

Dear Friends and Colleagues in Christ,

Attached is the 2023 Compensation Guidelines document submitted by the Committee's on Ministry and the Conference Board of Directors to our Conference annual meeting, October 10, 2022. The changes from the 2022 version of compensation guidelines include a 6.5% increase to the Cash Salary Grid across all Steps to reflect competitive compensation for ministerial professionals and promote ministerial retention in our congregations along with the addition of two extra weekends off a year to encourage good pastoral balance between an authorized minister's personal and professional life. It was also determined to omit the definition of commissioned ministry as all of the committees that authorize ministers are in compliance with the 2018 revised manual on ministry and new commissions are not anticipated. We also hope that you will revisit the additions made in the past years including an expansive definition of parental leave; specific paid holidays; encouragement of outdoor ministry participation; and the recommendation for reimbursement for professional coaching, spiritual direction, and/or counseling.

The Committee's on Ministry and the Nebraska Conference Board of Directors understand the realities of congregational life and the need for well trained, justly compensated clergy. All congregations are encouraged to seriously consider the guidelines and create a plan to move toward full implementation within the next 1-3 years. Additionally, churches entering the process searching for a new settled minister will use these guidelines to communicate the compensation package they are able to offer with prospective ministers.

These guidelines are intended to promote just and generous compensation to the skilled and valuable spiritual leaders of our Conference, our authorized ministers. They are also intended to help the UCC churches of the Nebraska Conference be attractive to the brightest and best leaders of our denomination, strengthening our mission and encouraging the health and vitality of our congregations.

The Committee's on Ministry and Conference staff are happy and eager to help your leadership team use these guidelines well. Please contact them with your questions and concerns.

Blessings for the Journey,

Suzi Harland, Chair, Committee for Authorized Ministry, Prairie Association

Sue Sheer, Chair, Church and Ministry, Heartland Association

Randy Sanders, Chair, Church and Ministry, Living Waters Association

# **Supporting Our Ministry 2023 Compensation Guidelines Nebraska Conference UCC**

These guidelines continue the updates made in 2021. All congregations are encouraged to use these guidelines and if needed, create a plan to move toward full implementation.

## **Introduction – Understanding Compensation for Ministry**

This resource is entitled *Supporting Our Ministry* because authorized ministers - whether ordained, licensed, commissioned, or granted lay ministerial standing- are called and compensated for the sake of the whole church's ministry and mission. Any who recommend, determine, or evaluate compensation for those leaders, therefore, need to understand compensation in the context of the whole church's ministry.

All Christians are called to ministry and mission, beginning with their baptism. Congregations have found that properly trained leaders are indispensable if they are to be faithful to the gospel and to God's mission. Well-educated, trained clergy help the church guard against distortions of the gospel, neglect of prayer or scripture, or misuses of religion. Studies in Bible, church history, theology, psychology, leadership development, and more prepare clergy to preach and teach the gospel faithfully in changing social times. Clergy need also to understand psychological, social, political, and economic realities to help the church hear God's call and respond in faithful mission. Professional clergy developed because such responsibilities demanded more education and time than could be achieved by volunteers.

Congregations compensate pastors/teachers/preachers/leaders to equip members for ministry through: Bible study, worship, preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, counseling, prayer, spiritual direction, and support at times of special personal or community need. Compensation reflects, therefore, the congregation's intention to live in faithful service to God. That makes their relationship with their minister different from that of employer to employee, even though a written call should be considered a legal contract. Their relationship is a covenant defined by their responses to God's Call.

The following principles, in summary, are important when considering compensation for ordained clergy and other ministers:

**The church compensates leaders for the sake of and in the service of the whole church's ministry and mission.** The minister is not "hired" by a congregation to serve itself but is called as a pastor and teacher to lead all members in proclaiming the gospel, being stewards of God's human and material gifts and serving God's mission.

The minister is thus a local representative of the gospel tradition and the whole church.

**The church's ministry both requires and deserves our faithful stewardship, our generous giving.** One part of the church's ministry should not be put in competition with another because of weak stewardship. For example, local and wider mission are both essential; adequate clergy compensation and building maintenance are both very important. Faithful ministry requires faithful stewardship.

