

# COMPENSATION GUIDELINES and LEADERSHIP SUPPORT RESOURCE MATERIAL: 2008

Clergy Compensation Task Force  
Northern Great Lakes Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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## The Compensation “Conversation”

One of the most difficult issues in the relationship of pastor and congregation is that of compensation. Many congregations and pastors struggle not only with determining an adequate level of compensation, but with even beginning the conversation!

Nonetheless the conversation, when carried out in a caring, Christian atmosphere is just as important as the final decision. Conversing about compensation involves reviewing not the performance of the pastor, but the whole relationship between pastor and congregation. The pastor, in the call document, is asked to “fulfill (the) pastoral ministry,” while the congregation pledges “prayers, love, esteem, and personal support,” along with the compensation and benefits. To review compensation properly is to take the time to reflect on the responsibility that both pastor and congregation bear in the partnership we share in Jesus Christ!

It is our hope that pastors and congregations will endeavor to do four things:

1. Make a regular effort to review the mission and ministry shared by the pastor and the whole congregation *apart from the compensation process and not just when there is conflict.*
2. Note especially the material on page 10. Seek to develop a well thought out and considered compensation package recognizing that cash compensation is only one part of compensation.
3. Make use of the compensation guidelines provided by the Northern Great Lakes Synod and this resource as a starting point for developing an equitable and affirming compensation package.
4. With joyful, eager, and prayerful anticipation, look forward to the continuing partnership shared by all the people of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ!

This booklet contains various materials related to the compensation planning process that will aid you in the process of developing an overall compensation package. *Please save this booklet for future reference.* In addition, a yearly salary grid, approved by the Synod Assembly, will be sent to congregations and pastors.

We solicit your feedback on this material, and we stand ready to assist congregations and pastors in the review of congregational ministry and the pastoral compensation process.

May God continue to bless your ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

**Clergy Compensation Task Force**  
**Northern Great Lakes Synod - ELCA**

# Common Questions About Clergy Compensation

## **WHAT ARE THESE COMPENSATION GUIDELINES AND WHY SHOULD WE USE THEM?**

How much to “pay the pastor” continues to be one of the more difficult questions that congregations face on an annual basis. The Northern Great Lakes Synod has prepared this document to assist congregations. It is a guide for thinking and for action. While congregations and pastors must arrive at the level of compensation independently, it is helpful to know what other congregations are paying and what are the appropriate benefits.

## **HOW MUCH SHOULD WE PAY THE PASTOR?**

These guidelines use a “salary grid” based on experience. The increments for each additional year are minimal. An annual increase, however, provides affirmation and helps a pastor and her or his family keep up with inflation. Congregations may choose to add an additional salary amount for other factors. Please remember that these guidelines are “minimums.”

## **HOW IS IT THAT THE PASTOR GETS FOUR WEEKS OF ANNUAL VACATION?**

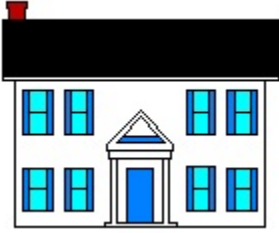
Four weeks, including four Sundays, as well as one full day off per work week is the **minimum** for all our synod pastors. This time off is good for both the pastor and the congregation. Pastors come back after vacation energized and ready to charge into a 6-7 day a week job that often requires more than 8 hours of work each day. Most of our pastors live at considerable distance from extended families and the nature of the pastoral office does not allow for weekend trips.

Some pastors have negotiated variations of the “four weeks” - for example, two weeks plus three weekends, allowing for more family time when spouses have weekends available. Others have received additional weeks as a form of additional compensation.

Congregations have pledged their prayers, love, esteem and personal support to the pastor in the Letter of Call. Every effort should be made by the congregation to meet the needs of the pastor in terms of compensation and support in carrying out the work of the church. Congregational leaders should insist that the pastor take his or her full day off each week and full four weeks of vacation every year. All will benefit!

# Housing

## WHY DO WE AS A CONGREGATION PROVIDE HOUSING?



Historically, congregations have provided a parsonage for pastors and their families as part of a pastor's compensation. If the pastor lives in a church owned parsonage he or she is paying "rent" for that housing by serving as pastor. This is done as a convenience and as a financial savings for the congregation. While there is some movement toward pastors purchasing their own homes, over half of our synod congregations still have parsonages.

