

2022 SNEUCC Conference Guidelines FAQ

Who prepared the new guidelines?

Knowing that the three historic conferences would become one, we had to make a single methodology. Though each historic conference used the same overall approach to guidelines, there were enough differences between them that we could not merge them. We had one representative from each conference working under the supervision of a staff person from the Massachusetts Conference. The three of us decided to re-imagine guidelines as the then-current methodology didn't work well. Along the way we had many people look at them and give us comments, many of which we incorporated into this document. These guidelines were reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors of the Southern New England Conference.

These guidelines approach compensation in a completely new way. Why?

Early in our discussions, we agreed that health insurance costs were problematic for several reasons. The costs were highly variable due to many factors: age, family composition, deductibles, and the marketplace. Also, how do we factor in health insurance for part-time clergy? We also felt that we could not in good conscience continue to expect churches to cover 100% of a pastor's health insurance. We also knew that many pastors were bearing some of their insurance costs already. Consequently, we chose to develop the guidelines to reflect typical compensation practices where benefits typically are 30% of income and good household budget practices in which housing costs should not exceed 30% of income. We, then, wanted to have a single number to include cash salary, housing, and benefits, which would make budgeting for our churches easier. The pastor and the church can allocate the total package as they wish.

Why were the guidelines shifted to focus on the local economy?

Generally, congregations like their pastor to live in the community they serve. Even before these revisions, Massachusetts made a point to emphasize justice as an underlying principle. Clergy should be able to live in the community they serve in a manner consistent with the bulk of the congregation. We felt strongly that this principle should be upheld in the revision. Consequently, compensation would be based upon the community's median income.

What if my congregation is already in the middle of our search?

We understand that this shift in methodology might come as a surprise to congregations, particularly to those in transition. We do not expect congregations to adapt overnight. Rather, we hope that these guidelines will invite every congregation to have an honest conversation about what it costs to live in their community and how that impacts both clergy compensation and expectations. We encourage you to have open conversations with your ACM and transitional pastoral staff about compensation moving forward. Please bear in mind that your clergy should be able to serve the congregation without significant financial hardship.

What happens if the new guidelines suggest a compensation package that we cannot afford?

Consider the package's value as aspirational. If congregations cannot pay the guideline, how close can they come? If the offer is far from the guideline, this warrants a discussion with the

congregation. In such a case, a congregation should reflect upon its ministry and ways it can compensate its pastor fairly. It could entail reducing the pastor's hours or reducing costs in other areas or both.

How should we be thinking about benefits? Are benefits still part of the conference guidelines?

Yes. Benefits are included as part of the total package. Rather than having the benefits delineated separately, the pastor and congregation would break out the benefits and allocate them as they wish.

To assist you in this, there is an accompanying spreadsheet that allows you to input total compensation and see a potential breakdown of benefits as a part of that package. However, this is only a tool; both congregation and clergy may be flexible in how compensation is allocated.

How should a congregation use these guidelines if they do not anticipate their settled pastor leaving?

We hope these new guidelines will encourage settled pastors and congregations to have ongoing conversation around compensation and expectations. Open, honest, and regular conversation around compensation and expectations strengthens current relationships and lays the foundation for cooperative and collaborative pastoral leadership, future pastoral transitions, and new ministerial leadership.

If the new guidelines do not break down benefits in the total compensation package, what should a congregation do if a pastor does not need a portion of the benefits? (e.g. health insurance.)

A pastor can take the cash value of the unused benefit and allocate it somewhere else. For example, if a pastor does not need health insurance, the pastor can designate the amount towards their annuity. The pastor may also wish to allocate more towards their cash salary. This question is similar to a situation in which the pastor is on Medicare. The pastor can allocate the difference between the cost for private health insurance and Medicare to their annuity.

Where do I go if I have questions about these guidelines?

Your Area Conference Ministers are here to be a resource for you as you discern how to incorporate these new guidelines. Please do reach out to them with any questions you may have. Together we hope to lean into this faithful experiment and learn how we equitably determine clergy compensation in the 21st century.

Should a pastor refuse to serve a congregation who can't - or won't - pay conference guidelines?

Pastoral ministry is a call. Several factors in addition to compensation comprise a pastor's decision to accept a particular call. While the compensation may not meet conference guidelines, there may be other aspects of the call that compel the pastor to say "yes." However, these guidelines seek to ensure that the pastor can live reasonably comfortably in the community they serve in the manner consistent with the congregation. A pastor cannot serve their congregation well and carry the burden of financial distress.

What should we do if we realize that we cannot fairly compensate our pastor according to these guidelines and that the only way to do so would be to reduce the pastor's hours?

These guidelines suggest ways for congregations and clergy to manage part-time ministry. Reducing a pastor's hours should be done in consultation and negotiation with the pastor. An overriding consideration is the financial impact the reduction will have upon the family's finances. Some pastors may be able to absorb reduced compensation better than others. Other pastors may need to find supplemental employment.

Reducing the pastor's hours necessitates reducing the pastor's workload. Reducing a pastor's compensation will require sufficient notification so the pastor can make adjustments, such as finding supplemental employment or managing debts. It may also require time for the pastor to put profile together to seek a new call.

Please do be in conversation with your ACM throughout your discernment. We anticipate lots of questions and wonderings over the coming months and your ACM team wants to be a partner with you in brainstorming potential answers.

How do we get access to MissionInsite?

All clergy in the conference have access to MissionInsite. Please check the following link for information and instructions: <https://www.sneucc.org/missioninsite>

If you are a clergy person unable to access to MissionInsite through the SNEUCC, consider using the other website in the Compensation Worksheet – DataUSA.io (<https://datausa.io/>). If you cannot find the city/town listed on that website, use the county data.

If you are having problems with MissionInsite, reach out to your ACM.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones are members of the congregation. Mr. Jones only comes to church on Sundays. Mrs. Jones comes to church on Sundays and attends Bible study on Wednesdays and the prayer shawl ministry on Thursdays. Do we count them as two members or four members?

The short answer is four members as Mrs. Jones participates in two additional church activities every week.

However, the participation in church services every week is a rough way to estimate the pastor's workload. If counting Mrs. Jones twice increases the weekly participation to 77 people, the additional work for the pastor is negligible. If, however, the weekly participation is 85 and the congregation feels financially stretched to pay for the additional work, the pastor and the congregation should discuss ways to resolve this in a manner amenable to the pastor and the congregation. In the above case, perhaps, the prayer shawl ministry runs itself without the pastor's presence, thereby obviating the necessity for the pastor's presence.