

## ANNUAL MEETING AGENDA ITEM #7 – SABBATICAL POLICY



Dear Calvary friends,

One of the key strategic emphasis for the work of Calvary's Council in 2022 was leadership – developing leaders within our church, and supporting, developing, and equipping our staff leadership. I'm excited to share with you an opportunity our council has developed after much prayerful conversation. What follows is a way we can support and sustain our staff, which we are convinced will help us better care for our staff, will lead to long term staff retention which is key to congregational health, and will provide for the health and well-being of our staff.

Upon a review of our staff policies, the council discovered that Calvary does not have a Sabbatical policy, a practice standard in most church and recommended by our Synod and denomination, the ELCA.

Why a Sabbatical policy?

The demands placed on a church staff are unique and ever present. A pastor, for example, has emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations. In the course of a day, a pastor can deal with death, deep spiritual issues, petty criticisms, tragedies, and celebrations of birth. A pastor is also "on call" 24-hours a day - they go to sleep with the knowledge they could be awakened by a phone call at any time of the day, and vacations are rarely uninterrupted. Most unique is the fact that pastors work every weekend and multiple weeknights a week, time most of us spend caring for our families.

Our church staff does so generously and selflessly, but we know the unique demands effect their family, social, mental and physical health. In fact, our research uncovered a recent study that was alarming: A survey in 2022 from Barna, a Christian research organization, asked 1000's of pastors if they'd given serious consideration to quitting in the last year, and 42% said "yes." We also discovered that within our denomination, the ELCA, for every 3 pastors retiring, there is currently only 1 going into ministry. There is a leadership crisis at foot in the church.

But, friends, here's what else we discovered in our research: Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches. Church staff members who receive sabbaticals feel appreciated and valued. They feel as though the church sees the uniqueness of their commitment and the realities of the work they do. Most of all, a sabbatical gives them time to refresh, recalibrate, renew and reconnect.

We were honored to unanimously approve the following policy and present it for your approval.

Peace & joy,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jana Berndt".

Jana Berndt (Council President) and the Calvary Council



**CALVARY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA, MINNESOTA**  
**Sabbatical Policy**

**Policy:**

Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church of Alexandria, Minnesota ("Calvary") believes that a sabbatical is imperative for staff to continue a healthy relationship with God and the church. This is a time of reflection, refreshment and free from church responsibilities.

Staff eligible for sabbatical include:

- Calvary Benefits Package Group A (Pastoral) (eligible for sabbatical leave up to 3 months)
- Calvary Benefits Package Group A (Professional) (eligible for sabbatical leave up to 6 weeks)

**Procedure:**

Staff requesting a sabbatical will be required to fill out the sabbatical application form and submit it to the Calvary Church Council by no later than July 1 of the year preceding the commencement of the sabbatical period to allow adequate time to finalize all interim sabbatical coverage and budgetary arrangements in advance of the sabbatical leave. The Church Council will review deviations to the above-described schedule and application deadline on a case-by-case basis.

**Requirements to be eligible for sabbatical leave:** Each applicant shall:

- Have been a full time employee at Calvary for a minimum of seven (7) consecutive years prior to the approval of the applicant's initial sabbatical leave, and the employee will be eligible to apply for subsequent sabbatical leave(s) every five (5) years thereafter.
- Complete the sabbatical application and obtain approval thereof from the applicant's direct supervisor, if applicable.
- Obtain approval of the Church Council.
- Be an employee, either pastoral or professional, included in Calvary's Benefits Package Group A.
- Ensure that no other eligible staff have requested and been granted a sabbatical leave during all or a portion of the same timeframe.
  - Notwithstanding the foregoing, in the event spouses are both employed by Calvary and are each eligible for sabbatical leave pursuant to this Policy, said spouses are strongly encouraged to take their sabbatical leave concurrently.
  - In the event said spouses are eligible for different sabbatical terms, the spouse eligible for the shorter sabbatical term may extend his/her leave to match the other spouse's sabbatical term by utilizing Paid Time Off or extending the sabbatical leave without pay.

- If numerous eligible employees have requested a sabbatical leave during all or a portion of the same time period, leave, if granted, shall be based on seniority of the applicants (based on length of employment with Calvary).
- Endeavor to continue full time employment with Calvary after returning from sabbatical leave for at least one (1) year.
- Agree to take the sabbatical leave continuously.

**During the employee's sabbatical leave, Calvary agrees to the following terms:**

- Calvary shall continue to pay the employee's regular salary and benefits during the period of approved leave, including salary increases if the sabbatical leave occurs during a time the staff receive a pay increase.
- Accrued PTO/vacation/sick leave will not be required to be applied toward the sabbatical time away subject to spousal exception described above.
- PTO/vacation/sick leave will continue to accrue during the sabbatical term.
- Calvary will not seek a replacement for the employee during the employee's sabbatical leave; however, Calvary may solicit support services (i.e., pulpit supply) or temporary contracted assistance during the sabbatical term.
- Calvary will not contact the employee during the employee's sabbatical leave except in the case of an emergency.
- Calvary shall be responsible to obtain support services (i.e., pulpit supply) during the sabbatical leave.
- The employee may apply to use budgeted and accrued continuing education dollars allocated to the employee during sabbatical leave, which, if approved, shall be applied to expenses associated with travel, classes, retreats, counseling, etc. during the leave.

### **Sabbatical Application Form:**

The sabbatical plan shall include:

- a description of the applicant's desired and intended sabbatical activities;
- a statement of how these activities will benefit the applicant and/or Calvary;
- the dates of the proposed sabbatical leave; and
- a statement describing how the applicant's ministry will be carried out during the sabbatical term.

Approval of a sabbatical plan is at the discretion of the Church Council.