

# **NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA**

## **EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK**

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North/West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **WELCOME**

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) (hereafter referred to as the NWLMS or Synod) extends a sincere welcome to all employees. We believe that each employee contributes directly to our service within the ELCA and the NWLMS and our effectiveness in leading and supporting ministry. We hope you will take pride in being part of our synod team!

The Employee Handbook was developed to describe some of our expectations of at-will employees and rostered ministers serving within called or at-will positions on staff and to outline the policies, programs and benefits available to eligible employees. Please read this Handbook carefully and familiarize yourself with its contents as soon as possible, for it will answer many questions about employment with the NWLMS.

The N/W Lower MI Synod Compensation Guidelines (available on the synod website) provides additional guidelines and expectations for rostered ministers (Pastors and Deacons) serving on staff.

If you have any questions regarding any information contained in the Employee Handbook, or any other questions regarding your employment with us, please feel free to ask the Synod Bishop (or the Bishop's designee) as your primary direct supervisor and/or the Vice President of the synod who as chair of the synod's Executive Committee serves as the Director of Human Resources. Portions of Human Resources policies, procedures, and related activities may be delegated by the Vice President of the synod to other Synod Council members or NWLMS staff members for administrative purposes. In some cases, as specifically outlined in this Handbook, you may direct questions to the other employees or representatives of the NWLMS.

We hope that your employment with the NWLMS will not only facilitate enhancement of your personal gifts and talents, but that it also will be challenging, enjoyable, and rewarding.

## **THE NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA**

### **WHO WE ARE**

*Proclaiming Christ and prayerfully participating in  
Jesus' own work of reconciling the world to God's very self!*

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod is one of sixty-five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As Lutheran Christians, we are passionate about proclaiming God's unconditional love for all people, for all creation, revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we prayerfully participate in Christ's own work of reconciling the world to God's very Self. In grateful celebration of our abundant life in Christ, we worship God, help friends and neighbors, celebrate diversity, feed the hungry, work for justice, care for creation, and advocate for peace.

Synods of the ELCA are organized into nine regions. The NWLMS is part of Region 6, which includes a total of six synods across Michigan (two in the lower peninsula), Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky. The NWLMS is comprised of more than 30,000 baptized Christians, including over 190 Rostered Ministers (active and retired) and other professional leaders, and approximately 100 congregations across our geographic region. Congregations of the NWLMS are grouped into seven geographic conferences: Bay, Capital, Greater Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Stony Lake, Sunrise, and Traverse. Each conference is led by a Dean who serves as a liaison between the synod office and the congregations in their area.

### **PURPOSE OF THE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK**

An Employee Handbook is provided to each Synod employee to provide answers to many questions about the NWLMS, including administrative and personnel policies, conditions of employment, compensation practices, benefit programs, and other policies that apply during employment.

The Employee Handbook was established and is maintained by the synod's Executive Committee which serves as the Human Resources team for the synod. The Handbook is presented for informational purposes only and can be changed at any time by the NWLMS, with or without notice. Various policies and procedures will need to be addressed and updated periodically. Employees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the contents of this Handbook, as well as changes or additions to policies and procedures as they are communicated.

This Handbook and the policies set forth in it are not an employment contract nor an employment agreement, expressed or implied, and are not intended to create contractual obligations of any kind. In all cases, the NWLMS may exercise its sole discretion in applying and interpreting its

policies and it may deviate as needed to appropriately deal with and resolve specific situations. Exceptions to the Employee Handbook may be granted by action of the synod's Executive Committee. Such exceptions, when applying to an individual employee, will be documented in the employee's personnel file.

If any provision in the policies contained in this Employee Handbook are inconsistent with a third-party benefit plan or other governing document, the applicable benefit plan or governing document generally will be controlling. Please ask if you need clarification.

Employment with the NWLMS is not for a definite term; employees are considered "at-will", which means that either the employee or the NWLMS can terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without a reason, with or without prior disciplinary action, and with or without advance notice. No representative of the NWLMS has the authority to enter into an agreement with an employee that is contrary to the foregoing, except through a written agreement signed by the Synod Bishop and the Vice President of the synod on behalf of the synod's Executive Committee. No other synod employees, pastors, leaders, officers or representatives of the NWLMS have such authority, nor do they have authority to make agreements inconsistent with the contents of this Handbook.

If you have any questions regarding the contents of this Handbook, or your employment in general, please discuss them with the Vice President of the synod.

NOTE: This Handbook may be referenced by individual congregations as a model, template, or guide; however, a congregation should consult with its own legal counsel to ensure policies and procedures are appropriate and applicable at the congregation level.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS PHILOSOPHY**

The NWLMS values the commitment and contributions of our employees and hopes our employees have career satisfaction in a pleasant work environment. We realize that our employees contribute greatly to our success and are critical to our ability to provide excellent service on behalf of our synod. As an employee of the NWLMS, you represent our synod and its ministry in your work life. Employees are expected to have a positive and caring attitude toward all individuals with whom they have contact through their work, to take pride in and responsibility for their work, to have a commitment to providing quality and efficient work, and to demonstrate courtesy and respect for others.

Employees are recruited, hired, trained, and offered continuing employment according to the needs of the NWLMS and the individuals and congregations we serve. No guarantees are made

as to length of employment, availability of work, conditions of ongoing employment, or guarantees of wage levels or fringe benefits.

Employees are compensated for their services to the NWLMS through equitable wages and benefits. Employees are given feedback regarding their work performance periodically throughout their employment. All employees are encouraged to give constructive input into the decisions and direction of the NWLMS. The NWLMS appreciates the opportunity to work with its employees to resolve issues and to facilitate a pleasant work environment.

## EMPLOYMENT

### **EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

The NWLMS has a policy of nondiscrimination with all employees and applicants for employment. All aspects of employment, including but not limited to recruitment, hiring, promotions, compensation, benefits, discipline, continuing education and training, and any other employment opportunities, will be made on the basis of individual abilities and qualifications and without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, genetic information, height, weight, marital status, veteran status, gender orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other legally protected category.

As a member of the ELCA, certain positions may require more intensive understanding of and commitment to ELCA doctrine and statements of policies. Accordingly, at times the NWLMS may specifically seek out individuals with defined religious training, synodical recognition, or who are members of an ELCA congregation.

Employment opportunities with the NWLMS are based on an individual's ability to do the job. The NWLMS will provide reasonable accommodations when necessary to aid the employment and advancement of disabled workers who are otherwise qualified to perform the essential job functions of their position, unless doing so would result in an undue hardship. A qualified employee with a disability should provide the Vice President of the synod a written request for an accommodation within 182 days after the employee knew (or reasonably should have known) the accommodation was needed in order to perform the job tasks more effectively. The Vice President of the synod will then meet with the employee to discuss the disability in relation to the duties of the job and possible accommodations. Failure to properly notify the NWLMS will preclude any claim.

An employee with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace is encouraged to bring such issue(s) to the attention of the Vice President of the synod. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal.

## **EMPLOYMENT AT WILL**

For any and all non-rostered employees, continued employment is not guaranteed; each non-rostered employee is an at-will employee in a position that is co-terminus with the synod bishop's elected term. Similarly, rostered ministers under call who are serving on synod staff are also in positions that are co-terminus with the synod bishop's elected term. Continuation of service within a synod staff position will be determined by the synod bishop at the start of each new 6-year term.

At-will employees may choose to leave employment at any time, with or without cause, with or without prior disciplinary action, and with or without prior notice, although the NWLMS does request two weeks advance notice when possible.

Likewise, in addition to the co-terminus provision noted above, the NWLMS may discharge an at-will employee at any time, with or without cause, with or without prior disciplinary action, and with or without prior notice, but the NWLMS will try to provide advance notice as possible, based on the circumstances.

No representative of the NWLMS, other than the Synod Bishop and the Vice President of the synod, has authority to enter into an agreement of employment for any specified period of time or to make any agreement contrary to the foregoing. Further, any such offer of employment other than at-will status must be in writing and signed by the Vice President of the synod.

## **EMPLOYMENT APPLICATIONS & INFORMATION**

Applicants for employment with the NWLMS are expected to provide complete and accurate information regarding their background, employment history, credentials, and qualifications for employment. The NWLMS relies upon the accuracy of information contained in the employment application, as well as the accuracy of other data presented, verbally or in writing, throughout the hiring process and the employment relationship. As part of the hiring process, an individual must provide references and must authorize a criminal history background check. Any misrepresentations, falsifications, or omissions in information or data may result in an individual no longer being considered for employment, or if employed, may result in the termination of employment, regardless of the time elapsed before the discovery. The NWLMS also may investigate a candidate for employment or an employee's background, employment history, credentials, and qualifications at any time during the employment relationship.

## **EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION**

In compliance with federal immigration laws, the NWLMS is committed to employing only individuals who are legally authorized to work in the United States. Each new employee, as a condition of employment, must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 and must present documentation which constitutes evidence of identity and employment eligibility. If an employee is authorized to work in the United States for a limited time period, the individual will be required to provide reverification documentation of renewed employment eligibility prior to expiration of that period to remain employed by the NWLMS.

## **ORDINATION/LICENSURE/CERTIFICATION**

Some positions may require ordination, specific religious education, licensure and/or certification. When a specific criterion is required, an employee or applicant for employment must present original documentation of successful educational completion or licensure/certification prior to beginning employment. Employees are responsible for providing and maintaining a current or updated license or certification, when required for their position, prior to the expiration date. If the licensure or certification is suspended or revoked, or impacted in any way during its effective period, the employee is responsible for providing written notice to the NWLMS as soon as the change is made or is known by the employee.

## **PERSONNEL FILES/CHANGES IN EMPLOYEE INFORMATION**

The NWLMS establishes and maintains a personnel file for all employees. The personnel file includes such information as the employment application, resume, credentials, licensure, certifications, performance evaluations, wage and benefit data, disciplinary actions, records of education and training, and other information relating to the employee's employment.

Employees are required to keep their personnel records updated by reporting changes to their name, address, telephone number, marital status, beneficiary designation, number of dependents, and persons to notify in the event of an emergency as soon as possible after a change is made.

Employee personnel files are the property of the NWLMS and are held in confidence. Access to information is restricted to specified NWLMS employees or Synod Council members on a need-to-know basis. Employees have the right to review their own personnel file by submitting a written request. A time then will be arranged for the employee to review the file with the Bishop of the Synod.

## EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

Employment classifications are categorized as rostered staff (i.e., rostered ministers – Pastors or Deacons) or at-will employees. All staff members (full-time, part-time and limited part-time) are in positions that are co-terminus with the synod bishop’s elected term where employment may or may not end at the conclusion of the synod bishop’s term of service. Continuation of service within a synod staff position will be determined by the synod bishop at the start of each new 6-year term.

The following are used to describe employment categories for at-will employees with the NWLMS:

- *Exempt* employees hold management, professional, administrative or other positions exempt from federal and state overtime pay requirements. These employees often are referred to as salaried employees.
- *Nonexempt* employees are typically referred to as hourly employees and are eligible for overtime pay.

Regular Full-time Benefit Eligible: An employee regularly scheduled to work forty (40) hours per week in a designated regular full-time salaried position (exempt) or hourly position (nonexempt). A full-time employee is eligible to participate in all benefits listed in this Handbook (see specific benefits for details).

Regular Part-time Benefit Eligible: An employee regularly scheduled to work twenty (20) hours to less than forty (40) hours per week in a designated regular part-time hourly position (nonexempt). Regular part-time employees are eligible for benefits related to time off in addition to those benefits required by law (i.e., sick time pay) and are also eligible for other benefits such as medical insurance and pension contributions (see specific benefits for details).

Limited Part-time: An employee regularly scheduled to work less than twenty (20) hours per week in a designated limited part-time nonexempt hourly position. Limited part-time employees are not eligible to participate in most benefits listed in this Handbook unless specifically noted, as otherwise required by law (i.e., sick time pay), or as specified in a contract approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Vice President of the synod.

Temporary: An employee hired to work for a specified period of time as an interim replacement, to temporarily supplement the workforce, or to assist in the completion of a specific project. Temporary employees typically are hired for an initial duration of 120 days or less, although their employment may be terminated at any time consistent with at-will or co-terminus employment status. Extension of employment beyond the initially stated period does not in any way imply a change in employment status unless such individual is specifically notified otherwise in a document signed by the Vice President of the synod. Temporary employees are not eligible to

participate in employee benefits, except for those benefits required by law, or specified in a contract approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Vice President of the synod.

### **ELCA EMPLOYEES**

An individual who is employed by the ELCA and providing ministry in the NWLMS, is deployed from the ELCA to the NWLMS, is jointly supervised by the corresponding ELCA Unit Director and the Bishop of the NWLMS, and/or is a shared employee, is subject to the policies, procedures, and practices established and administered by the ELCA as well as the NWLMS. If a policy, procedure, or practice of the NWLMS is inconsistent with ELCA standards, generally the ELCA standard controls; however, the individual should request clarification by the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod to ensure compliance with NWLMS expectations and requirements. In all cases, ELCA policies and procedures related to compensation and benefits will apply for staff members employed by the ELCA.

### **INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS / INDIVIDUALS PLACED THROUGH TEMPORARY AGENCIES**

The NWLMS at times enters into an independent contractor relationship with an individual or may engage the services of a temporary placement agency to provide individuals whose services are necessary for a specific job to meet Synod operational and administrative needs. Such individuals are not employees of the NWLMS; however, they may receive a copy of the Employee Handbook solely for the purpose of becoming acquainted with expectations of all individuals who provide services on behalf of the Synod. Further, such individuals are required to comply with NWLMS policies, procedures and practices while placed with and/or working with or for the NWLMS.

### **JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

The synod's Executive Committee provides employees written job descriptions outlining the major duties and responsibilities of their position. Employees normally will be involved in the periodic updating of their job descriptions. Job descriptions are intended to provide a summary of the major duties, responsibilities and expectations of the position; they are not an all-inclusive list of tasks. Further, job responsibilities may change at times and an employee may be asked to work on or to assist with other work necessary or important to the mission and ministry of the NWLMS. The Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod, and the Executive Committee reserve the right, at any time, to alter or to change job responsibilities, to reassign or to transfer

positions, or to assign additional job responsibilities. Any questions regarding your job description, duties or responsibilities may be directed to the Synod Bishop and/or the of the synod.

## **PERFORMANCE REVIEWS**

We believe open, honest, and consistent communication is important to a good working relationship. Accordingly, the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod and/or the synod's Executive Committee attempt to provide ongoing feedback to employees regarding their work performance on a periodic basis. If an employee has a question or concern regarding performance, the employee is encouraged to ask for feedback. Formal requests for performance feedback may be directed to the Synod Bishop and/or the Vice President of the synod.

Regular full-time and regular part-time employees generally receive a performance evaluation on a periodic basis (i.e., annually, every other year, etc.) at a time designated by the Vice President of the synod or the synod's Executive Committee. The performance review is intended to provide performance feedback from both the Synod Bishop and the synod's Executive Committee and to discuss developmental needs, plans and goals to ultimately enhance the mission and ministry of the NWLMS and an employee's job satisfaction. Direct supervisors (i.e., the Synod Bishop or delegate) are encouraged to communicate informally on a regular basis regarding individual performance and planning expectations.

When a performance evaluation is written, the original will be retained in the employee's personnel file and a copy will be provided to the employee. Both the supervisor and the employee sign the evaluation form; signing the form does not mean there is agreement on the contents; rather, it indicates a performance related conversation occurred. An employee may submit a signed written response to a written performance evaluation which will be attached to the original evaluation and also will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

## **OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT / CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

When you accept employment with the NWLMS, your first responsibility is to the synod and to the efficient performance of your assigned duties. However, as an employee (especially those in less than full-time positions), you may hold a job with another organization as long as you satisfactorily perform your job responsibilities with the NWLMS and as long as the other job does not interfere with your regular synod work hours, affect the efficient performance of assigned synod duties, and/or distract you from your duties due to fatigue, worry, or other conditions.

All employees will be held to the same performance standards and will be subject to NWLMS scheduling demands, regardless of any existing outside work requirements. NWLMS work requirements, including mandatory overtime, must take precedence over any secondary employment.

If the NWLMS determines that an employee's outside work interferes with the performance or the ability to meet the requirements of the employee's position with the NWLMS, the matter will be discussed with the employee and the employee may be asked to modify or to terminate the outside employment if he or she wishes to remain employed with the NWLMS.

### **TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

The ending of employment with the NWLMS may occur through resignation or discharge, unless specified otherwise in individual call documents or via co-terminus alignment to the synod bishop's term of office. Resignation is a voluntary termination initiated by the employee; discharge is an involuntary termination initiated by the NWLMS.

Other than in a co-terminus situation, please notify the Vice President of the synod in writing of your intent to resign. A two-week notice of resignation period is respectfully requested; however, the NWLMS may accept your resignation effective immediately or at any time during the notice period in its sole discretion. You will be paid for actual time worked through the date of your resignation. Although employment is at-will, the NWLMS will try to provide advance notice of termination through discharge also, unless circumstances require less time or no notice.

Exit interviews may be conducted with resigning employees to discuss the reasons for the employee's departure as well as such issues as employee benefits, suggestions, concerns, and complaints.

Exiting employees are required to return all NWLMS property unless otherwise specified in writing, including but not limited to keys, vehicles, Employee Handbooks, documents, electronic and paper files, books, computers, computer usernames and passwords, cell phones, and all other property or materials issued to them or in their possession or control immediately upon request or upon termination of employment. The employee may be required to sign an affidavit that all Synod property, including all confidential information, has been returned.

The employee's final paycheck will be provided on the regular pay date following the termination of employment date. Upon termination of employment, whether voluntary or involuntary, paid time off benefits earned through the last day of employment are paid out on a pro-rated basis. All other employee benefits cease of the last day an employee actually works unless specified otherwise in writing.

## **AT-WILL EMPLOYEE REFERENCES**

Current and former at-will employees should refer all external requests for employee personnel information to the Vice President of the synod. Only the Vice President of the synod is authorized to respond to requests for information regarding current and former at-will employees.

The Vice President of the synod will confirm the following information regarding employment with the NWLMS: hire date, termination date, position title, and status of employment (whether full-time or part-time). If an employee or former employee provides a signed authorization to release additional information to specified prospective employers, the Vice President of the synod also may provide factual, job-related information contained in the employee's personnel file.

## **REHIRING FORMER EMPLOYEES**

Any individual who terminates employment voluntarily with proper notice may seek re-employment with the NWLMS at a later time. Re-employment will be based upon the existing needs of the NWLMS in relation to the qualifications of the former employee. A former employee who has not been employed by the NWLMS for twelve (12) months or more shall assume the status of a new hire and will not receive credit for prior service in terms of employee benefits or seniority purposes, unless specifically agreed to otherwise in writing at the time of rehire and signed by the Vice President of the synod.

## **CONTINUOUS SERVICE DATE**

An employee's continuous service date is based upon the actual first day of work adjusted by any leaves of absence or termination of employment followed by a rehire within six months.

## **EMPLOYEE RELATIONS**

### **STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

The primary responsibility of all NWLMS employees is to support the Synod's mission and ministry through competent performance of job responsibilities and duties. As an employee of the NWLMS, you have an obligation to be hospitable, organized, efficient, and attentive to the needs of others as well as to reflect the love of Christ in all interactions. The NWLMS believes that establishing a favorable impression within and outside our synod is extremely important as the primary step in building trust and confidence and in furthering our mission and ministry.