**Compensation should be consistent with the values faith affirms.** It should honor experience, education, and responsibilities. It should meet genuine needs and be reviewed annually to respond to changing personal or economic conditions. It should be generous, just, and equitable regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or social status.

## **1. Financial Aspect of Ministry**

Few among us like to talk about money, and ministers will sometimes find it especially difficult to approach these topics with their local churches. People rarely answer the call to pastoral ministry in order to become wealthy, yet the compensation package is very important to the church and to professional ministers. Candidates for pastoral positions pay attention to the salary offered and to the history of pastoral compensation in a local church profile.

One of the chief causes of anxiety among members of the clergy is concern for adequately providing for themselves and their families. Pastors too often feel they have no bargaining power and that the only way they can increase their compensation is to move on to another church or job.

Satisfaction with compensation is one factor in feeling good about one's work and, thus, often leads to better performance of that work.

In order for a church to attract and retain qualified, competent, gifted, caring pastoral leadership which will enhance the spiritual life of the congregation it will have to offer a financial package that is attractive and a salary consistent with the wider community.

### **Guiding Factors**

In the United Church of Christ, final salary decisions are made by the local churches in negotiation with their ministers. These guidelines are designed to assist churches and pastors in strengthening their ministries.

In establishing these guidelines, we have been mindful of the following and recommend them to our churches as guiding factors in making these decisions:

- **Justice:** Justice demands that all should be treated equitably in matters of compensation. As the church admonishes the world to pay workers fairly, it cannot maintain inadequate levels of compensation for its own employees. A congregation should be fair in compensation with its ministers regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or social status.
- **Local Economics:** Compensation should be comparable to that of the other professions in the community requiring similar education and experience. A minister's standard of living should not be less than those among whom she/he is called to serve.
- **Stewardship:** A local church should be responsible in raising and allocating funds. Trust and open communication about the resources and needs of all parties is essential to sustain a covenant relationship. Congregations which struggle to meet these guidelines are encouraged to consider alternative forms of ministry and/or alternative forms of compensation (such as extra days off).
- **Pastoral Care:** Just as every good pastor goes out of their way to provide effective and sensitive care to those in the congregation, so the congregation must understand their responsibility toward the pastor and the pastor's family. One way to evidence that care is through the compensation package.
- **Factors Affecting Compensation:** Congregations should honor the experience, education, responsibilities, and changing personal and economic conditions of authorized ministers. Some clergy will be making payments on educational loans acquired during their time of post-graduate study in seminary.

The elements described below, including salary, housing, benefits, and paid time off, together comprise an adequate and fair compensation package.

## I. Clergy and Taxes

Yes, pastors do pay taxes. Pastors are not exempt from paying income tax. They are taxed at the same percentages as the rest of the population. Pastors are also responsible for paying Social Security Tax. Because pastors are considered self-employed for Social Security Tax purposes, they sustain the burden of paying the entire tax at the highest rate (currently 15.3% of the combined total of cash salary and housing).

Although a properly approved housing allowance (or fair rental value of the parsonage) is not subject to income tax, it is subject to Social Security Tax. Even when a church agrees to pay half of the pastor's Social Security Tax, as happens with other types of church and secular employees, that amount itself is considered taxable for both income and Social Security Taxes.

Because of the complexities inherent in the taxing of clergy, a church should plan a carefully organized compensation package, one that takes into consideration the sizable financial impact that taxes make upon pastors. The church should work with the pastor to allocate a salary and benefits package that minimizes tax liability. In

this way a church becomes a well-informed steward of its resources and demonstrates genuine care for its pastor.

The Pension Board prepares resources for churches and ministers to assist with tax preparation. These include Tax Guide for Ministers and Federal Reporting Requirements for Churches. These are available directly from the Pension Board and on their website at <https://ext.pbucc.org/>.

### Voluntary Withholding

A church and its pastor (who reports their income taxes as an employee) can voluntarily agree to subject the pastor's compensation to income tax withholding. Some pastors find voluntary withholding attractive because it avoids the additional work and discipline associated with the estimated tax payment procedure. Pastors who elect to enter into a voluntary withholding arrangement with their church need only file an IRS Form W-4 (Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate) with the church. The filing of this form is deemed to be a request for voluntary withholding. This arrangement may be terminated at any time by either the church or pastor individually, or by mutual consent of both. Of course, a voluntary withholding arrangement will affect the church's quarterly IRS Form 941.

