

Interpretive Comments on the Guidelines for Pastors' Salaries and Benefits 2013-2014

I. Pastoral Salary Base and Unit Values

The base and unit values have been increased 1.6%. The base assumes a high school education only. Credit for post-high school education is included in the salary units for education (II.B).

II. Unit Value for Salary Adjustment

A. Experience. One unit is given for each accumulating year (or full-time equivalent) of pastoral experience, up to a maximum of 30 years. One unit should be credited for each of the first 20 years of pastoral experience and one-half unit per year for years 21-30 for a maximum of 25 units.

In some situations, particularly where ministry is a second career or where other church related years of experience have helped to prepare the person for pastoral ministry, it might be appropriate to award some units for experience other than ministry. When that is done the maximum should be no more than one unit for each two years (or full-time equivalent) of relevant experience. For new pastors, it would also be appropriate to give one year of experience for each year of full-time pastoral education.

B. Education. Education units are awarded based on degree completion—not on years of study—according to the table. The unit credit for S/CPE is for four full units of credit, not for the single but year-long extended unit of S/CPE. Graduate degrees other than seminary, while valuable for general preparation, are not designed for pastoral ministry preparation and should be granted only one unit per degree. The maximum units for all accumulated education are eight.

C. Responsibility. The premise is that different levels of complexity, various levels of intensity, and higher levels of risk in ministerial leadership ought to be reflected in the salary scales. These are kept at a minimum in the church compared to other vocations in our society. Where these guidelines might result in an equal or higher salary for an associate as compared to a lead pastor in that congregation, the committee may need to make adjustments that reflect the stated roles and responsibility.

The criterion is Sunday morning attendance and pastoral role. In some cases, there may be other factors that should also be considered in adding units for responsibility. For purposes of these guidelines, we consider a youth minister to be an associate pastor.

Conference Minister's responsibility units reflect the additional weight of being a pastor to pastors and the complexity of overseeing a larger organizational system. Conference ministers are often required to balance pastoral, administrative and management functions similar to executives of comparable organizations. Additional responsibility units for conference ministers acknowledge this role.

D. Geography. Across the country there is considerable spread in the cost of living, particularly related to housing costs. The geographical units assigned are primarily based on the *2009 Demographics USA County Edition* in which there are Mennonite congregations. These geographical units were not updated for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, or 2013-2014 because the data source has become very expensive. Decisions about future updates will be made each year.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that local data should be taken into consideration to adjust geographical units as needed. Specifically, we recommend taking into consideration the cost of living and/or the effective buying power in your county or the community where the majority of your members reside. You should also consider the median household income of your congregation. Do not rely only upon subjective guesses. Consult your local Chamber of Commerce or a similar organization for local information.

- E. **Optional other units.** We recognize that the specific unit values identified on the worksheet may not meet the unique circumstances of every congregation. In some cases where the cost of living and/or housing is particularly high, a congregation may want to add additional units. There may also be other local considerations that would suggest additional units.

III. Self-Employment Tax Adjustment

We strongly support pastors' participation in the Social Security system to provide long-term benefits for retirement, disability, survivor's benefits in case of an untimely death, and Medicare benefits in retirement years.

Pastors are considered self-employed for purposes of figuring social security taxes, meaning that they are responsible to pay this as the self-employment tax, both the employee's and the employer's portion of social security, minus a somewhat discounted rate (approximately 2 percentage points) of the 15.3 percent total tax rate.

This additional cost to the pastor for social security could be considered a trade-off for the unique housing deduction which pastors have on income tax (see section VII. A. "Housing Allowance"). However, many times, half of the self-employment tax still exceeds any special income tax deductions for housing which the pastor may receive.

The pastor should be granted additional income to cover the amount normally paid by the employer (7.65 percent of income or one-half of the usual rate of 15.3 percent). Any payment to the pastor to assist in payment of the self-employment tax becomes additional salary and must be included as taxable income on the W2 form for IRS.

IV. Housing Adjustments

- A. **Parsonage adjustment.** When the congregation provides housing through a parsonage, the value of such housing should be figured at a fair market value in the community and subtracted from the overall salary. This amount should be deducted from Total Salary before Housing Adjustments (line 12). Another guide for determining this parsonage adjustment is that it should not exceed 25 percent of line 12. The value of the housing is considered a taxable benefit.
- B. **Housing equity fund.** If the fair market value of housing is deducted from salary because of a parsonage, then a housing equity fund may be established for the minister. This fund helps to offset the loss to the minister of the amount which normally would go to pay on the principal of the mortgage, the gain in value which may come to the property due to inflation and the gain which may be realized through improvements using the minister's own labor. The recommended amount to be placed annually in an account is five percent of line 12 or two percent of the assessed parsonage value. It is recommended that these funds be deposited in a separate account such as an Everence Praxis Mutual Fund or another type of investment of

local choice. *This is taxable income in the year the minister receives and controls these funds as is the interest or dividends earned.*

V. Benefits

A. Medical Health Plan. The Corinthian Plan is a comprehensive benefit plan including health, life and disability with optional dental and vision coverage sponsored by Mennonite Church USA and administered by Everence. The Corinthian Plan envisions all Mennonite Church USA congregations participating in a plan to provide access to health care insurance for all Mennonite Church USA pastors. See <http://mennoniteusa.org/the-corinthian-plan/>. Cost information for The Corinthian Plan is available by contacting Denise Henke at Denise.Henke@Everence.com. Information on premium assistance is available from The Corinthian Plan Director at keithh@mennoniteusa.org.