Employees of the NWLMS are to display the highest standards of personal conduct. Accordingly, the following are not tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, up to the immediate termination of employment:

- Theft, abuse or sabotage of property
- Dishonesty
- Divulging or misusing confidential information
- Harassment or other unlawful discrimination
- Insubordination or other disrespectful conduct
- Refusal or failure to follow NWLMS policies, procedures and/or standards, including the policies contained in this Employee Handbook
- Fighting, engaging in threatening or violent behavior, or behaving in a way that could provoke violence
- Altering, falsifying or tampering with any personnel, payroll, or any other Synod records
- Possessing firearms or weapons, or other dangerous or hazardous materials, devices or substances on Synod premises or while conducting synod business
- Use of abusive, obscene, or foul language or behavior
- Endangering your safety, the safety of a co-worker, or the safety of others
- Being under or appearing to be under the influence of, or having in the employee's system, alcohol and/or illegal drugs on Synod premises or while conducting synod business
- Possessing, consuming, manufacturing, distributing, or dispensing any illegal drugs on synod premises or while conducting Synod business
- Excessive absenteeism or tardiness; an absence without notice; unauthorized absence from the work area during the workday
- Unsatisfactory job performance; failure to correct conduct; failure to improve unsatisfactory performance which has been the subject of a prior warning
- Excessive, unreasonable, unauthorized, or inappropriate use of synod property, equipment, technology, or supplies for personal use
- Sleeping, loafing, or wasting time during work hours
- Excessive, unreasonable, unauthorized or inappropriate use of synod property, equipment, technology, or supplies for personal use
- Participating in any illegal activity on synod property or while conducting synod business
- Other conduct disruptive to synod operations or to the synod's mission and ministry

The above list is intended to provide a general list of prohibited conduct and is not intended to be all-inclusive. The list is not to be considered to cover all situations that may result in disciplinary action nor does it limit the NWLMS right to take appropriate action in any specific incident or situation, although employees have the right to address matters related to the terms

and conditions of their employment in an appropriate manner. Notwithstanding this section, the NWLMS reserves the right to terminate an at-will employee at any time, with or without prior disciplinary action, with or without advance notice, and with or without reason.

### **CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES**

The NWLMS takes a constructive approach to disciplinary matters to ensure that actions which could interfere with our Synod's mission and ministry or an employee's job responsibilities and duties are not continued. Occasionally disciplinary action is necessary when an employee's actions do not conform with generally accepted standards of good behavior, when an employee violates work rules, or when an employee's work performance is unsatisfactory.

There is no effective method of predetermining the seriousness or effect of any one violation of synod policy or of making an exhaustive list of all possible violations of policy. The severity of the disciplinary action depends on the nature and frequency of the offense, the seriousness of the infraction or performance deficiency, the employee's past record, and any other mitigating circumstances.

Discipline may range from verbal warning(s) to written warning(s), to suspension from work (with or without pay), to discharge from employment. Further, although some violations may be more severe than other violations, repeated violations or a combination of violations also may result in more severe discipline or termination of employment.

Nothing in this policy or in this Handbook is intended to limit in any way the NWLMS right to terminate at-will employment at any time, with or without cause, with or without prior disciplinary action, and with or without advance notice.

### **EMPLOYEE CONCERNS/RESOLUTION PROCEDURE**

The NWLMS wants its employees to feel comfortable raising any issues or concerns they may have related to their employment. At times an employee may believe that he or she has a legitimate complaint about a synod policy or practice, a supervisor, another employee, or a visitor. On such occasions, we encourage employees to speak their minds without fear of reprisal to the appropriate person(s). By openly discussing concerns together, we can best protect the interests of both the individual and the NWLMS. Formal concerns should be communicated to the Vice President of the synod for review and resolution.

Employee concerns and problems will be treated with respect. Employees will not be penalized formally or informally, for voicing a complaint, concern, or problem in a reasonable and

businesslike manner. We encourage any employee with a complaint to resolve the problem. Whatever course of action is taken, however, an employee should air complaints to the appropriate person(s) and through the appropriate channels – not to other employees, individuals outside the Synod staff, or visitors.

## **ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY**

Your job is important to the NWLMS and to the individuals, congregations, and communities we serve. Your supervisor, other employees, and individuals throughout our Synod rely on you to perform your work regularly and competently. Punctuality and regular attendance are essential to the NWLMS mission and ministry and create a good working reputation for an employee.

It is necessary that you are present and on time during your scheduled working hours. Employees are expected to arrive in time to be ready to work by their appointed time or to be otherwise available during working time if working at a remote location. Any time after that is considered tardy. Tardiness also is counted when returning from lunch or other non-work time away from the NWLMS. Chronic tardiness will be addressed on an individual basis.

If you will be late for work or unable to report for work, whether working in the synod office or deployed to another location, you must personally contact the Synod Bishop or designee as early as possible to communicate regarding your delay or absence. You are required to provide information regarding the reason for your absence or delay and how long you expect to be away. You then are required to provide an update to the Synod Bishop (or designee) each day of your absence, unless you have made specific alternative arrangements with the Synod Bishop. Employees absent repeatedly or for an extended period of time may be required to provide acceptable documentation regarding the cause(s) of absence and their suitability to return to work.

Absenteeism or tardiness that is unexcused or excessive in the sole judgment of the Synod Bishop and/or the synod's Executive Committee will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Further, an absence without notification as required by this policy may be considered job abandonment and may be considered a voluntary self-termination. Finally, if an employee must leave work before the end of the workday, the employee must obtain authorization from the Synod Bishop (or designee) prior to leaving.

## **BULLETIN BOARDS**

The NWLMS may provide bulletin boards (actual or electronic) for synod-related and employment-related information. Notices must have synod approval before posting and must be dated. Unauthorized, inappropriate, and/or outdated information will be removed at the discretion of the Synod Bishop or designee. The Vice President of the synod has ultimate authority, in conjunction with Executive Committee oversight, over what is posted on NWLMS bulletin boards.

## **BUSINESS ETHICS**

The NWLMS strives to maintain a caring and safe environment with a reputation for compassion and integrity. This requires our employees to display the highest standard of ethical conduct and personal integrity in all dealings with other employees and individuals throughout our synod. Our ability to further our ministry effectively is dependent upon preserving others' trust and confidence in us and in our ability to meet their needs.

Employees are cautioned not to take any actions that may obligate the NWLMS in a manner not specifically approved. Never make any verbal statement, enter into an agreement or sign or alter any document as an agent or representative of the NWLMS without full understanding of the implication of your actions and without specific authority to do so.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

Employees have an obligation to protect the confidentiality of synod information. Synod business, financial, proprietary, congregational, administrative and other operational information should never be accessed, disseminated, or discussed with others, except on a need-to-know basis according to the employee's position. The confidentiality obligation also includes information protected pursuant to federal or state laws, including but not limited to social security numbers, as addressed more specifically below.

Information in a personnel file is confidential and can be released only after receiving written authorization from the employee, or as required by law. If a request for release of information is from an attorney, is a subpoena, or concerns a questionable situation, the request will be reviewed and responded to by the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod and/or the Synod Attorney.

All files, documents or other materials containing confidential information are synod property and should be secured in an appropriate manner during and at the end of every workday. An

employee who causes confidential information to be misused or disclosed will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The obligation to keep information confidential continues even after an employee is no longer employed by the NWLMS.

Employees may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement which itemizes in more detail obligations regarding confidentiality, and which confirms their pledge to abide by the NWLMS guidelines for confidentiality.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER PRIVACY POLICY**

Consistent with the NWLMS Confidentiality Policy, practices and procedures, and with legal requirements, the NWLMS is committed to protecting the privacy rights of our employees, rostered ministers and others whose personal information we retain, specifically regarding the protection of social security numbers. Social security numbers may be required at times for such purposes as payroll, IRS reporting, benefits administration, etc. The NWLMS also may use up to four sequential digits of an employee's social security number for identification or other business-related purposes. The NWLMS uses social security numbers only for the intended purpose for which they are obtained and for purposes consistent with and necessary to the original purpose.

Social security numbers are considered confidential information under the Confidentiality Policy, are stored in secure locations, and are accessible only to specifically authorized employees or other need-to-know individuals. The NWLMS takes precautions to protect personal information of individuals collected or maintained by the NWLMS against loss, unauthorized access, and illegal use or disclosure. Any transmission of a social security number is made through secure means so as to be protected from interception by a third party, such as through a secured server or encrypted transmission. Further, when a mailing is necessary which includes a social security number, such mailing will be done so that the social security number is not viewable.

Social security numbers and related information are not provided to third parties without written consent, except when required by law, such as for identification verification, payroll taxes, insurance related needs, or other benefits administration. Any documents containing a social security number are maintained in accordance with this policy and the Confidentiality Policy. When such documents are no longer required, they are destroyed. Any documentation stored in a computer file will be kept securely in the system until a time when it is no longer required, at which time it will be deleted from the system.

Any person who violates this Social Security Number Privacy policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

## **DRUG, ALCOHOL, & SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY**

The NWLMS is committed to maintaining a drug-free environment. To protect your health and safety and the health and safety of others, an employee may not possess, dispense, unlawfully manufacture, distribute, be under the influence of, have in the employee's system, or use any alcohol, marijuana (including medical marijuana), a controlled substance, intoxicant, or narcotic on synod property or during work time (except for the use of wine as related to the sharing of Holy Communion). The NWLMS encourages an employee with a problem relating to either alcohol, marijuana, or drug abuse to seek professional counseling or other treatment. Early recognition and treatment of drug, alcohol, marijuana, or substance abuse are important for successful rehabilitation.

If a representative of the NWLMS has any reason to believe that you are unable to perform the duties of your job in a safe and productive manner, or if in the Synod Bishop's or the Vice President of the synod's opinion your presence on the job creates a risk to the safety and well-being of yourself, other employees, our members, visitors or to synod property, you will be suspended from the workplace immediately. If you are using a medically prescribed substance which might affect your performance, you should notify your supervisor.

The NWLMS reserves the right to require an employee to submit to drug or alcohol testing where the NWLMS, in its sole discretion, believes an issue exists which may be related to an employee's drug or alcohol usage. In such circumstances, the NWLMS will pay for the cost of any such testing. The results of such testing may be used as a basis for disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. An employee's consent to submit to drug or alcohol testing is required as a condition of continued employment; if an employee refuses to be tested when requested by the NWLMS, termination of employment may result.

## **ANTI-HARASSMENT**

The NWLMS intends to provide an environment that is compassionate, professional, and free from intimidation, hostility or other offenses which might interfere with furtherance of our mission and ministry. All persons who serve in ministry or support positions, whether they are being paid for their services or are a volunteer, are expected to carry out their life and ministry in a Christ-like and professional manner. The NWLMS prohibits employees from doing anything that intimidates, insults, coerces or harasses another employee, a volunteer or visitor. Harassment of any sort – verbal, physical, nonverbal – will not be tolerated, particularly harassment based on, but are not necessarily limited to, race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, genetic information, height, weight, marital status, veteran status, gender orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other legally protected category.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual harassment is prohibited. Sexual harassment may include unwelcome or unsolicited sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature when: (1) submission to the conduct is made an explicit or implicit term or condition of employment; (2) submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for an employment decision affecting the individual; or (3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Examples of sexual harassment may include but are not limited to explicit sexual propositions, sexual innuendo, suggestive comments of a sexual nature, sexually-oriented kidding or teasing, practical jokes of a sexual nature, jokes about gender-specific traits, and obscene language or gestures; displays of obscene printed or visual material; and physical contact including unwelcome or unsolicited touching, including intentionally brushing against another's body.