### Estimated Tax Payments

Unless they elect voluntary withholding, pastors must prepay their income taxes and self-employment taxes using the IRS estimated tax procedures.

## **II. Cash Salary**

The following chart provides guidance for determining the cash salary of full-time authorized ministers in a local church setting. The guidelines are related to the average weekly worship attendance of a church with various Steps within each category. This was a change made to the 2020 guidelines. The use of average weekly worship attendance has been chosen since it reflects the demands of congregational engagement and a pastor's responsibilities. However, for congregations where the worship attendance does not fully reflect the demands asked of a pastor, a congregation may choose the compensation of a higher Step or a higher worship attendance.

The Steps refer to experience, special skills, and other factors deemed important for salary calculations. If the actual cash salary of a minister (before any re-allocation of funds to other line items) is below that of the appropriate membership size and Step, the position may be considered to be less than full time. The salaries listed in the chart are for ordained ministers who are solo and senior ministers. Licensed ministers, Commissioned ministers, and those with Lay Ministerial Standing should receive 85-100% of the salary designation for an ordained minister serving the same church at the appropriate membership size and Step.

Congregations who are not currently meeting Conference guidelines are encouraged to both seriously consider the guidelines and create a plan to move toward full implementation in 1-3 years. However, if the pastor's current cash salary exceeds the cash salary recommended by these guidelines, a congregation should not decrease their pastor's cash salary.

**Suggested Minimum Cash Salary for 2023**  
(does NOT include housing allowance, parsonage, or benefits)

Avg Weekly Worship attendance*	Step A	Step B	Step C	Step D	Step E
Up to 50	\$35,052.23	\$38,206.92	\$41,645.55	\$45,393.64	\$49,749.08
51-100	\$38,206.92	\$41,645.55	\$45,393.64	\$49,749.08	\$53,932.20
101-150	\$41,645.55	\$45,393.64	\$49,479.08	\$53,932.20	\$58,786.08
151-200	\$45,393.64	\$49,479.08	\$53,932.20	\$58,786.08	\$64,076.83
201-250	\$49,479.08	\$53,932.20	\$58,786.08	\$64,076.83	\$69,843.74
251 and above	\$53,932.20	\$58,786.08	\$64,076.83	\$69,843.74	\$76,129.68

These guidelines assume most of the responsibility for worship planning, preparation, and leadership are held by one or two pastors of the congregation and that the major activity and workload of the ministry is connected with worship. In some settings, especially congregations with more than two ministers who share and/or collaborate for most worship planning, preparation, and leadership, adjustments should be made to more accurately align the skills necessary and the workload demanded of the minister to the appropriate level within the grid.

Guide to the Steps

Cash salary guidelines are based upon the average weekly worship attendance and the skills, education, and experience of the pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, team ministry, pastor, or other authorized minister.

Please note:

- Each Step denotes a minimum salary for that Step
- Truly outstanding performance in ministry may merit a salary in the next larger category or Step
- An adjustment should be considered for ministers who have received less than adequate increases in the past

Step A = Entry-level. No ministerial or applicable life experience other than field education as a part of theological education.

Step B = Entry-level to mid-level. 2-5 years ministerial and/or applicable life experience.

Step C = Mid-level. 5-15 years ministerial and/or applicable life experience and proficiency in special skills.

Step D = High mid-level to early senior-level. 15-25 years ministerial and/or applicable life experience, perhaps an advanced graduate degree, specialized experience gained from continuing education or other work experience. A high level of proficiency in a wide range of skills typically needed by a senior minister, including staff supervision.

Step E = Senior-level. 20 or more years ministerial and/or life experience, highest level of skills proficiency needed by a senior minister, advanced graduate degree(s) and/or specialized skills.

It must be borne in mind that the figures above apply only to cash salary. It is important to consider a similar increase in the housing allowance (if provided) or the overall percentage increase will be smaller.