The federal tax code recognizes the special relationship between pastors and housing and provides some benefits for pastors. There is no income tax levied on the portion of income that is used for housing by clergy. However, the self-employed Social Security and Medicare taxes of 15.3% of the housing's "imputed" value is paid.

Congregations that do not provide a parsonage must add at least \$9,000 to \$12,000 on to the cash salary. There are legal ways to maximize the income tax savings to the pastor whether they live in a parsonage or provide their own housing. Consult a tax advisor for more details.

## WHAT IS A "HOUSING EQUITY ALLOWANCE" AND HOW DO WE ESTABLISH ONE?

The housing equity allowance is an additional benefit that many congregations provide their pastors who live in a parsonage and thus cannot build equity in their own home. Recognizing the reality that one day most pastors will buy their own home (either in a new call or in retirement) the congregation sets aside each year a sum of money held to benefit the pastor. When the pastor buys a home he or she can access this money and use it for a down payment. If this equity allowance is established through the ELCA Board of Pensions, it will not be taxable to the pastor provided the money is used for housing at a later date. Some congregations give an annual amount for a "housing equity allowance" such as \$1,500 or use a percentage of cash salary to fund this benefit.

## WHAT IS A "HOME FURNISHINGS ALLOWANCE?"

A home furnishings allowance is an amount of money, usually a portion of the pastor's salary, that is designated **prior to the year in which it is paid** as home furnishings allowance. Such an allowance allows the pastor to furnish a parsonage and deduct some or all of the money used from income tax.



The IRS requires that three numbers be considered - the amount of the allowance, the fair market value of furnishings (i.e. the difference between the fair market value of the parsonage rented out and the parsonage rented out as a furnished home), and the actual amount spent. The pastor can deduct from federal and state income tax the smallest of these three.

A home furnishings allowance need not be designated as such in the congregation's budget, but must be designated by Congregation Council and noted in the minutes.

As in all cases where taxation is a consideration, consult a reliable tax advisor, but be aware that not all advisors are knowledgeable about the complex laws surrounding clergy taxes!

## Pension Issues

Participation in the ELCA Pension plan is key to the pastor's financial security in retirement. Congregations make contributions of 10-12% percent of the "defined compensation" (salary, Social Security allowance, value of housing). The actual rate depends on several factors - consult with the Board of Pensions for more information.



The ELCA Pension plan operates under Section 403.b of the IRS code, and contributions are not taxable. The amount which a congregation contributes is affected by salary level, and for this reason the synod encourages congregation paying below salary guidelines to make extra pension payments based upon recommended salary guidelines. This is an excellent program.

Congregations may wish to increase the contribution as an added benefit to the pastor. A congregation might propose raising its contribution level to 11% or 12%. In order to be included in the regular ELCA Pension Plan such contributions must be such that the pastor does not have the option of taking the contribution as cash salary.

Pastors may also choose to enter into a salary reduction tax sheltered annuity arrangement (IRS Code 403.b). This can be done through the Board of Pensions "Optional Pension Plan," or with outside organizations (Thrivent, mutual fund companies, etc.) This extra pension has no cost to the congregation but will be of great benefit to the pastor in retirement as well as to reduce current tax obligations.

## Other Benefits

Typically personnel benefits add 30% to 40% beyond the salary to the cost of employment. This is true of a full-time secretary, nurse, business executive and pastor. The major costs beyond the salary to the congregation are also the major benefits to the pastor. In addition to pension, health care and Social Security allowance are major benefits.

### HEALTH CARE

The ELCA Medical and other benefits program is central to the financial security of the pastor and family. Contribution rates are determined by the salary of the pastor and whether the pastor, spouse, children, or the whole family is covered. While the congregation is only obliged to cover the pastor, they are encouraged to cover spouse and family as well. Congregations may also want to consider establishing a flexible spending account (see below for more information).



A pastor covered by a spouse's policy can opt out of the health care plan, though other portions of the plan (disability, for example) are not optional. Consult with the Board of Pensions.

### SOCIAL SECURITY ALLOWANCE

An allowance of one-half of the expected self-employed Social Security and Medicare rate of 15.3% is to be paid by the congregation just as any secular employer would pay 7.65% of income as Social Security and Medicare tax. This allowance is paid to the pastor directly; federal law does not permit congregations to "withhold" for pastors, though they must withhold for other employees.

### FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT

In a flexible spending account an employee elects to "reduce" his or her salary by a set amount. That amount is then available either as a reimbursement for medical expenses or for dependent care, based on which plan the employee selects. That reimbursement is non-taxable, saving the employee up 35% or even more. There is a minimal cost to the congregation, but big savings to the employees. It is an inexpensive way to add some significant benefits for the employees. There are restrictions that should be explored, but the advantages make that exploration well worth the time and effort! More information can be obtained from the ELCA Board of Pensions or access their web site.

## Family Issues

Like any family, the pastor's family undergoes changes. Many times, however, the pastor makes more time for other families in need than his or her own family. To some extent that is part of the calling – to be present for others in their time of need. Nonetheless, in order to be an effective caregiver, the pastor must also be a healthy caregiver, and part of health is taking care of one's own family responsibilities.

Congregations can enhance the emotional health of the pastor – and therefore the quality of pastoral care that they receive from the pastor – by encouraging and enabling the pastor to care for his or her own family changes. This may involve small amounts of time for illness and other needs, or it may involve more significant issues such as family grief and maternity/paternity care. In any situation the synod encourages congregations and pastors to enter into a dialogue and come to a mutually agreeable understanding of the appropriate time and conditions to allow for family changes to be addressed in a healthy fashion. In addition, the bishop is available for consultation.

**Family Grief Leave** allows the pastor to take time for meeting his or her emotional needs at the time of death of a close family member. Many businesses allow up to five days of family grief leave. The congregation, as the community of God's caring people should also seek to meet the needs of a grieving pastor and his or her family. *The synod has a model policy which has been adopted by the Synod Council. Congregations are urged to examine the model policy and use it as a basis for their own policy.*

**Maternity and Paternity Leave** allows parents the time to help bring a new addition into family life. A healthy relationship between pastor and congregation recognizes that the ministry needs of the congregation need to be maintained while the needs of the new parents are also addressed. Maternity leave is especially important as a pastor deals with the emotional and physical needs following pregnancy. A leave of four to eight weeks which also seeks to meet the ongoing ministry needs of the congregation will not only assist the pastor in becoming a parent, but also allow the congregation to take an active role in its responsibilities to the people of God. *The Synod Council has adopted a model policy for maternity leave and encourages congregations to adapt the model for their own use as a way to affirm both the ministry and the person of the pastor.*

Paternity leave is less about physical needs and more about the emotional needs of the family. While the pastor who is a new father may continue to carry out ministry, the congregation would be wise to consider a limited paternity leave. Encouraging a lighter work load for the new father for the first two or three weeks can allow the new family to bond and develop. Remember that there will be many an evening meeting or Saturday wedding that will keep the young family apart. Giving some extra days or afternoons during the first few weeks can be a wonderful gift!

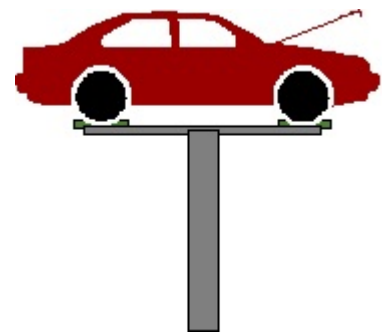
## Business Expenses

Congregations, like any other organization, should cover the normal and reasonable business expenses of the pastor. Pastors should not be expected to subsidize the congregation by paying out of her or his own pocket the expenses associated with congregational life.

Several items considered “business expenses” deserve special treatment: auto expenses, continuing education, and books.

### **AUTOMOBILE EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

Automobile and other related travel expenses are business expenses for the congregation. These are not part of the salary package, nor should they be reported as such. For reasons of accountability to the congregation and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), it is important that the clergy persons keep accurate record of business related automobile use and expenses.



Reimbursement for automobile expenses can be handled in one of three ways:

1. Reimbursement for actual business miles driven at the current IRS rate per mile, paid monthly. The current rate for the year can be obtained from the IRS or its internet web site ([www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)). For 2007 the rate was \$ 0.485 per mile.
2. Payment of a lump sum car allowance, calculated on an annual basis, and paid monthly. For example: estimate business miles driven per year (12000) multiplied by the IRS mileage rate (\$0.485 per mile) divided by 12 months per year = \$485 per month.
3. Purchase or lease of an automobile by the congregation with the congregation assuming the total automobile vehicle expense. Clergy would assume some IRS liability for non-business use of the vehicle.