## **HARASSMENT REPORTING & COMPLAINT PROCEDURE**

All NWLMS employees have a responsibility for keeping our environment free of harassment. Any person who becomes aware of an incident of harassment, whether by being subjected to harassment, by witnessing an incident, or by being told of it, must report it immediately to the Bishop or the Vice President of the synod. When the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod becomes aware of the existence of harassment, prompt and appropriate action will be taken.

If the allegation of harassment involves a pastor or other rostered leader, the incident must be reported to the Bishop of the NWLMS. [The Synod Misconduct Policy is available in the NWLMS office and also is available at [www.mittensynod.org](http://www.mittensynod.org), the NWLMS website.]

The NWLMS encourages you to communicate directly with the alleged harasser and to make it clear that the person's behavior is unacceptable, unwelcome, offensive, and/or inappropriate. It is essential however, that you notify the Bishop or the Vice President of the synod immediately of any incident of harassment, even if you are not sure the offending behavior is considered unlawful harassment.

When the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod is made aware of alleged harassment, the incident must be documented immediately. All claims of harassment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated. Reports and investigations will be kept confidential to the extent possible consistent with resolving the matter and taking appropriate corrective action; absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Any employee found to have harassed another employee, volunteer, visitor, or other individual, which includes constituent congregations and their members, will be subject to severe disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination of employment. The NWLMS also may take additional action necessary to effectively resolve the situation in a manner it deems appropriate.

Retaliation for reporting harassment will not be permitted. No one will be retaliated against regarding opportunities, compensation, benefits, or other terms or conditions of employment for submitting a report of harassment or for participating in an investigation related to a harassment claim.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The NWLMS is committed to conducting its business in a manner that is environmentally conscious. Each employee has an individual responsibility to understand and to support our environmental practices. The NWLMS is committed to recycling, conservation of resources, preventing or minimizing pollution, and promoting environmental responsibility. Consistent with NWLMS mission and values, we promote recycling and/or reusing products and materials, monitoring and reducing electricity use when possible, and managing hazardous chemicals and materials appropriately.

### **PARKING**

Employees are asked to park so that visitors have easy access to the NWLMS office during synod office hours. The NWLMS is not responsible for personal automobiles or contents while on the premises. Please remove all valuables and lock your car while parking at the synod office.

### **PERSONAL APPEARANCE & DRESS CODE**

The NWLMS wishes to provide a welcoming, comfortable and professional image to our visitors. An employee's personal appearance contributes greatly to the impression of others. Clothing should be neat, clean, appropriate, and in good taste at all times.

Good judgment is expected in matters of jewelry, cosmetics, personal grooming, cleanliness, and hygiene. Excessive jewelry and make-up and extreme clothing and hairstyles are to be avoided. Strong perfumes (including lotions, after shaves, etc.) are inappropriate for the workplace and can cause allergic reactions so should not be used.

Should an employee's attire or hygiene be deemed inappropriate by the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod, the employee may be required to leave work and return when dress and/or hygiene is suitable for work. Any time missed for this reason will be without pay. Employees who have questions regarding appropriate dress for work should consult with their supervisor.

### **GENERAL HOUSEKEEPING**

Neatness and good housekeeping are signs of efficiency. Employees are expected to keep work areas neat, clean and orderly at all times. Employees are expected to care for and appropriately maintain equipment assigned to them, to replace paper or ink in copiers as needed, and to be considerate of others when using common equipment.

If a liquid is spilled, please clean it up immediately in a safe manner. Do not leave materials or other supplies on the floor where individuals may slip, trip or fall. Keep aisles, stairways, exits, fire extinguishers, and doorways clear at all times. Keep drawers closed when not accessing the contents. Dispose of trash in the appropriate receptacles. Please be aware of good health and safety standards and report anything that needs repairing or replacing to your supervisor.

Should an employee's workspace be deemed unduly cluttered, messy or otherwise inappropriate, the employee will be required to correct the issue. Employees who have questions or concerns regarding appropriate housekeeping should consult with their supervisor.

### **SMOKING / TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

The NWLMS maintains a "no-smoking" policy. Smoking and the use of other tobacco products (including vaping, e-cigarettes, or similar products) is prohibited during work hours and while on synod property or while conducting synod business. Synod property includes inside offices as well as entrances, parking lots, etc. When visiting others or while representing the synod, employees who smoke are requested to be aware of not offending others who may be sensitive to smoke by washing their hands after smoking, keeping clothing as fresh smelling as possible, and using a mouthwash or breath mints after smoking.

## **PERSONAL VISITORS**

Employees generally are not to have personal visitors during working time. This applies to family, friends, and former employees, as well as strangers and is intended to enhance security, protect confidential information, safeguard employee welfare, and avoid potential distractions and disturbances. If a visitor is uninvited, appears suspicious, or is in any way threatening, an employee should contact the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod, or call 911 immediately (depending on the urgency of the situation).

## **COMPENSATION PRACTICES**

### **PAY**

The NWLMS wants to recruit, retain and reward capable people. To achieve this, we strive to offer a pleasant working environment, competitive pay and a meaningful benefits program. The NWLMS determines an employee's job level and pay range by evaluating such things as the level of responsibility, skills required to do the job, the problem-solving ability and decision-making necessary, and the working conditions for the position. An actual pay rate is then established based on the job level, the prior experience brought to the job, and external comparisons.

From time to time an employee may be eligible for an individual wage increase. Whether a wage increase is given, however, is within the NWLMS discretion and is based upon such factors as work volume, budgetary constraints and overall individual work performance. Wage increases are proposed by the synod's Executive Committee and approved by the Synod Council.

### **PAY DAY & PAY RECORDS**

NWLMS employees are paid on a semi-monthly basis on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month. If the pay date falls on a weekend or holiday, paychecks are available the last weekday preceding the regular pay day. A pay week begins each Monday morning and ends each Sunday night.

Time sheets are available for employees to record hours worked. Exempt employees are required to document each day they work. Non-exempt employees are required to document when they begin and end work each day, including approved lunch breaks or other time away from work. Hours worked include all the time actually spent on the job performing assigned duties. Paid time should be clearly designated. All employees are to record paid time appropriately (for example, regular hours, vacation time, holiday, overtime, etc.). Time records are to be submitted to the synod's Director of Finance by the first workday after the payroll

period ends. Failure to turn in or to accurately record the time worked may result in the delay of a paycheck or an administrative correction in a subsequent check.

Time records are legal records and must be maintained properly and accurately. The only person authorized to make any entry or change to a time record is the employee whose name appears on it. Any changes on a timecard or time sheet must be approved in writing by the employee's supervisor or the Synod Bishop (or designee).

### **WORK SCHEDULES & OVERTIME**

Synod office hours are generally from 9 AM to 3 PM during weekdays (Monday through Friday) unless otherwise set and communicated by the Synod Bishop. The office is closed on holidays; however, from time to time an employee may be required to work on these days as needed. With approval of the Synod Bishop, an employee's individual work schedule and location may vary either within or outside of these hours by the employee's position, the time of year, or other synod-related needs. With the exception of approved time off, employees are expected to work all regularly scheduled hours, arriving on time, being available throughout their work time, and working through to their scheduled end time. In addition, work time may include evening and weekend obligations based on synod programming and activities, with appropriate adjustment of work hours during normal work hours as needed.

If an employee has a personal matter that needs to be attended to during scheduled work time, the employee's schedule may be modified for a given day or within that same work week to the extent possible with Synod operations. It is important that any changes to an employee's schedule are determined and approved in advance of any time off during hours in which the employee is normally expected to work.

On occasion, non-exempt employees are required to work overtime to meet NWLMS operational needs. Overtime must be authorized by the employee's supervisor prior to working overtime hours. Overtime will be paid at time and one-half the employee's regular hourly wage for non-exempt employees who actually work more than forty hours in a single pay week. Overtime is calculated on the basis of hours actually worked; paid time off hours (such as vacation time, personal time, holidays, etc.) do not count toward the overtime calculation.

## **MEAL & BREAK PERIODS**

Employees working eight (8) hours per day are eligible for a 30-minute unpaid lunch period. This time can be used as the employee wishes (eating, errands, etc.). Staffing should be arranged so that phones are still answered during the lunch period as needed.

The NWLMS does not have formal break periods during the working day; instead employees may take a brief break from their work as needed to remain alert and to tend to personal needs. Employees will be notified if time away from work negatively impacts synod operational needs. An employee who is a nursing mother also may have unpaid break time and an appropriate location to express breast milk as needed. Please notify your supervisor if this is applicable to you for more information and arrangements.

## **PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS**

Deductions are taken against an employee's gross pay each pay period as required for federal, state and local income taxes, social security taxes, and garnishments. Deductions are calculated as required by law and as modified by deductions claimed on employee W-4 forms on file. Employees may change income tax withholding levels by completing a new W-4 form. The NWLMS offers programs and benefits beyond those required by law, such as automatic payroll deposit and insurances. Eligible employees may voluntarily authorize additional deductions from their pay checks to cover the costs of participation in these programs.

A wage garnishment is an order from a court or a government agency directing us to withhold a certain amount of money from an employee's paycheck and to send it to a person or agency. Wages can be garnished to pay child support, spousal support or alimony, tax debts, outstanding student loans or money owed as a result of a judgment in a civil lawsuit. If the NWLMS is instructed by a court or agency to garnish an employee's wages, the employee will be notified of the garnishment at once. Please note that the NWLMS is legally required to comply with these orders. If you dispute or have concerns about the amount of a garnishment, you must contact the court or agency that issued the order.

The NWLMS does not take any other deductions from your paycheck without your written authorization unless required by a government authority. If you believe a deduction has been inappropriately taken, or if you have any other questions concerning why deductions were made from your paycheck or how they were calculated, please provide written notice to the synod's Director of Finance, with a copy to the Vice President of the synod, as soon as possible after the questionable deduction is made. The NWLMS will provide you a written response regarding what deduction was made and why. In addition, an employee will be reimbursed promptly for any improper deductions that were made.

