

Note about mileage reimbursement and visitations reporting

The synod office has handled a number of questions from congregation councils and pastors about mileage reimbursement documentation and about identifying those who are visited.

The IRS has specific regulations about mileage reimbursement, and documentation is the responsibility of the individual seeking reimbursement. It is to include date, destination, miles traveled, and purpose. The entire mileage record/log should be turned in for reimbursement, not just a total of miles for the reporting period.

Some have been under the impression that HIPAA regulations, or best pastoral practices, prevent the disclosure of the name of individuals who are visited. This is inaccurate. It is reasonable for congregations to ask for the names of those who are visited in the course of extending pastoral care, particularly when those visited are recognized homebound members or visits to those whose hospitalization or other situation was not requested to be kept confidential.

Ministers may report visits as confidential in those cases in which confidentiality is a crucial part of the pastoral care extended (certain crisis or counseling visits, for example). When this is the case, a minister may record a "Confidential Pastoral Visit" so long as a date and mileage are provided.

As always, the goal is a responsible balance between accountability (legally and ethically) and pastoral responsibility (for sensitivity to any need for confidentiality).