Visitation in hospitals, homes, businesses, and throughout the community is an important part of pastoral ministry - and that makes it a business expense. In the Northern Great Lakes Synod especially, hospitals and nursing facilities are sometimes a distance from the church building.

Whichever way the congregation chooses to reimburse such expenses, it should be done in such a way as to encourage the pastor to be out and about, among the congregation and the community!

## CONTINUING EDUCATION TIME AND EXPENSE



The ELCA expects pastors to engage in 50 hours of continuing education time each year. Continuing education opportunities range from day long seminars held in the synod to one or two week long courses at seminary sites. This is not vacation time - it is a time for developing and enhancing skills in ministry, skills that will directly bear on the life of the congregation!

In order to encourage pastors to take the time necessary congregations are encouraged to provide up to 2 weeks (not including Sundays) for continuing education, along with a budget line item of \$550. In addition, pastors and congregations are encouraged to dialogue and consider together the continuing education needs of the pastor in light of her or his skills and the current needs of the congregation.

From time to time a congregation might also give consideration to a “sabbatical leave.” A sabbatical leave is time away from parish life for a pastor to engage in study and renewal. For more information, see “Sabbatical Leave” on pp. 11-12 of this resource.

## BOOK BUDGET

In addition to continuing education opportunities, pastors may need to keep current through journals and books. Many of the journals and books pastors obtain are “professional” in nature in that they contain information, skills, and ideas that directly lead to more effective ministry. Congregations can encourage the pastor to enhance his or her ministry through journals and books by providing a book allowance. Providing up to \$300 per year allows the pastor to stay current, and the pastor’s ministry to be enlightened and challenged!



## Evaluation Instruments

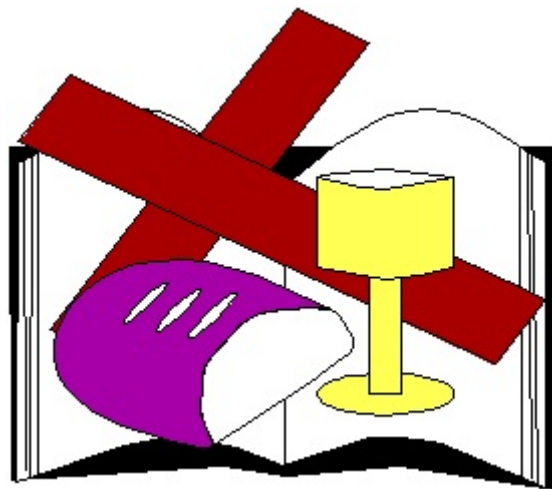
It is the experience of the Synod office that evaluation instruments are extremely popular - when there is conflict in the congregation!

To be effective evaluation instruments need to be seen as one piece of the ongoing partnership between the congregation and the pastor. They provide the opportunity for prayerful consideration and review of pastoral ministry and the work which the pastor and congregation are together called to make happen in the name of Jesus Christ.

Congregations are encouraged to consider evaluation instruments at a time when things seem to be going well. Why? To discover how evaluation tools can be a positive experience for both pastor and congregation! *Congregations should never first use evaluation instruments in a time of conflict. Such a use will almost certainly exacerbate the conflict rather than lead to healing and growth.*

Several instruments for evaluations are available. One of the best has been developed by the Rev. David Echelbarger (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Negaunee, MI). Pastor Echelbarger's evaluation instrument is available from him or from the Synod office. Congregations and pastors wishing to make use of this instrument are encouraged to contact Pastor Echelbarger or the Synod office for information and insight on how best to use the instrument.

Finally, in any evaluation process remember - and use - the power of prayer. Pastor and congregation have a common concern - the work of the kingdom of God as together the gospel is proclaimed. Lift up in prayer both the concern for people and the mission we share through our common calling in baptism!



## Sabbatical Policy

**The Gift of Sabbath** - The term sabbatical comes from the Hebrew concept of Sabbath, or rest. Genesis notes that God rested from the work of creation and the Ten Commandments instruct us to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, by worship, and reflecting on the blessings of God. Deuteronomy and Leviticus describe sabbatical periods where the balance of life is restored. The Sabbath is a gift of God for the purpose of rest, renewal and recovery.