We strongly recommend that a family health insurance plan be provided for the pastor and the pastor's family through The Corinthian Plan. Participation helps provide health insurance coverage for Mennonite pastors and church employees, some of whom would otherwise find it difficult or impossible to obtain adequate health insurance elsewhere. If the spouse has health insurance available through employment, the coverage the church provides may include only the pastor and eligible children.

Because of the continuing escalation of health insurance costs, some congregations are moving to higher deductible plans and/or limiting coverage for families. Such changes could result in a pay cut to pastors! Where this is deemed necessary, we urge congregations to phase in these changes over a period of years. We also urge you to explore setting up a Health Savings Account (HSA) or a Flexible Savings Account (FSA), to help manage out of pocket expenses for pastors. HSA and FSA contributions can be made with pre-tax income and can reduce income tax. For information on HSA's contact Everence or your current health insurance provider or www.healthcareshopper.com.

B. Pension Plan/Retirement Fund. We recommend that an amount equal to 8 to 10 percent of the Total Salary (line 12) be contributed by the congregation for retirement purposes into Mennonite Retirement Trust, administered by Everence, or another tax-deferred instrument on behalf of the pastor. We encourage the pastor to make personal investments/savings toward retirement. Contributions from both the employer and pastor can be up to 100 percent of taxable compensation or \$51,000, whichever is lower, as long as there is income to support the contribution. Keep in mind that contributions to retirement plans cannot exceed the pastor's income minus the amount designated as housing allowance. See "Ministers' Retirement Fund Recommendations" at <http://mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/leadership-development/pastor-salary-guidelines/>. We encourage you to consult with a financial advisor, tax consultant, or lawyer.

C. Life and Disability Insurance. The congregation may provide some other life insurance and/or disability insurance for the pastor if they do not participate in The Corinthian Plan. Life and Disability are also now included as benefits in The Corinthian Plan.

D. Continuing Education and Spiritual Direction/Retreats. The congregation should provide funds for pastoral growth and continuing education such as the annual seminary pastors' week. We are suggesting a range from \$600 - \$1000 per year. In addition one to two weeks annual study leave time should be provided. Congregations may also wish to encourage pastors to seek out opportunities for spiritual direction and/or retreats.

- E. Other Benefits.** Congregations may want to contribute to an employee's Health Savings Account (HSA). Other special benefits can be recorded on line 21.

VI. Expense Allowances

- A. Auto Expense.** Auto expense for church related travel should be reimbursed at 56.5 cents per mile, the 2013 level of allowance by IRS. This should be paid monthly based upon an itemized record of miles actually driven and reported by the pastor. The rate should be updated on January 1, 2014 to the current IRS rate or at any other time that IRS adjusts the rate.
- B. Conference Expense.** The pastor's attendance at area and denominational conference sessions as well as area ministers' meetings is part of the pastor's professional responsibility. It is strongly recommended that the congregation pay for registration, travel, lodging, and food costs for the pastor.

Sometimes pastoral families vacation in connection with conference attendance. In such cases it is recommended that the congregation reimburse the round trip costs of conference attendance. The cost of the roundtrip should not exceed the actual cost to make the roundtrip and the parameters of the cost should be agreed upon prior to the trip.

- C. Professional Expenses.** Dues of professional associations and costs incurred on behalf of the congregation such as church-related lunch meetings or visits should be reimbursed.
- D. Other Expenses.** Moving arrangements and expenses are negotiable between the pastor and the congregation. It is common practice that the receiving congregation assumes the basic costs of moving, such as payment for a rental truck and fuel. Such negotiations should occur as part of the "Covenant of Understanding" and be part of the offer to the pastoral candidate prior to the candidate accepting the invitation.

VII. Other items to consider

- A. Housing Allowance.** Our salary guidelines include allowances for housing, utilities and appurtenances. For these to be tax-deductible items for the pastor, they must be identified by a specific amount prior to receiving them in an annual contract, the church budget, or a specific minute reflecting an action by the governing body of the congregation. When the minister provides his/her own housing, official boards of congregations in the United States should designate annually a portion of the cash salary as a "housing allowance" or a "parsonage allowance," which under IRS rules may be excluded from taxable income. This action must be taken by the church prior to the time the income is received. Generally, the pastor, in consultation with her tax consultant, will recommend a housing allowance amount.

Current IRS rules (Publication 517) stipulate that only the lowest of the following three factors can be taken as a housing allowance exclusion for income tax purposes: 1) the amount designated as housing allowance by the church; 2) the amount actually used for housing and related costs; or 3) the fair market rental value for equivalent housing in the community.

