



# REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON PAID FAMILY LEAVE

***Presented to the Synod Council on January 10, 2019***

*Mathew 25:45 "...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."*

## **Formation**

The East Central Conference of the St. Paul Area Synod recommended a resolution to the 2018 Synod Assembly to modify the Synod's Salary & Compensation Guidelines to include a recommendation that both parental leave and family leave be increased to at least 12 weeks. The resolution further recommended that congregations follow these new guidelines whenever possible and that the synod provide resources to congregations to aid in implementing the new guidelines.

The Reference and Counsel Committee, in consultation with the authors of the resolution, utilized the rules of procedure to provide for engagement on the resolution in a manner that did not include a vote. The committee believed that additional consideration of potential consequences—both intended and unintended—along with further information and analysis were needed before any action could be considered. Given that conclusion, engagement on this important topic was provided for through the formation of a task force. The Task Force on Paid Family Leave was charged by the Synod Council to fully examine paid family leave and provide a report to the 2019 Synod Assembly. The membership of the task force was recommended by Bishop Lull and appointed by the Synod Council.

## **Research Findings**

The Task Force on Paid Family Leave commenced its work this fall by researching current practice within the synod and other Synods within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

That congregational research, with 36 of 112 congregations responding (a strong 30% response rate for a survey of this type), showed that 45% have a family leave policy.

Of those and those that have a policy:

- 50% cover the mother only; and
- 50% cover the father;
- 30% cover "other" sick family members

Of those that have a policy and offer paid leave:

- 70% offer six weeks or less, but 30% offer more than 10 weeks

When asked if they might implement a paid leave policy in the next two years, congregations were split 50/50.

Research into guidelines and policies of other ELCA synods showed that most offer six-eight weeks paid parental leave, with synods using a "minimum of" or "up to" guideline language. Currently, only the Southwest California Synod recommends 12 weeks for family medical leave, but not for parental leave.

## **Recommendation**

The Task Force on Paid Family Leave recommends that the Saint Paul Area Synod be a leader in showing the way to supporting all of those who serve our congregations and mission starts during times of new growth as parents and when called upon to care for a family member. To do this, the task force recommends that the synod's non-binding Salary & Compensation Guidelines be amended to include a call to congregations and mission starts to increase parental and family leave from "up to six weeks" to "up to 12 weeks." It further recommends

that the synod provide resources and advice on how this can be achieved by all congregations and mission starts. The task force believes providing these new guidelines will allow congregations and mission starts to enter into leave arrangements with more confidence and understanding. While adopting the recommendation would make us one of the premier synods in terms of recommended leave, the guidelines are non-binding and leave significant room for local adaptation. The revised guidelines would continue to provide congregations and mission starts the ability to maintain a leave standard below 12 weeks if they so choose. If nothing else, it is the hope of the task force that the new guidelines will prompt all congregations and mission starts to engage in discourse and consider what length of leave best works for them.

As the only industrialized nation without this time of care, the Task Force on Paid Family Leave believes our church community should step up to support its congregations and mission starts. Why be bold? In Philippians 2:4, we were asked to "...not look to our own interests but each of you to the interests of others." It is important, however, to provide guidelines for which congregations can aspire and language that will help them grow into this recommendation rather than see it as too difficult to even begin. We desire to guide other congregations and even synods onto a path whereby they can achieve this goal in the matter of several years.

## **Next Steps**

The Task Force on Paid Family Leave will be providing resources at the February 2019 Toolkit with FAQs, sample policies and procedures such as those used in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, and three case studies (pastor, youth and family leader, administrator) on how to best prepare for the sending and returning of staff during planned and unplanned leaves of absence. Our research shows that most congregations are unprepared and do not have a structure on how to deal with either a crisis or a planned leave.

Many congregations small and large, including those that answered our survey, wonder how they can pay for such coverage. One step is to set goals to designate and begin a fund for such paid staff leave, much like congregations funding sabbaticals or "strategic reserve funds." In the short term, congregations can take a faith offering, similar to natural disasters or use a "pastors' discretionary fund." A packet on the Portico benefits applicable to such leaves will also be available.

Since the current guidelines already recommend "up to six weeks" for parental leave, congregations might think about how they are already providing for this leave and how they might think about increasing it. Every congregation is different, but through a combination of volunteers, deferred programming, shifting responsibilities, and budgeting for coverage, the task force believes all congregations, small, medium, and large, can make such leaves work.

## **Members of the Task Force**

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