gospel, including dramas, testimonies, congregation participation and so on. This affirms the priesthood of all believers and begins to help our disciple-members to understand that we are all called to bear witness to the resurrected Christ in the world and in our lives.

On Sundays when it is not possible to have a lay leader from the congregation preach, and the pastor is absent, the Synod Council of the Southwestern Texas Synod recommends the following baseline levels for those providing supply preaching, since sermon preparation is involved:

- Supply preaching: \$150 for one service, \$200 for two services; plus mileage at the current annual IRS rate.

Based on the number of Sundays off that the pastor has been granted as part of their compensation package, less the number of Sundays the congregation plans for lay preaching, the remaining amount needs to be set aside in the yearly budget for regular pulpit supply.

Currently, the sacrament of Holy Communion can only be celebrated by an ordained pastor or synodically authorized lay minister. On the Sundays when the pastor is absent the congregation can either have a service of the Word (without Holy Communion) or they can invite another pastor to celebrate in their absence (often a retired pastor in or near the congregation). If that pastor is already doing pulpit supply for the congregation, the above rates would include presiding at Communion as well. Otherwise, if there is a lay preacher but the congregation still desires to have Communion, the Synod Council of the Southwestern Texas Synod recommends the following baseline levels for those who are presiding only:

- Supply presiding: \$50 for one service, \$75 for two services; plus mileage at the current annual IRS rate.

In special circumstances, the Bishop may choose to license a lay person to preside at Communion. The supply presiding rate would be the same as that of an ordained pastor.

## **9. OPEN ISSUES**

Moving to more part-time pastors in the ELCA will require a radical rethinking of the role of the pastor, what kind of training is required for both clergy and lay persons, how can we support congregations as they transition to these new models, including the theological and practical issues around the administration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

All of these are beyond the scope of this task force and individual congregations, but we believe they need to be wrestled with as vital components of our future together as the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. What follows are some beginning thoughts on these issues.

### **9.1 Training for Pastors and Congregations**

Ephesians 4:11 says, “The gifts that [he] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work in ministry.”

In the earliest churches there were no mega churches and no multi-staff personnel hired to do the work of the church. The ministry of the church was done by the people of the church. From what we can gather from historical research, preachers travelled from location to location. For example, in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Stephen was assigned the task of ensuring that the Hellenist widows and orphans were cared for.

Congregations with pastors serving in a less than full-time capacity very much reflect the earliest church; all members contributing to the ministry of the church with their various skills and abilities. Two challenges facing congregations attempting to become more self-sufficient are: 1) Pastors are not trained to equip leaders. Pastors are trained to think theologically, read Scripture accurately, and understand things historically. 2) In a survey of pastors serving in part-time calls, most of the available time was spent in sermon preparation. A pastor called to part-time ministry might find it challenging, if not overwhelming, to get settled into the new ministry setting, prepare for weekly worship, learn to appreciate the structure and dynamics of the congregation, etc.

Healthy Congregations Workshops 1-3 help pastors and congregations appreciate the dynamics of a congregation and can assist a congregation to see the larger context of ministry in a changing time. These are currently offered by the synod on a regular basis. Congregations and Pastors involved in part-time ministry are strongly encouraged to attend all three workshops.

Additional training that would be helpful to assist congregations in assuming more of the ministry:

- How to develop a mission plan (connecting with the neighborhood, asset based planning, etc.)
- Recruiting and equipping new leaders
- Stephen Ministry and/or basic pastoral care skills to care for the homebound and those facing illness
- Setting up a financial accountability structure within the congregation that includes basic accounting principles
- Thinking theologically and liturgically about worship
- Basic Biblical and Theological Literacy
- Preaching

A congregation could choose to be trained in some or all of these areas as they feel called and gifted to do. They may want to send particular persons in the congregation to the Parish Ministry Training Program or something similar in order to gain overall expertise. Alternatively, they may want to send individuals to specific trainings to acquire different skills. This might mean an expansion of our existing Parish Ministry Training Program.

