

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHAPLAINS AND CONGREGATIONS IN TIME OF MILITARY INVOLUNTARY CALL-UP

Involuntary call-up for military chaplains is a term applied: (a) to a reserve component chaplain who is assigned to a reserve unit that is activated for federal duty, or (b) to an individual reserve chaplain who is called to active duty when he or she has not requested it. The suggestions provided here for chaplains serving under call to congregations may be used as guidance for other employing entities, institutions, or agencies where pastors are serving under call outside of the congregation setting.

Procedures for Pastors

- If you have not already done so, make your congregation aware of your status as a military reservist.
- Notify your Congregation Council and arrange for a meeting to discuss your involuntary call-up to military service.
- Notify your synod bishop and invite the bishop or a member of the bishop's staff to participate in the Congregation Council meeting where the issues related to your call-up will be considered.
- Contact the ELCA Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Federal Chaplaincies, at telephone 202.408.8403 in Washington, D.C.
- Contact the ELCA Board of Pensions for essential pension and medical insurance information.
- Note that no new ecclesiastical endorsement is necessary in order for you to respond to the call-up.

Considerations for Congregations

- The federal Employment and Re-Employment Rights of Members of Uniformed Services Law requires employers to provide returning reservists with the same or comparable employment that they had at the time of the call-up. While it is doubtful that this law is directly applicable to pastors under call to congregations, efforts should be made to insure that members of the clergy are not placed at a disadvantage by their involuntary call-up.
- For a call-up of nine months or less, a leave of absence should be granted to the pastor by the Congregation Council. The synod should assist the congregation in arranging for interim or supply pastoral care during the leave of absence.
- If the call extends for more than nine months, the situation should be reviewed and possibly renegotiated. The leave of absence may be extended, or the pastor could submit a letter of resignation, allowing a new pastor to be called by the congregation, possibly under a term call for the remainder of the call-up period.
- The salary of the pastor should continue until military pay is received by the pastor or the pastor's family.
- The congregation should continue coverage for the pastor and the pastor's family in the medical plan until health coverage is provided by the military.
- The congregation should consider making payments into the pension plan under the Board of Pensions for at least the nine month leave of absence. It is important to confer with the Board of Pensions to determine what is appropriate and possible under these circumstances.

Other Considerations

- There will be a delay of approximately thirty days for the chaplain's family members to be incorporated into the military medical system. For this reason, it is important that family members have copies of both: (a) the military member's orders activating him or her to active duty, and (b) a reserve identification card. These items could help a family member to receive medical care during the thirty-day period.
- While on leave of absence, the pastor's housing allowance should continue until the military housing allowance is activated. If a pastor's family is living in a parsonage, arrangements should be made for their continuing in that setting during the leave of absence, or until a new pastor is called. When the military housing allowance is received, that amount should be offered to the congregation in lieu of rent for the parsonage.

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Prepared by:

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