## **EMPLOYEE BENEFITS**

### **VACATION DAYS**

The NWLMS provides regular full-time and regular part-time benefit eligible employees paid vacation time off for personal activities, rest and relaxation. Paid vacation accrues from the first day on the job. The amount of vacation time provided is based upon the employee's years of service with the synod with exceptions managed by the synod's Executive Committee during the hiring process as appropriate. Vacation time can be taken in one-hour increments as needed but employees are strongly encouraged to plan for longer absences (i.e., a week or more) to effectively "unplug" and "de-stress" relative to the normal work schedule. Vacation time must be pre-approved by the Synod Bishop and will be granted or denied for a particular time period based on workload requirements or other synod business reasons.

Vacation time is to be reported to the synod's Director of Finance in advance of the time taken to assure accurate tracking within the payroll system.

Vacation time is provided on an annual (calendar year) basis assuming a standard 40-hour work week for regular full-time benefit eligible employees as follows:

<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>Full-Time Benefit Eligible</u>	<u>Part-Time Benefit Eligible<sup>1</sup></u>
Up to two years	96 hours (12 workdays)	48 hours (12 workdays)
Three to five years	112 hours (14 workdays)	56 hours (14 workdays)
Six to nine years	128 hours (16 workdays)	64 hours (16 workdays)
Ten to fifteen years	160 hours (20 workdays)	80 hours (20 workdays)
Sixteen years and beyond	192 hours (24 workdays)	96 hours (24 workdays)

<sup>1</sup>The hours listed assume a 50% part-time status which is equivalent to a 20-hour work week. Actual planned vacation hours will vary based on actual hours worked per week (pro-rated based on annualized % status).

Values listed assume the employee is working the full year. A "workday" is based on typical average working hours for a regular full-time benefit eligible position (i.e., 40-hour work week at an average of 8 hours per day) or regular part-time benefit eligible position (i.e., for those working 50% of a full-time position this is equivalent to a 20-hour work week at an average of 4 hours per day). Adjustments will be made on a pro-rated basis as appropriate – i.e., employee's starting or retiring mid-year, part-time employees working more or less than 4 hours/day on average, etc. The number of years of service are based on the hire date with vacation amounts provided starting January 1 of each calendar year.

For example, a regular full-time benefit eligible employee starting on June 1 will have 50% of the full year's allotted vacation to use (6 days or 48 hours) through the remainder of that calendar year. On January 1 of the next calendar year (the second year on staff), the employee will have

the full allotment of vacation (12 workdays or 96 hours) to use. Starting January 1 of the third calendar year (the third year on staff), the vacation time allotted to this employee for the full year will increase to 14 workdays (112 hours) as the third year of service occurs within that calendar year.

Regular part-time benefit eligible employees must work at least a 20-hour per week schedule to be eligible for paid vacation. If eligible, part-time employees are paid for each vacation day based on the average hours worked per week. For example, a new 50% part-time employee's vacation hours are based on twelve (12) 4-hour workdays for the full year which totals 48 hours of vacation time – with proration based on the start date to determine the actual hours of vacation to be used across the remainder of the initial calendar year. A new 62.5% part-time employee's vacation hours are based on twelve (12) 5-hour workdays which equates to 60 hours of vacation time prior to proration based on start date. A new 75% part-time employee's vacation hours are based on twelve (12) 6-hour workdays which equates to 72 hours of vacation time prior to proration based on start date (and so on).

Holidays observed by the NWLM Synod occurring during an employee's vacation time do not count against the employee's vacation allotment.

Paid vacation time off is not considered hours worked for overtime calculation purposes. Any vacation time not used during the year is forfeited at the end of the year, it may not be carried over to the next year or cashed out. Upon termination of employment, unused vacation time that has been accrued as of the final day of employment is paid out in an employee's final paycheck.

Additional requests for unpaid time off will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with the synod's operational needs.

## **SICK DAYS**

Full-time and part-time employees are protected by a paid sick leave plan. Paid sick days are intended for use only for actual days when the employee or an employee's immediate family member has a personal illness, and the employee is therefore unable to report to work during regular work hours. Paid sick days are not intended for use as additional vacation or other paid days off. Paid sick days are not considered hours worked for overtime calculation purposes.

Specifically, earned (accrued) sick leave may be used for any of the following:

- The employee's or the employee's family member's mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition; medical diagnosis, care, or treatment of the employee's mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition; or preventative medical care for the employee.
- If the employee or the employee's family member is a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, for medical care or psychological or other counseling for physical or psychological

injury or disability; to obtain services from a victim services organization; to relocate due to domestic violence or sexual assault; to obtain legal services; or to participate in any civil or criminal proceedings related to or resulting from the domestic violence or sexual assault.

- For meetings at a child’s school or place of care related to the child’s health or disability, or the effects of domestic violence or sexual assault on the child.
- For closure of the employee’s place of business by order of a public official due to a public health emergency; for an employee’s need to care for a child whose school or place of care has been closed by order of a public official due to a public health emergency; or when it has been determined by the health authorities having jurisdiction or by a health care provider that the employee’s or employee’s family member’s presence in the community would jeopardize the health of others because of the employee’s or family member’s exposure to a communicable disease.

Persons considered immediate family for sick leave / family illness purposes include spouse, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, son-in-law and daughter-in-law. The definitions of immediate or qualified family members may be altered based on individual circumstances.

Sick leave begins accumulating at the start of employment at the rate of one workday per month. Part-time employees earn this benefit on a pro-rated basis based on average hours worked per week. A sick day equates to the hours/day worked on average for each employee (i.e., 8 hours/day for a full-time employee; 4 hours/day for a part-time employee working 20 hours/week on average – actual hours worked per day are based on a 40-hour work week).

Sick time accrues as of the 1st day of each month. A “year” for purposes of sick leave accrual is a calendar year from January to December. Unused sick leave does not expire – accrued sick leave may be saved for future use in case of an extended illness or emergency. Upon termination of employment from the synod, unused sick days that have been accrued and/or saved up as of the final day of employment are forfeited and will not be paid out in an employee’s final paycheck.

Up to seventy-two (72) hours of sick leave may be used in a calendar year. An approved leave is necessary for any absence exceeding seventy-two (72) hours in a calendar year. Sick days are to be reported to the Bishop and to the synod’s Financial Director as soon as possible either during the time off period or immediately after return to work to assure awareness and accurate tracking within the payroll system.

Any employee whose time away from work becomes an issue will be notified and the situation will be addressed on an individual basis consistent with the Attendance and Punctuality Policy. Employees who need extended time away from work may consider whether a formal leave of absence is appropriate (please refer to the Leaves of Absence policies). An employee must use

sick days (if available) at the beginning of a medical or personal (when due to a family member's illness) leave of absence.

Temporary employees and contract workers are not eligible for Sick Leave/Family Illness pay but may request an unpaid leave as needed.

### **BEREAVEMENT TIME OFF**

When an employee has a death in the employee's immediate family, the synod will provide bereavement time off as needed to grieve the loss of the family member, to make arrangements for and/or to attend a funeral or memorial service, and to handle other post-death matters, with advance notice to and approval from the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod. Persons considered immediate family include father, mother, brother, sister, spouse, child, grandparent, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, or sister-in-law. The definitions of immediate family may be altered based on individual circumstances.

Regular full-time and regular part-time benefit eligible employees may have up to three (3) paid days off for bereavement. Additional time off requests will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

An employee may use vacation time off to cover additional time off due to bereavement. Any paid time off due to bereavement is not considered hours worked for overtime calculation purposes. If extended time off is necessary, an employee may consider requesting a personal leave of absence (please refer to Leave of Absence policies).

Time off for bereavement is to be reported to the synod's Director of Finance as soon as possible either during the time off period or immediately after return to work to assure accurate tracking within the payroll system.

## HOLIDAYS

The NWLMS provides regular full-time benefit eligible employees eleven (11) paid holidays a year (regular part-time benefit eligible employees receive this benefit on a pro-rated basis). Holidays are paid at the full-time employee's regular rate for the employee's regularly scheduled hours for a workday. Days the offices are officially closed and which are considered paid holidays include the following:

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- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday after Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve Day
- Christmas Day

Full-time benefit eligible employees are paid 8 hours of pay at the employee's regular rate of pay for each of the holidays listed above.

Part-time benefit eligible employees who are regularly scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week are eligible for holiday pay and will receive this pay based on the average hours worked per day assuming a 5-day/40-hour work week (as explained in the vacation time proration section) for holidays that occur on normal workdays (Monday – Friday). Holiday pay is not intended to increase the hours paid in a single work week for an employee.

A holiday falling on Saturday will normally be observed on the preceding Friday. A holiday falling on Sunday will normally be observed on the following Monday. Holiday pay is provided as defined above even if the office is typically closed on the day the Holiday is observed (i.e., a holiday falling during the weekend when the synod office is normally closed).

Employees who are on an unpaid Leave of Absence will not be eligible for holiday pay.

If an employee's religion requires the observance of a holiday other than those listed above and the employee is scheduled to work on that day, appropriate arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis to accommodate the situation.

If a non-exempt employee is required to work on a holiday, the employee will be paid the employee's regular rate of pay for the actual hours worked on the holiday and will receive a different day off with pay as close to the actual holiday as possible consistent with overall Synod business operations. Holiday pay is not considered "hours worked" for overtime pay calculation purposes.

## HEALTH CARE, DISABILITY, PENSION AND INSURANCE BENEFITS

Rostered ministers and full-time and part-time benefit eligible at-will employees on staff are eligible to participate in selected health care, disability, pension and group life insurance benefits administered by Portico Benefit Services. As each new plan year approaches, the synod chooses the level of health care coverage offered by Portico that best fits employee benefit needs and the synod's budget capacity.

**Rostered Ministers:** As per the N/W Lower MI Synod Compensation Guidelines (available on the synod website), the synod will provide health coverage for rostered ministers on staff and their families, unless a rostered minister's family is covered elsewhere and chooses to waive health coverage. In addition, disability, pension and group life insurance benefits administered by Portico Benefit Services are also provided.

**Full-time Benefit Eligible At-Will Employees:** The synod covers 100% of the premium for eligible employees' health care coverage through Portico Benefit Services (medical including prescription and dental coverage) and 50% of the premium for the employees' spouse and/or dependents for whom such coverage is not otherwise provided. Vision coverage through Portico is available as an option with 100% of the premiums paid by the employee. Synod employees shall pay their portion of the spouse, dependent and/or optional vision premiums via payroll deduction.

