



Southwestern Texas Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America God's work. Our hands.

From the Office of the Bishop

Guidelines for Compensation and Benefits related to COVID-19 For Rostered Leaders, SAMs, Vicars, Musicians, Faith Formation Leaders

The year was a difficult one for most everyone. We have all had to pivot in work, education, and the regular tasks of everyday life. While we are not in the business of trying to decide who has suffered more during this time, we know that church leaders have borne a particular burden. As such, and as we are a people who care about the well-being of all, we strive to tend to the needs of our leaders. We call upon ministry settings to make a way for Sabbath rest for leaders who have been overworked during the past year. We call upon all to advocate for rest for all who need it at any time, and especially those who have been overburdened due to COVID-19. While this document outlines compensation for leaders in our church, we advocate for such compensation for front-line and essential workers as well.

With this in mind, we make the following recommendations for church leaders and ministry sites to implement in 2021. In the best-case scenario, we expect that all four of these areas will be used. At the very least, we expect ministry sites to give verbal and written thanks for the tireless work leaders have done as well as choose another form of compensation from one of the other three areas.

We suggest that this conversation begins with a personnel or mutual ministry committee where possible. If a congregation has neither of these entities, the executive committee of the church council would also be acceptable.

Giving thanks

Leaders have faced unprecedented challenges to doing ministry in the face of this pandemic. They have had to make difficult decisions about worship, Bible study, small group meetings, funerals, weddings, precautions, congregational meetings, schools, and more. No leader can adequately meet the desires of all the people in a ministry setting, so many were faced with the disappointment and anger of ministry members. Much of the work of ministry had to continue, which meant learning new technologies, giving pastoral care without sharing physical space, and preparing for worship in new ways. This has been an anxiety-producing job for church leaders, and many have been berated for their choices on behalf of the community. Therefore, we call upon all ministry sites to give thanks to leaders. Individuals and groups can write notes of encouragement, send messages, or make calls to thank their leaders.

Vacation

Many leaders were unable to use all or most of their vacation in 2020. Even when getting a Sunday off, a full week of work off often did not correspond. We recommend that churches allow leaders to roll over up to half of their vacation from 2020 into 2021.

Continuing education

Likewise, many leaders did not get to use their full continuing education weeks/days or money during 2020. We recommend allowing half of both the money and the time to be rolled over into 2021.

Compensation in time or money

Leaders spent more time working in 2020. Whether full-time or part-time, most leaders worked at least 6 days per week and sometimes 7 especially at the start of the pandemic when major pivots had to be made into previously under- or un-used technology. The compensation for such overages will vary by congregation and leader based on many factors, including financial ones.

Some suggestions for fair compensation include:

- Additional days of vacation: a good calculation would be 1-2 extra days for every pandemic month worked. These could be given as full weeks including Sundays or as extra personal days to be used at will.
- Additional Sundays off not connected to vacation or continuing education.

- A financial bonus based on the additional work done—this could be paid directly or contributed to retirement accounts, for professional expenses, or another non-taxable option.
- A reduction of hours in 2021 comparable to the increase in hours worked during 2020. For example, a leader who worked approximately 5 hours more per week in 2020 would work 5 hours less than the call expects during 2021. This would require increased lay leadership in some settings.
- A short sabbatical not tied to years worked—perhaps one full month off at some point during 2021.
- For part-time leaders who did not get to take their normal Sunday off per month, compensation in the form of an equal number of Sundays or 2 days of work would be appropriate. Again, these workdays could be given as full weeks of vacation or as personal days.

Congregations and leaders should pay attention to several issues when determining the best compensation for their setting. Certainly, finances will play a role, as will the seasonal cycles of the church. What is important is the recognition of the extra work performed. We are called to be a people who care for one another, and this is one way for us to do so.

In Christ,

Bishop Sue Briner
Mr. Carl Teinert, Vice President, Synod Council
Rev. Paul Miller, Chair, Leadership Team

[Guidelines in PDF](#)