The Nebraska Conference is well aware that many of our churches struggle to meet these guidelines. The first approach in such a situation must be a careful inward look in which the congregation openly and prayerfully considers whether it is really teaching and challenging its members to be generous givers and faithful stewards of the financial resources God has given to each member. In cases where the resources to compensate at the guideline minimums cannot be obtained, it is important to enter into constructive negotiation with the pastor about alternative ways to recognize and honor the pastor's work. Some pastors might gladly accept additional time off, additional vacation time or other non-economic considerations in lieu of a compensation increase. Other ways to acknowledge a pastor's faithful service might include a yearend bonus or a contribution toward paying off their seminary debts, or (for pastors who live in a parsonage) contributions toward a (usually tax-deferred) housing equity fund.

## **II. Housing (Parsonage or Housing Allowance)**

A second, major portion of a pastor's compensation is housing, which is provided either in the form of the rent-free use of a church owned house (parsonage) or as a housing allowance. Various options for housing should be considered as part of the call agreement and may be renegotiated as required. The amount of total compensation designated for housing must be established in advance by vote of the church or official governing body and reported in writing to the pastor.

After the theoretical salary and housing compensation are agreed upon, the minister may choose to reallocate that total compensation in a more beneficial way for their particular economic circumstances, in accordance with the codes of the IRS and ethics of authorized ministry. (See Pastoral Ministry Budget Worksheet at the end of this document for computing the figures.)

It is important for the church and minister to understand that the value of the parsonage or the amount paid as housing allowance is not taxable for the purposes of income tax and should not be included in box 1 of form W-2. However, the value of

the parsonage or the housing allowance paid is taxable for the purposes of Social Security.

### Relocation Expenses

It is expected that the calling congregation pays full relocation expenses for a newly called minister and their family. Additionally, it is expected that the calling congregation provide an additional cash benefit equal to 15.3% of the relocation expenses to offset the income tax now associated with this benefit. Prior to December 31, 2017, a church's payment or reimbursement of a pastor's qualified moving expenses was a nontaxable benefit. However, the 2017 Tax Cuts and Job Act made the moving expense benefit provided for clergy a form of taxable income that must be reported on the pastor's W2. The congregation's additional cash benefit to the newly called clergy covers the clergy's increased tax liability that results from the changes.

**OPTION 1: PARSONAGE PROVIDED** - When a parsonage is provided, it should be well maintained and compare with the average housing in the church membership and community. It is recommended that there be a written agreement between the church and minister concerning all procedures for regular maintenance and repairs. The payment of utilities should be the responsibility of the church, with the exception of personal telephone calls. Because the pastor who lives in a parsonage will not accumulate equity as does a person who owns their own home, it is recommended that the church establish a tax-sheltered equity fund (usually an IRA) into which payments in lieu of equity accumulation will be made on the pastor's behalf.

**OPTION 2: HOUSING ALLOWANCE** - If the church does not provide a parsonage, a housing allowance should be calculated and paid based on the median price of owner-occupied housing in the church's own Page 4 community. **A minimum housing allowance shall be no less than 1% per month of the value of the median-priced standard 3-bedroom home** in the community (e.g., if the median priced home is \$100,000, the annual housing allowance would be \$12,000). Annual review of the compensation package should include review of the community's housing market so that all components of the package are equitably adjusted each year.

According to the IRS, the value of the annual housing allowance must be formally approved at the annual meeting of the church or by the appropriate church board each year prior to receipt of the allowance by the minister. The approval must be officially recorded in church minutes and be retained in the church files.

It is important for the church and minister to understand that the value of the parsonage, or the amount paid as housing allowance is NOT taxable for purposes of income tax, and should not be included in box 1 of form W-2. However, the value of the parsonage or the housing allowance paid IS taxable for the purposes of Social Security.

*NOTE: Definition of "Salary Basis"*



The “Salary Basis” is the sum of the cash salary plus either the housing allowance or the value of the parsonage provided. For the purposes of calculating the “Salary Basis”, the value of a provided parsonage should be set at 30% of the cash salary. The “Salary Basis” is the figure from which the pastor’s pension contribution and Social Security offset is calculated.

### III. Forms of Ministry

#### A. Full-time Solo or Senior Ministry

Full-time ministers should receive at least the minimum cash salary. For purposes of these recommendations, it is assumed that full-time service consists of approximately 12-13 units of work per week, where one unit equals one 3-4 hour block of time, such as one morning, one afternoon, or one evening, as averaged over the course of a year.