**What is Sabbatical Leave?** - Sabbatical leave is a carefully planned period of time in which a pastor or other rostered person is granted leave away from his or her normal ministerial responsibilities in order to spend an extended period of time in study, renewal and reflection. Sabbatical leave is not a vacation, nor is it merely an extended period of continuing education.

**How often should a Sabbatical leave be taken and for what length of time?** - *Life-Long Learning and Development for Faithful Leaders* (Division for Ministry, ELCA) provides recommendations regarding sabbatical policy and planning a sabbatical leave. In the Northern Great Lakes Synod we encourage a sabbatical leave no later than the seventh year of call.

Flexibility is essential in determining a Sabbatical plan. The length and frequency of the Sabbatical period should reflect both the resources and needs of the congregation and the ongoing demands placed on the rostered leader, along with his or her need for a renewal period.

**What are the benefits for a pastor and congregation if our pastor takes a Sabbatical leave?** Burnout, discouragement and depletion of spiritual and emotional resources threaten the effectiveness of pastoral ministry and threaten to shorten pastorates. Periodic Sabbatical leaves may foster a ministry that is longer, more energized, and more fruitful.

People are drawn to interesting, vitalized pastors who reflect what they preach, and what we preach is a way of life. Andrew Greeley suggests that “the parish priest should be the most interesting person in town.” A vitalized pastor at the center of their congregation’s life is essential. The pastor is called to model ways of emotional and physical wholeness along with enthusiasm for proclaiming the gospel and caring about people. As St. Irenaeus writes, “the glory of God is a person fully alive, and the life of the person is the vision of God.”

How can a pastor invite people to “take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Timothy 6:19) if spirits are depleted and if one has no time for renewal, vision and reflection? A Sabbatical provides the opportunity to drink deeply from Biblical and classical sources of wisdom so that the pastor may return to the congregation with renewed vitality in all areas of ministry.

**What are the potential pitfalls of having our pastor take a sabbatical?** - The return from a Sabbatical is almost always a stressful time for both clergy and congregations when they are not prepared for this stress. The return from Sabbatical should be seen as a new beginning, much like the beginning of a new pastorate.

Staff in parishes, especially office staff, sometimes find it difficult to cope during a sabbatical. Care must be taken to provide administrative and support structures during a sabbatical.

Some pastors return from a Sabbatical with the recognition that their ministry in that place has come to completion and begin the call process after the mandatory year of service.

**How is Pastoral care and leadership provided for during a Sabbatical?** - Congregations may be able to contract for a full-time pastoral replacement, but one of the chief side-benefits of a pastor's sabbatical leave is the opportunity it provides for a congregation to take responsibility for its ministries. The congregation may organize visits to the sick and the homebound. Local pastors may covenant to provide emergency pastoral care in order to facilitate each other's Sabbaticals. Supply preachers, seminarians and lay people may share in preaching and worship responsibilities. Committee chairs and council members may take new initiative in leadership. With advanced planning, attention to detail, flexibility, and the willingness to risk, members of a congregation can grow in exercising their spiritual gifts during the Sabbatical period.

**How is a Sabbatical Negotiated and Funded?** - A Sabbatical leave is not to be confused with vacation time, although vacation may be added to the beginning or end of a Sabbatical.

The rostered person should have a high degree of freedom in planning a leave. However, the nature and benefit of these activities need to be communicated to the congregation. If a leave is not included in the letter of call, it should be approved by the congregation council.

The congregation continues to pay full salary and benefits for a pastor on Sabbatical leave, and takes responsibility for funding an interim pastor or supply preachers and any other leadership in the pastor's absence. Congregations can prepare by setting resources aside ahead of time, and they may apply for grants which may be available to fund costs associated with a Sabbatical.

The rostered person is responsible for costs related to books, courses, travel, accommodations, and any other items related to the Sabbatical. The rostered person may use his or her continuing education funds to support Sabbatical activities and may be eligible for grants.

The rostered person agrees to serve the congregation for a minimum of one year after the completion of the Sabbatical, as well as providing a report upon return to the congregation.

**How will the Synod Assist in Encouraging Sabbaticals?** - Congregations are encouraged to discuss with the Bishop the possibility of including a provision for Sabbatical leave in the letter of call and provide funding for the Sabbatical in the congregation's budget. The Synod will alert congregations and pastors when it is aware of grant money available for Sabbatical leave.