- B. Vacations, Holidays and Days Off.** The following schedule should be followed for a pastor's vacation time.

Years one through four -- two weeks
Years five through eleven -- three weeks
Years twelve and above -- four weeks

This is for cumulative years of full-time pastoral or church-related service and is transferred with the pastor. Vacation time should not be used for conference attendance or minister's workshop participation. Normally vacation time is not taken until the pastor has been employed for a minimum of six months and then only on the basis of days earned.

Holidays normally observed by society will be time off with compensatory days for those religious holidays which call for pastoral duty. The pastor can normally be expected to work 45-50 hours per week. There should also be provision for regular days and evenings where the pastor is free of pastoral responsibilities. There should be a policy for personal days off for special circumstances. A normal range is 3-5 days per year.

- C. Sabbaticals.** In order to encourage growth in ministry and the likelihood of longer pastoral tenure, the congregation is encouraged to establish the following sabbatical policy. For each year of completed service to this congregation (other than the year in which a sabbatical leave is received), one month of sabbatical leave may be granted. The leave is not to be used until the fourth year of ministry in that location. Subsequent sabbatical leaves would occur during the eighth and twelfth, etc., years of ministry. During the sabbatical, the pastor will receive full salary and benefits as exist in the then current "Covenant of Understanding." Sabbatical plans, submitted by the pastor, shall be approved by the governing body of the congregation. Following a sabbatical, the pastor agrees to provide a minimum of one year of service to the congregation with the understanding that repayment of sabbatical salary and benefits will be made for failure to do so. Accumulated sabbatical time is not transferable from prior congregational locations, nor are terminal sabbaticals normally acceptable. Congregations are urged to budget for sabbatical support every year to help provide for pastoral leadership during the time when the pastor is actually gone on sabbatical.
- D. Parental/Family and Medical Leave.** We believe that, in principle, pastors should be given the rights generally accorded to employees under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, even though technically they may not qualify as employed by an agency with 50 or more employees. We recommend that the congregation grant one day per month for health-related leave, which may accumulate up to a total of 90 days. A total of up to 45 days may be accumulated and transferred from prior pastoral locations; this must be established at the time of beginning employment. This provision will only be applicable upon documented records which have been carefully and accurately maintained.

Pastors are eligible for the provision of the Family and Medical Leave Act if they have been employed in their present position for at least one year and for a minimum of half-time employment during the previous 12 months. An unpaid, job-protected leave of up to 12 weeks will be granted for any of the following reasons:

1. to care for the employee's child after birth, or placement for adoption, or foster care.
2. to care for the employee's spouse, son or daughter, or parent who has a serious health condition.
3. for a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the pastoral responsibilities.

By their mutual agreement, the congregation may grant a paid leave for a portion of these 12 weeks based upon accumulated health leave and/or accumulated vacation time. Otherwise the leave or the remainder of the leave will be unpaid. We further recommend that the congregation maintain health care coverage and retirement benefits. It is understood that the pastor will assist the congregation in planning for the needed interim ministry required during

the leave.

- E. **Part-Time Application of the Guidelines.** To apply these salary and benefit guidelines to persons in part-time employment, the guidelines should be figured as if full-time. The part-time percentage should then be applied on line 10. Congregations that cannot pay at the full-time level should allow the pastor to seek part-time employment elsewhere that is compatible with the pastoral role. If the congregation plans to make retirement contributions for a part-time minister, remember that the retirement contribution cannot exceed the pastor's salary minus the amount designated as housing allowance.
- F. **Copying these Materials.** You are encouraged to make copies of the Interpretive Comments and the Salary Guidelines (any or all of these materials) for those in your congregation who are responsible for working with the pastoral salary negotiation process.

VIII. Other Resources

- A. **Special considerations for compensation for Transitional and Interim Ministry.** See the policy for transitional and interim pastors (available upon request from Leadership Development Team of Mennonite Church USA). Generally, compensation for a transitional or an interim pastor follows the Pastors' Salary Guidelines with adjustments for the unique circumstances of the transitional or interim pastor.
- B. **Negotiating the Pastor's Salary.** Available in the Pastor Congregation Relations packet from <http://mennoniteusa.org/resources/leadership-development-packets/pastor-congregation-relations/>. This packet is available upon request from Leadership Development Team of Mennonite Church USA or from your area conference office.
- C. **All of the materials** related to the Guidelines for Pastors' Salaries and Benefits are available on the Mennonite Church USA web page at <http://mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/leadership-development/pastor-salary-guidelines/>.
- D. **Covenant of Understanding** (also available at <http://mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/leadership-development/pastor-salary-guidelines/>). The finished worksheet for a pastor's salary can be attached to or incorporated into a Covenant of Understanding
- E. **Software** for calculating pastoral compensation according to these guidelines is available at www.manygifts.org/salaryguidelines. It provides some enhancements over the paper worksheet and can produce a Covenant of Understanding using the figures entered into the software. A spreadsheet is also available. This software is available without charge to any member congregation or pastor of Mennonite Church USA.

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