#### B. Full-time Associate Ministry

Associate ministers’ compensation will vary with responsibilities, experience, and training. While it is common for an associate minister’s cash salary and housing to be less than that of the senior minister’s in that congregation, it should meet at least the minimum guidelines on page 2. Any differential between the compensation of a senior pastor and that of an associate would best be accomplished by INCREASING the compensation of the senior pastor (for additional responsibilities, etc.) rather than by reducing the compensation of the associate. A reminder from the cash salary grid on page 2: in some settings, especially congregations with more than two ministers who share and/or collaborate for most worship planning, preparation, and leadership, adjustments should be made to more accurately align the skills necessary and the workload demanded of the minister to the appropriate Step within the grid. Full benefits should be provided for all full-time authorized ministers.

#### C. Part-time Ministry

Churches that cannot afford the recommended full-time salary package may wish to consider offering their minister a part-time salary package, which is based on the minister’s time commitments in terms of “units.” Transparency and good communication are key to this package, because without those a church might easily develop unrealistic time expectations of its part-time minister.

One approach to negotiating a transparent part-time minister compensation package is to look at each morning, afternoon, or evening as constituting one unit of work (e.g. 3-4 hours). For example, a minister who spent a morning on worship preparation, an afternoon on hospital visitation and administrative work and an evening at a church meeting would have worked 3 units that day.

- A full-time pastoral position would average 12-13 units/week over the course of a year.
- A three-quarter time position would average 9 units/week over the course of a year and the minimum salary and benefits should be calculated at 75% of a full-time ministry package.

- A half-time position would average 6 units/week over the course of a year and the minimum salary and benefits should be calculated at 50% of a full-time ministry package.

This approach permits a church to set priorities while also providing considerable flexibility. Lay people might prepare the newsletter, teach an adult Bible Study or make routine visits to shut-ins, freeing up the part-time minister to concentrate on worship preparation, a limited number of meetings, and counseling of and visitation to those in need. In this way, a church may provide a professional-level ministry with a parttime minister.

A possible, but not exhaustive, list of church activities and responsibilities that might be included in a minister's total units of time are

- Worship planning and preparation
- Sunday worship and Sunday programs
- Visitation at hospitals, nursing homes, personal homes
- Administration, phone calls, e-mails
- Church, community, and denominational meetings
- Counseling, weddings, funerals, and other pastoral concerns
- Teaching, bible study, adult education
- Communication venues: bulletins, newsletters, website, etc.
- Community-based chaplaincy at nursing homes, jails, hospitals, etc.

Another means for determining part-time compensation would be to consider the cost of leading worship at \$125-200/day plus mileage reimbursement, and that of all other pastoral responsibilities at \$20-\$30 per hour plus mileage reimbursement, based on experience.

#### D. Supply Ministry

Supply ministry is another model by which to address the pastoral needs of a congregation between installed pastorates, pastoral sabbaticals, pastoral family leave, and other authorized pastoral leave situations. This may be as little as regular pulpit supply or expanded to include hospital visitation and/or other specified pastoral duties. Supply ministers may be lay, licensed, or ordained.

A minimum weekly compensation of at least \$125-200, plus travel expenses, is recommended for worship leadership. The compensation should be increased when there is more than one worship service, or when the pastoral services beyond worship leadership have been agreed upon.

#### E. Intentional Interim Ministry

An interim pastor serves churches experiencing the transition between their former pastor's departure and the calling of a new pastor. Because this interim period is such an important time for a congregation to work on issues of change and development, an interim pastor needs special skills and training. A full-time interim pastor should

receive compensation that meets the above guidelines and be at least equal to the pay received by the previous pastor.

An Intentional Interim Minister is a pastor contracted to serve a church during a stipulated transition period in order to help that congregation meet particular goals before calling a new, permanent pastor. An Intentional Interim Minister helps the church identify those important goals and set objectives for the interim period, which may be one to two years. Compensation for this specialist in interim ministry should be at least at the same level as the last full-time pastor's but may need to be higher to adequately compensate for the interim's unique skills or to stretch the congregation toward more adequate compensation for a newly called pastor.