**Part-time Benefit Eligible At-Will Employees:** The synod covers 100% of the premium for the employee's health care coverage through Portico Benefit Services (medical including prescription and dental coverage). Coverage is not provided for spouse or dependents. Vision coverage is available through Portico as an option with 100% of the premiums paid by the employee via payroll deduction.

All employees eligible for Medicare Advantage coverage or who have medical insurance (including prescription coverage) through another employer-provided plan (i.e., through a spouse's coverage, etc.) may waive the medical portion of the Portico plan (disability, pension and group life insurance benefits would continue to be provided). If medical coverage is waived, additional compensation in the form of cash in lieu of medical coverage may be considered by the synod's Executive Committee.

Upon election of participation in the program offered by the Portico Benefit Services, Synod pension contributions for benefit eligible employees are based on the following percentages:

<b>Classification (Based on Age at the Start of the Fiscal Year)</b>	<b>Pension Contribution Rate</b>
<b>Called Staff (Rostered)</b>	
Less than age 60	12%
Age 60-64	15%
Age 65+	18%
<b>Admin and Deployed Staff ("At Will")</b>	
Less than age 60	10%
Age 60-64	12%
Age 65+	15%

Note that the Internal Revenue Service sets annual limits for retirement plan contributions. Contact the Portico Benefit Service Center for more details [(800) 352-2876]. In addition, contact the Synod’s Director of Finance for full information on Portico Benefits, Summary Plan Descriptions, eligibility, enrollment, and employee contribution information.

### **WORKERS’ COMPENSATION**

Workers’ compensation insurance pays for medical expenses when an employee becomes injured or sick as a result of his or her employment. If the employee is unable to work, workers’ compensation also provides lost wage payments to the employee after a brief waiting period. For more information, please contact the synod’s Director of Finance. Please refer also to the Medical Leave of Absence policy for time off procedures.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION**

Employees are typically not eligible for unemployment compensation benefits (state or federal) upon termination of employment, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, since the NWLMS is exempt from paying federal and state unemployment tax. There may be scenarios where unemployment benefits are applicable (i.e., pandemic programs, etc.). Employees are encouraged to consult with the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity at the following website for more information: <https://www.michigan.gov/leo>.

## **CONTINUING EDUCATION**

The NWLMS recognizes the importance of continuing education for its employees; accordingly, the NWLMS at times may provide its employees the opportunity to attend meetings, seminars or programs which are related to and can enhance skills required for the job or are required for continued career development. Whether an educational opportunity is job-related and eligible for this benefit will be determined in the NWLMS sole discretion. If the meeting, seminar or program is one which you are required to attend, you will receive your normal pay for the time you are attending the program as well as any pre-approved fees and expenses directly related to the opportunity. Generally, up to one thousand dollars (\$1000) per year for regular full-time employees and up to five hundred dollars (\$500) per year for regular part-time benefit eligible employees may be available for continuing education. In addition, an employee may request up to five (5) paid days off for continuing education purposes. Employees are expected to make necessary arrangements ahead of time to attend an educational opportunity.

Employees who attend an educational opportunity paid for by the NWLMS are required to attend ALL meetings, sessions and/or classes which are part of the opportunity, arriving on time and staying until the conclusion unless alternative scheduling is approved prior to the event. Time spent in educational opportunities is an investment in yourself and your future through the increased skills, knowledge and understanding you will gain. Keeping current in one's field of work is the personal responsibility of each employee. Continuing education allowances are not to be used to prepare an employee for an outside position or for future employment in another field of work. If an employee wishes to attend an optional or non-required seminar to further his or her job proficiency, the employee must provide the NWLMS with a written request including the reasons such training would be beneficial and the estimated expenses involved.

Continuing education allowances must be preauthorized by the Vice President of the synod and Executive Committee and will subsequently be paid upon submission of documentation of expenses, and a passing grade or certificate of completion, within 60 days of the last session attended. Employees should arrange with their supervisor how they will share information learned upon their return.

When an employee is sent to a conference that is directly related to the establishment or continuation of a synod program, the cost of that event should be built into the program budget and will not be considered a continuing education cost under this policy.

## **STAFF MEETINGS**

Attendance at staff meetings (either in-person or remote / via Zoom) are paid at an employee's regular hourly rate and are considered hours worked for pay purposes. All employees are expected to attend staff meetings (in-person or remote as agreed upon with the Synod Bishop) and to contribute any ideas or challenges that might have arisen unless specifically authorized to be excused by their supervisor. Staff meetings are held so that we can have a relaxed time to talk about anything good or bad happening in our jobs as well as to keep everyone informed related to upcoming events, etc. Please contribute and use the time to learn more about what other staff members are doing and to voice your ideas and solutions.

## **BUSINESS & TRAVEL EXPENSES**

The NWLMS reimburses employees for pre-approved actual, reasonable, and necessary business expenses which are fully documented. Generally, business expenses must be approved in writing in advance of when the expense is incurred in order to be reimbursed. If advance written permission is not granted, the NWLMS has the option of not reimbursing the expense(s) in question. All expenses must be completely documented with original receipts, submitted within thirty (30) days of when incurred or they may not be reimbursed.

Employees who are required to travel by and on behalf of the NWLMS using their personal vehicle will be reimbursed for mileage accrued upon submission of appropriate documentation to the synod's Director of Finance within thirty (30) days of the travel. Mileage is paid at the amount established and approved by the IRS.

Employees who are provided Synod credit cards are to use such cards only for Synod-related expenses. Such expenses should be pre-authorized unless specifically provided otherwise. All original receipts for expenses using synod credit cards should be provided to the synod's Director of Finance by the end of each month of when the expense is incurred for bill reconciliation, payments, and audit purposes. If a card is lost or stolen, the employee must notify the Financial Director immediately. Synod credit cards must be returned to the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod or the synod's Director of Finance immediately upon request and upon termination of employment.

## **WITNESS & JURY DUTY PAY**

If you need time off work because you are called as a witness or for jury duty, provide a copy of the summons to the Bishop and request approval to be absent prior to the time you are required to attend. The Synod Bishop (or designee) will approve the time off unless the critical nature of your work calls for an employer-requested postponement of or release from the duty.

Employees are expected to work their normal schedule to the extent possible with witness or jury duty requirements and are required to submit a copy of proof of service when jury or witness duty is completed. Requests for alternate arrangements will be considered on a case-by-case basis consistent with Synod operational needs.

Regular full-time employees will be paid for the time they serve for up to fifteen days per calendar year and are allowed to keep the allowance received from the court for such service. Employees required to serve more than fifteen days in a calendar year may use paid time off benefits to supplement any witness or jury duty pay.

## **VOTING**

Voting is a basic civic responsibility. Generally, it is possible to vote before or after working hours. If it is not possible to vote before or after working hours, please request advance authorization from the Bishop to leave work briefly for voting purposes during the workday. Nonexempt employees are to clock out if authorized to leave work for voting purposes.

**[Note: The benefit policies contained in this Employee Handbook are not applicable to pastoral staff or synodical rostered employees who are provided benefits in accordance with synod guidelines to the extent the same topic is addressed in call or other contractual documents.]**

## **LEAVES OF ABSENCE**

### **MEDICAL LEAVE**

Regular full-time and regular part-time benefit eligible employees who need time away from work due to their own illness or disability may apply for a medical leave of absence if they wish to continue their employment status with the NWLMS. A medical leave of absence will extend for the length of the disability or eight (8) weeks, whichever is less. An employee may request an extension of an approved medical leave of absence for up to an additional maximum period of four (4) weeks.

An approved medical leave of absence is unpaid time off work unless the employee is otherwise eligible for compensation pursuant to requirements of and participation in a Synod-sponsored health and/or disability plan. Exceptions to this policy may be granted upon written request and subsequent review and approval by the synod's Executive Committee.

An employee is required to use unused paid time off benefits as part of the leave under this policy. Generally, benefits will not accrue or be paid for by the NWLMS during periods of approved medical leave of absence, except as otherwise required by participation in and eligibility under specified individual benefit plans. During an approved leave, the employee is required to leave any NWLMS-provided equipment (such as cell phones or lap top computers) at the synod office unless specifically authorized in writing by the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod.

Except in cases of emergency, request for leave must be made in writing at least two (2) weeks prior to the beginning of the requested leave period. The request must be accompanied by a written report from the employee's personal physician detailing the employee's disability and the projected length of such disability. The NWLMS may require additional medical verification of the employee's ability to return to work or of a continuing disability which prevents an employee from returning to work. The NWLMS also reserves the right to require the employee to submit to further mental or physical examination by a doctor, selected by the NWLMS, at the NWLMS expense.

An employee returning from an approved medical leave of absence must provide the NWLMS at least one (1) week advance notice of his or her intent to return to active employment prior to the end of the approved leave, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Vice President of the synod. An employee returning to work will be assigned to his or her former position if the position has not been eliminated or filled during the employee's absence. If the former position is not available, the NWLMS will attempt to assign the employee to a similar position. The NWLMS does not guarantee the availability of a position or continued employment upon return from leave. The employee should not accept other employment during a medical leave of absence without providing written notification.

An employee is expected to communicate periodically with the NWLMS while on leave regarding the employee's continued intent to return to employment at the completion of the leave. Employees who are able to work but fail to return on the agreed expiration date of a medical leave, or who have not requested or do not have an approved extension for additional leave, will be considered to have voluntarily resigned their employment.

## **PERSONAL LEAVE**

Regular full-time and regular part-time benefit eligible employees may submit a request for an unpaid personal leave not to exceed four (4) weeks. An employee may request one extension of an approved personal leave of absence for up to an additional maximum period of two (2) weeks. Requests must be made in writing and must include the reason for the request with any supporting documentation at least two (2) weeks before the effective date, except in cases of emergency. Approval will be based on the synod's ability to cover the employee's position and other relevant circumstances at the time the request is made.

Exceptions to this policy may be granted upon written request and subsequent review and approval by the synod's Executive Committee.

An employee may use unused paid time off benefits as part of the leave under this policy. Benefits will not accrue or be paid for by the NWLMS during periods of approved unpaid leaves of absence. During an approved leave, the employee is required to leave any NWLMS-provided equipment (such as cell phones or laptop computers) at the synod office unless specifically authorized in writing by the Bishop or the Vice President of the synod.

