

# **Clergy Compensation Guidelines for the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ**

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## **Introduction**

When the three historic conferences merged to become the Southern New England Conference, each had its own clergy compensation guidelines. They differed significantly from each other, which necessitated creating new guidelines for the new conference.

The situation presented an opportunity to rethink clergy compensation in light of the new realities our clergy and congregations face today. We have fewer congregations that can support full-time ministry. Health insurance costs continue to rise, and the health insurance marketplace offers low-cost options, especially for part-time clergy. At the same time, congregations seek certainty for the budgets, especially when calling a pastor, which is difficult to achieve with widely varying health insurance costs.

Other ancillary issues around compensation have arisen in recent years. These include:

- Compensation for clergy serving in the military, whether they are in the reserves or on active duty.
- Clergy on emergency call
- Pulpit supply

As a result, these guidelines have a completely different approach to compensation from previous iterations.

## **Guideline Basics**

The guidelines' fundamental premise is justice. A pastor should receive fair compensation. The measure for fairness is that the pastor should be able to earn enough income to live in the community they serve in a manner consistent with the members of the congregation.

These guidelines base compensation on a local community's median family income as reported by Mission InSite. Though there are several sources to reference income, Mission InSite reports income annually, defines geographic granularity by zip code, and is accessible across the entire conference for both clergy and congregations.

The guideline methodology produces a single number as the compensation package, which includes cash salary, housing, and all benefits. The pastor and the congregation can negotiate the allocation of the total package.

The guidelines define full-time ministry as 35-45 hours per week. They also provide guidance for the tasks of ministry for part-time clergy. Together, part-time clergy will be better able to balance serving their congregation and supplement their income with other part-time employment.

The guidelines do not obligate a congregation to provide any benefits if it cannot sustain half-time ministry. That, however, sets up a situation in which the pastor will serve the congregation to fulfill stipulated tasks not to exceed eight hours a week plus Sunday worship coverage. Known as Sunday-plus, a pastor could preach on Sunday and get paid only for a church meeting that week. The pastor would have no other obligation that week to the congregation.

### **Changes in Approach**

Determining compensation begins with finding the median household income for the community in Mission InSite. If the congregation offers housing with a housing allowance, add 30% of the median household income to cover all benefits. The minimum compensation for full-time ministry will be the total of the median household income plus 30% for benefits. If the congregation offers a parsonage, the median household income will include housing and all benefits as the minimum compensation for full-time clergy. The guidelines include increases above the base for congregation size, pastoral experience, and other clergy serving the congregation.

The guidelines come with a worksheet to calculate compensation.

If the congregation cannot meet full-time compensation, the congregation can enter its budget number for compensation. The worksheet will return the number of contracted hours.

In this approach, base compensation may be higher than previous iterations, especially in communities with high housing costs. However, in this approach, pastors may bear some of the health insurance costs, which offsets the higher base compensation.

### **Conclusion**

These guidelines will enable congregations to prepare their budgets with more certainty. They offer pastors more realistic compensation to enable them to live in the communities they serve. Overall, they provide a more realistic financial picture of fair and just compensation for the clergy.