### **9.2 Coaches**

Ideally, the Synod would train coaches for congregations who could organize this support structure within the Synod and Conferences. These coaches would also be available to both congregations and pastors to assist each in appreciating the changing dynamics of congregations and develop their own support structures so that their joint ministry may be enhanced.

### **9.3 Thinking Theologically and Practically about the Eucharist**

As ministry of congregations and rostered leaders in congregations is re-shaped for part-time calls, one of the most challenging considerations is how sacraments will be faithfully administered. Presiding at the sacrament of Holy Communion has historically been an exclusive privilege and responsibility of ordained pastors, except in unusual cases when dispensation may be granted by a bishop for other rostered, trained, or designated leaders to preside at the table in the absence of an ordained minister.

In recent years there has been a shift in our theological understanding of the Eucharist that supports and encourages weekly communion in congregations, and many have integrated this practice each week at worship. Even as this is a theologically sound position, it does create challenges for congregations that are considering being served by a part-time pastor (and those who are served by rostered leaders who are not ordained as pastors, including AIMs, deacons, diaconal ministers, or SAMs, who often fill part-time positions).

With the dramatic increase in the number of part-time clergy, and in order to implement some of the models described above, the Church needs to adopt some new alternatives to the existing restrictions on celebrating communion if we want to live into this new reality *and* continue with the practice of weekly communion. This is a conversation about our understanding of ministry and roles of various people involved, including ordained clergy, commissioned/consecrated rostered leaders, SAMs, and laity; as well as a conversation about the sacraments and what it means to administer them “rightly”, both of which are essential but beyond the scope of this task force.

However, some creative and practical answers to the question in the meantime may include:

- Asking pastors who are pensioned and participating in synod decision-making but available for worship services (retired, on leave from call, specialized ministries, etc.) to preside over communion for congregations served by part-time clergy, perhaps a certain number of times per year.
- Providing training and authorization for lay leaders in congregations served by a part-time pastor to preside at and serve communion in the context of weekly worship, in the absence of the ordained clergy person.

How this question is addressed in the absence of a formal policy ought to be the responsibility of the congregation and the rostered leader, in consultation with the synod, and guided by prayer.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this document is to start a series of conversations. First, a conversation in a congregation considering a part-time call. A call committee and/or Council must engage the congregation in a conversation about what a part-time call will look like, and specifically, what pastoral tasks will not be part of the call, what tasks will be prioritized, and what tasks will be taken over by lay staff and members of the congregation. The congregation and call committee/Council should also be in conversation with the synod as they shape this new call.

Second, these congregational conversations must be supported by a conversation in our synod about how we as a body support congregations with part-time pastors and pastors in part-time calls. This must

include addressing things like supply presiders, funding for synod events and training, and many other issues. These synod conversations also need to include larger congregations that might be able to help their neighbors.

Third, this is clearly part of a larger conversation in the ELCA. The question of what the church will look like in the future includes what it will look like in the growing number of congregations that cannot support full-time ordained pastors. For instance, how will we adapt seminary education so that pastors do not leave seminary with large amounts of debt and arrive at part-time calls? If we expect some pastors to be bi-vocational, how will we create seminary programs and church work schedules that actually allow for that? How will we adjust to more part-time pastors at the same time as we continue to move toward most ELCA congregations offering communion at every worship service? As with many other issues, finding our way into the next generation of the church in this place will require deep theological thinking, working and talking together, and much prayer.

We pray that these conversations will result not only in ways to make part-time ministry possible, but to allow it to be a blessing to congregations, strengthen lay leadership, widen career and family options for clergy, and witness to the creativity and tenacity of the Christ's church.

---

<sup>i</sup> As outlined in the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod Compensation Guidelines

<sup>ii</sup> This is consistent with the Southwestern Texas Synod approved compensation guidelines