If possible, an employee returning from an approved personal leave of absence will give the NWLMS at least two (2) weeks advance notice of his or her intent to return to active employment prior to the end of the approved leave. An employee returning to work will be assigned to his or her former position if the position has not been eliminated or filled during the employee's absence. If the former position is not available, the NWLMS will attempt to assign the employee to a similar position. The NWLMS does not guarantee the availability of a position or continued employment upon return from leave. An employee should notify the Vice President of the synod if he or she accepts other employment during a personal leave of absence.

An employee is expected to communicate periodically with the NWLMS while on leave regarding the employee's continued intent to return to employment at the completion of the leave. Employees who are able to work but fail to return on the agreed expiration date of a personal leave, or who have not requested or do not have an approved extension for additional leave, will be considered to have voluntarily resigned their employment.

## **MILITARY LEAVE**

If you need time off for service in the uniformed services (including active duty, training, National Guard Duty, etc.), whether voluntarily or involuntarily, please submit copies of your military orders or other appropriate supporting documentation to the Vice President of the synod as soon as possible. The NWLMS will grant military time off or a military leave of absence, without pay, for the period of military service in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. Your eligibility for reinstatement after your military service is completed is also determined in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. During an approved leave, the employee is required to leave any NWLMS-provided equipment (such as cell phones or lap top computers) at the synod office unless specifically authorized in writing by the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod. Please contact the Vice President of the synod for more information.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE**

In unique or extenuating circumstances rendering an employee unable to work in his/her current position, the employee may be placed on a paid or an unpaid administrative leave of absence. In some cases an administrative leave may be used as an alternative to termination from employment. Eligibility for and the length of an administrative leave of absence, the impact on benefit continuation, and conditions regarding return to work will be determined on an individual basis by the synod's Executive Committee. During an approved leave, the employee is required to leave any NWLMS-provided equipment (such as cell phones or laptop computers) at the synod office unless specifically authorized in writing by the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod. The NWLMS does not guarantee the availability of a position or continued employment if the employee is placed on an Administrative Leave.

## **HEALTH, SAFETY & SECURITY**

### **HEALTH EXAMINATIONS**

The NWLMS reserves the right to require an employee to submit to medical examinations and tests at any time should concerns arise regarding the physical or mental ability of an employee to function adequately in his/her position and/or to maintain workplace safety. Such examinations and tests will be at the NWLMS expense. Submission to such examinations and tests may be required as a condition of initial or continued employment. In the event an employee's physical or mental condition is not or cannot be resolved favorably in an acceptable

manner and within a reasonable period of time, the employee may be placed on an unpaid leave of absence or employment may be terminated.

## **SAFETY GUIDELINES**

Employee safety is a primary concern of the NWLMS. We are committed to providing a safe and healthy work environment for all of our employees. As an employee you are personally responsible for performing assigned duties according to synod or safety guidelines and with the main concern for your safety and the safety of other employees, visitors and synod property.

To help keep your work environment safe, be sure to:

- Report all illnesses, accidents or injuries, no matter how slight, in writing to your supervisor before the end of the day in which the illness, accident or injury occurs, regardless if medical attention is required.
- Inform your supervisor immediately of any conditions which may be a safety or health hazard, including faulty or defective equipment or supplies, so that the issue can be addressed.
- Wear safety gear as appropriate for the task being performed and equipment being used consistent with safety guidelines.

Employees should take all reasonable actions, mindful of their own personal safety, to contain or prevent injury; to isolate, neutralize, or label a hazard for persons unaware of it; and to minimize additional damage or loss to the NWLMS. Under no circumstances, however, should employees take any action which would put themselves at risk of personal injury or harm.

## **REPORTING ILLNESSES, ACCIDENTS & INCIDENTS**

Employees who become ill during working hours should notify their supervisor as soon as possible. If an employee has an accident or is in any way injured while working, or witnesses a visitor, another employee, or any other person having an accident of any sort on synod property or at a work site, the employee must immediately assist or summons help, as circumstances require, must immediately notify their supervisor, and must complete any necessary paperwork as soon as possible but no later than the end of the workday in which the accident or injury occurs.

## **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

The NWLMS has an Emergency Action Plan in the event of an unforeseen situation that threatens our employees, visitors, or the public; which could disrupt our operations; or which could cause physical or environmental damage. It is important that employees are prepared in the event of an emergency since a dangerous situation may arise with little or no advance warning and the situation may require evacuation or other immediate response. An emergency includes such things as a fire or other natural disaster, severe weather such as a tornado, an individual's cardiac arrest, etc.

The NWLMS Emergency Action Plan provides information such as how to report a fire or other emergency, location of fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment, evacuation procedures and escape routes, assigned rescue and medical duties, post-event procedures, and who is responsible for overseeing and implementing the Plan.

Remember: Although it is your responsibility to protect Synod property, *the safety of people comes first.*

## **SECURITY OF PROPERTY**

The NWLMS is not responsible for personal property of employees. Insurance will not cover theft or damage of property not owned by the NWLMS. Employees are responsible for protecting their own personal property and valuables. Any synod property and/or storage areas or devices are provided for the convenience of the employee; accordingly, they, as well as any articles found within them, can be inspected by the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod, a member of the Executive Committee of the NWLMS at any time, either with or without advance notice.

## **VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

The NWLMS is committed to preventing workplace violence and to maintaining a safe work environment. The NWLMS prohibits any language or actions by employees which could create an unfriendly, bullying, intimidating, or threatening effect on another employee or visitor. Likewise, a visitor is not permitted to create an unfriendly, intimidating or threatening effect against an employee. Any such actions should be reported to the employee's supervisor and/or the Vice President of the synod as soon as possible after it occurs. If there is reasonable belief there is the potential for immediate, physical harm to any individual on the premises, local law enforcement officials should be contacted immediately.

The NWLMS prohibits the unauthorized possession of firearms or weapons (or other dangerous or hazardous materials, devices, or substances) on synod premises or while conducting synod business. This prohibition includes visible or concealed weapons, even if the individual has a valid permit. An employee who witnesses behavior which is erratic, abusive, threatening, or otherwise troublesome by anyone on synod premises or while conducting synod business should report it immediately to the Synod Bishop and/or the Vice President of the synod, or they should call 911 for emergency assistance if the situation warrants immediate law enforcement assistance.

The NWLMS encourages employees to bring their disputes or differences with other employees or visitors to the attention of their supervisor, the Synod Bishop or the Vice President of the synod before the situation escalates into potential violence. The NWLMS will assist in working toward resolution of employee disputes and will not discipline employees for raising concerns.

### **INCLEMENT WEATHER**

In the event of inclement weather, the Synod Bishop will determine if the synod office is to be closed and if any synod-led meetings and/or events should be cancelled. If the synod office is closed, staff members are expected to conduct their work from home as they are able. Meetings scheduled remotely (via Zoom) can continue as appropriate. If a staff member is unable to work from home, the time off from work due to inclement weather is not paid, although available sick days or vacation time may be used upon request.

Notwithstanding this policy, the NWLMS does not expect staff members to jeopardize their safety due to inclement weather in order to report to work in the synod office or at another off-site location. A staff member who is not able to report to work due to inclement weather is to contact the Synod Bishop (or designee) and also is required to provide notice consistent with the Attendance and Punctuality policy.

### **EQUIPMENT, TECHNOLOGY & VEHICLES**

#### **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

The NWLMS provides most of the equipment and supplies employees will need for their work. NWLMS equipment and supplies are intended primarily for synod-related business and not for personal use. Consistent with good housekeeping practices, employees are responsible for ensuring that synod equipment is properly cleaned and cared for at all times. The cost of fixing or replacing equipment which is lost, misused or damaged during improper use, employee error, or abuse may be the responsibility of the employee.

## **TELEPHONES & CELL PHONES**

Telephones, including cell phones, are an important means of communication for our synod. Staff members should always have a courteous and well-mannered attitude when using the phone for NWLMS business. A staff member answering the telephone should:

- Use a pleasant voice
- Identify himself/herself by name
- Give the caller a choice of holding, calling back, or leaving a message if the caller cannot be connected to his/her party
- Inform the caller when transferring to another person

NWLMS phones are to be used for the purpose of serving our synod and for conducting synod business; accordingly, employees should not have an expectation of privacy when using them (including voice mail). The NWLMS recognizes the need for occasional personal phone calls during business hours; however, personal calls generally should be during authorized break periods, short in duration, and should not interfere with synod operations, service to others on behalf of the synod, or general workflow. Personal long-distance calls may not be charged to the NWLMS.

Personal cell phones are not to be used during work time (this includes talking, texting, and/or using other technologies) except in cases of emergency. If a cell phone is brought into NWLMS offices during work time or taken into a meeting or appointment, it must be deactivated or placed on a silent/vibrate mode until the meeting or appointment is over. The NWLMS reserves the right to require employees to turn their cell phone off or to prohibit an employee from having a cell phone with them during work time if the employee's use of the phone is having a negative impact on business operations or is being used too frequently.

## **TECHNOLOGY & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS**

The NWLMS provides and encourages the use of technological resources and other forms of electronic communication as means to make Synod-related and general business communications more effective. All phones, voice mail, Rolodexes, planners, computers, computer files, e-mail, Internet access, software furnished to employees and any and all other Synod office equipment and/or related communications are Synod property intended primarily for business use. The Synod recognizes that there may be occasional personal use of these tools during break times; however, this shall not be excessive or unreasonable and should not interfere

with Synod operations. It is important to use these tools in a responsible and productive manner that reflects well on you personally and the synod. Electronic correspondence should be written with the same care and professionalism that is given to printed correspondence.

The NWLMS prohibits the use of equipment, computers, Internet access and e-mail, or any other technology in ways that are discriminatory, offensive, obscene, threatening, harassing, intimidating, or disruptive to any employee or any other person, or that are harmful to morale. The NWLMS also prohibits the use of equipment, computers, Internet access, e-mail or other technology for personal gain, for advancement of individual views, or to solicit others for commercial ventures, political causes, outside organizations, or other non-business matters. Do not use the e-mail system to circulate jokes, chain letters, or other non-job-related items. Instant messaging, social networking, and similar applications are not to be used unless facilitating synod related matters during work time. Nothing in this policy is intended or should be interpreted in a manner that prohibits an employee from addressing concerns related to the terms and conditions of their employment in an appropriate manner.

All messages created, sent or retrieved over the Internet, computer, e-mail and/or voice mail systems, or other synod technology are the property of the synod and should be considered public information. Employees should not have an expectation of privacy related to any matter created, retrieved, sent, or stored on synod technological resources, telephones, or equipment, whether or not such matter is designated as private or confidential. The NWLMS reserves the right to access, read, listen to, review, copy and monitor the content of documents, messages, programs, files, or any other communication on the computer, Internet, telephone, e-mail or voice mail system(s), or any other Synod technology at any time, with or without advance notice.

All usernames, passwords, encryption keys and codes must be provided to and will be maintained by the Synod Bishop. Employees may not install password or encryption programs without the Bishop's written authorization.

An employee should not have an expectation of privacy related to business related telephone conversations. The NWLMS may at times listen to an employee's business-related telephone conversation with or without specific prior notice to the employee for the purpose of quality control, customer satisfaction and other business-related purposes.

The NWLMS purchases and licenses the use of various computer software and programs for business purposes and does not own the copyright to this software or its related documentation. Such software and its related documentation may not be reproduced or downloaded without prior written authorization. No hardware or software shall be installed or downloaded on without authorization from the Synod Bishop. Every employee with access to electronic media

and the Internet is responsible for taking appropriate security measures to prevent loss, misuse and damage, including damage caused by computer viruses. Any unexplained loss or alteration of data must be reported immediately to the Bishop.

This policy applies whether an employee is working at the synod or accessing synod information and/or systems from any other location (e.g., logging in from a home computer or working in a remote location).

Employees should notify the Synod Bishop and/or the Vice President of the synod upon learning of any violations of this policy.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media provides the opportunity for individuals to share information with a broad audience. The Synod encourages responsible use of social media and expects employees to use professionalism, good judgment and common sense when using these technologies. Whether or not an employee chooses to use social media by creating or participating in a blog, wiki, personal website, online social network or any other form of online publishing or discussion is his or her own decision. Employees are not authorized to communicate on behalf of the NWLMS, either in an actual or perceived manner, using social media sites unless specifically authorized to do so or as required by job responsibilities.

Synod policies and procedures, including the Technology & Electronic Communication policy, apply to an employee's use of social media when using synod equipment or conducting Synod business. Employees remain solely responsible for anything they post on social media. If an employee communicates or shares anything related to the synod, the employee is responsible for ensuring that it is clear that the employee is representing himself or herself and is not representing the synod. It is an employee's responsibility to ensure that any use of social media does not contain content (text, audio, video, etc.) which violates synod policies or which compromises in any way confidential, proprietary or other sensitive information of the synod. Posting to social media platforms during work is prohibited except during approved breaks or meal periods unless required by job responsibilities.

## VEHICLE USAGE

Synod employees may be provided a vehicle for synod business or may be required to drive their own vehicle for synod business. This policy applies to both use of a synod-provided vehicle and a personal vehicle used by an employee for synod business.

### Vehicle Operation

An employee who is required to drive as part of their job responsibilities or who operates a synod vehicle is expected to operate the vehicle in accordance with all local, state, and federal laws, common standards of safe driving and courtesy, and established synod procedures. Any traffic tickets, citations, or other violation notices received by an employee as a result of improperly driving while working or improperly operating a synod vehicle is the responsibility of, and must be paid by, that employee and must be reported to the Synod Bishop and the Vice President of the synod before the end of the following workday, as possible.

Michigan's hands-free law, effective since June 30, 2023, makes it illegal to hold or use a cell phone or other mobile electronic device for most purposes while driving. Drivers can be pulled over for holding a phone to talk, text, scroll social media, or view videos. In accordance with this law, hands-free use of a device and calling 9-1-1 in an emergency are allowed as needed.

Employees are not to smoke, eat, or engage in other distracting behaviors while driving. Vehicles must be locked while parked outside and unattended vehicles must be turned off and have the keys removed at all times. A spare key for each synod vehicle must be retained in a secure location.

Without specific authorization, all synod vehicles and equipment are intended primarily for synod business. Synod vehicles may be used for minimal personal use as needed. Synod vehicles may not be used for extensive personal use (for example, on days off or for trips where synod business is not conducted) unless advance approval has been given by the Vice President or Treasurer of the synod for a specific event purpose.

A synod employee may transport others; however, only approved employees or other individuals who have obtained specific pre-approval are allowed to operate a synod vehicle.

Use of a synod vehicle is a privilege not to be abused. Failure to comply with this policy may result in loss of the use of the synod-owned vehicle or other appropriate consequences.

### Driver License and Insurance

An employee who drives any vehicle for synod-related business must have a valid driver's license acceptable in the State of Michigan; a CDL may be required based on the vehicle being operated.

In the event your driver license is suspended, revoked, restricted or impacted in any manner you must notify your supervisor immediately and you may not continue to drive for synod business or to operate a synod vehicle. Employees driving a synod vehicle must maintain a driving record acceptable to the synod's insurance provider and are required to authorize the synod to obtain or to provide the synod an annual updated driving record.

### Personal Vehicle Usage

When an employee is required to use their own vehicle for synod business purposes (including employees who prefer to drive a personal vehicle in the event of inclement weather, if a synod vehicle is not available, or if large items need to be transported on behalf for synod business), the employee will be reimbursed based on total mileage at the standard IRS reimbursement rate upon submission of appropriate documentation within thirty days of when incurred. Employees operating their own vehicle for business purposes must maintain personal automobile insurance on their vehicles which is primarily liable for damages in the event of an accident.

### Fuel Expenses

Synod vehicles should be fueled at designated fueling stations, using the synod credit card, whenever possible (personal expenses, including gas for personal vehicles, are not to be charged to this card). When it is not possible to use the synod credit card, requests for reimbursement should be made consistent with standard synod expense reimbursement policy.

### Vehicle Care and Maintenance

An employee who is provided a synod vehicle is responsible for the vehicle's care and maintenance. The vehicle should be kept clean and presentable, inside and out; a minimum of weekly cleaning is recommended. Smoking is not permitted in a synod vehicle.

An employee is responsible for regular vehicle maintenance and for retaining maintenance records for all routine and non-routine maintenance. Regular vehicle maintenance includes oil changes, tire rotations, windshield wiper replacement, and annual waxing, as well as any recommended mileage related maintenance. An employee should obtain prior approval for non-emergency expenses such as repairs to brakes, steering, lights, etc.; inoperative devices, such as door locks, handles, windows, etc.; and damaged or worn tires. The synod may direct the employee as to which automobile service facility to use. A rental car or alternative transportation may be provided as needed for an employee's use while the synod vehicle is being serviced if one is available and as appropriate. Synod vehicle care and maintenance expenses should be paid using the synod credit card when possible. When it is not possible to use the synod credit card,

requests for reimbursement should be made consistent with standard synod expense reimbursement policy.

Synod vehicles are replaced periodically based on vehicle condition, age, and mileage. If an employee has any concern regarding the reliability, safety or general operation of a specific vehicle, or believes such vehicle should be replaced, such concern should be provided in writing to the Vice President and Treasurer of the synod for consideration.

#### Accident, Emergency Repair, or Damage to Vehicle

Any employee involved in an accident while driving on synod business during work time or while operating a synod vehicle must report the accident immediately to the police and to the Vice President of the synod, regardless of if the accident is considered major or minor. The employee is responsible for providing a copy of the accident report to the Vice President of the synod at the earliest possible time, but no later than 48 hours after the accident.

In the event of an unanticipated “emergency” situation (example, a transmission failure), the employee should attempt to contact the Vice President of the synod, an Executive Committee member, the Synod Bishop, or an Assistant to the Bishop for assistance and authorization to repair prior to incurring expenses. Subsequent requests for reimbursement should be made consistent with standard Synod expense reimbursement policy.

An employee may be required to pay for damage(s) to a synod vehicle (including the insurance deductible) caused by an employee’s abuse or neglect. Unauthorized non-removable modification or decoration of any part of synod vehicles is prohibited (example, no permanent window or bumper stickers).

# The North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA

## EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK RECEIPT ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have received a copy of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA (the NWLMS) Employee Handbook. I fully understand and will abide by the policies and procedures contained in it. I understand that it is my responsibility to read the Employee Handbook and to ask questions about and discuss the policies with the Synod Bishop, the Vice President of the synod or my supervisor.

I understand that this Employee Handbook is not a contract of employment or employment agreement, expressed or implied, between me and the NWLMS, and that I should not view it as a contract of employment or an employment agreement. I understand that if a call document or other written contract is inconsistent with the Employee Handbook, the call document or other written contract is controlling.

I also understand and agree that I am an at-will employee which means that my employment is co-terminus with the Synod Bishops term of elected office and may be terminated at any time by the NWLMS or me, with or without cause, and with or without any prior notice. I also understand that no supervisor or other representative of the NWLMS, other than the Vice President of the synod on behalf of the Executive Committee of the NWLMS, has authority to enter into an agreement with me for employment for any specified period of time or to make any agreement with me contrary to the provisions contained in this Employee Handbook. Furthermore, any such agreement must be in writing, signed by the Vice President of the synod before it will be deemed effective.

All decisions by the NWLMS as to intent, interpretation or application of any information contained in the Employee Handbook, or any other of its policies and procedures, shall be binding upon the employee. The NWLMS may exercise its sole discretion in applying and interpreting its policies and may deviate as needed to appropriately deal with and resolve specific situations.

I hereby understand and agree that any claim, cause of action or lawsuit relating to my employment with or the termination of my employment from the NWLMS must be filed no more than six (6) months after the date of the employment action that is the subject of the claim, cause of action or lawsuit, unless shortening the statute of limitations is expressly prohibited by administrative regulations. I hereby waive any statutes of limitations to the contrary.

I understand that this Employee Handbook takes precedence over, supersedes and revokes any previous memorandum, bulletin, policy or procedure issued prior to the effective date below, regarding any subject addressed in this Handbook. I also understand and agree that the NWLMS reserves the right to change, modify, delete, or alter the policies at any time, in its sole discretion, with or without prior notice.

I consent to the publication of my photograph in any synod publication, website or advertising promotion and hereby release the NWLMS from any and all liability for the use of such picture or news story.

The effective date of this Employee Handbook is 01-September-2025.

Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Name (Signed): \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_