Ministers who provide Interim Ministry rely on churches to support them during their ministry in the local setting, but also need to maintain some stability between interims. Churches should take this into account Page 6 when negotiating the terms to be applied at the end of an interim contract. It is suggested that each church setting seek to provide an additional 30-45 days of full compensation following the end date of an interim minister's time in serving a church setting for more than 6 months, and 15 days of full compensation for less than 6 months of service.

Interim ministers, whether part-time or full-time, may be called according to the cash salary guidelines found above or by using the "unit" system illustrated in the Part-time Ministry section on page 4. When calculating compensation per unit, the amount should, at minimum, reflect combined compensation of salary and housing.

#### F. Licensed Ministry and Those with Lay Ministerial Standing

Licensed ministers and those in ministry who have Lay Ministerial Standing serve a vital role in the life of the Church. This guideline should be used for full- and part-time ministry. Full-time roles should be compensated according to the cash salary guidelines on pages 2-3 of this document at 85-100% of the listed salary. Full housing and general benefits should be provided for full-time ministry. Part-time ministry should be compensated using the same approach as part-time ordained ministry, as described above.

#### **IV. Benefits**

Benefits are provided for authorized ministers as an expense of the ministry setting. **To be in keeping with Conference Guidelines, a church must provide at minimum the following benefits as described below in**

- A. Pension/Annuity (or cash equivalent)
- B. Health & Dental Insurance (or cash equivalent)
- C. Vision Insurance
- D. Social Security Offset
- E. Life & Disability Insurance
- F. Worker's Compensation

G. Malpractice Insurance (usually included or an additional rider with church's property insurance)

**To be in keeping with Conference Guidelines, a church must provide** paid vacation and days off, business travel reimbursement, financial and leave provisions for civic service and continuing education events, professional expense reimbursement, and Criminal Background Check reimbursement.

A. Pension/Annuity

Monthly payments to the Annuity Fund, an IRS 403(b) tax sheltered annuity administered by The Pension Boards UCC, are a standard part of the UCC ministerial benefits package. Ministry settings provide contributions directly to The Pension Boards of 14% of the minister's "salary basis," which for pastors paid a housing allowance is the total of cash salary plus housing allowances OR, for pastors provided with a parsonage, the total of cash salary + 30% of cash salary + any furnishings allowance. (Please see definition of "salary basis" on page 3). Payments are made directly by the church to the Pension Board on a monthly basis and all payments and accumulations are tax deferred until retirement.

B. Health & Dental Insurance Plan

A Health Insurance & Dental insurance for ministers and their dependents through The Pension Boards UCC is a standard part of the UCC ministerial benefits package. Plans B & C of The Pensions Board UCC are not appropriate substitutes. If health & dental insurance is desired by the minister, the ministry setting shall make: (1) monthly payments for the full cost of the annual premium directly to The Pension Boards UCC; or Page 7 (2) payments not to exceed the UCC annual premium applied to the cost of a comparable plan of another insurer. In the case of another insurer, not The Pension Boards UCC, contact your tax professional to discuss what premium payments are "subject to taxation." It is important to note that if the premiums are not paid on time the minister and family risk loss of coverage and cannot be reinstated without full medical examinations.

NOTE: Those persons entering authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ for the first time have a 90- day window during which they may enroll in The Pension Boards UCC health insurance plan without need of a medical examination. If a minister agrees to leave the UCC Group Plan for other insurance provided by the church, re-admittance may be possible only after a complete medical exam for all those to be covered; thus if a minister drops coverage for any reason, there is a risk of being declared uninsurable or of being severely restricted in insurability in future years.

C. Vision Insurance

Individual and family vision coverage is also recommended and is available as an optional coverage through the Pension Boards.

D. Social Security Offset

It is important to understand the “dual-status” of professional clergy. For purposes of income tax, the minister is an employee whose cash compensation is reported on IRS form W-2 (the housing allowance or value of a provided parsonage is NOT included in this figure). For purposes of Social Security, however, the minister is considered self-employed and must pay self-employment tax at the rate of 15.3% of cash salary plus housing allowance/value of provided parsonage. To acknowledge this anomaly, it is expected as minimum guidelines that the church provides an additional cash benefit equal to 7.65% of the minister’s salary basis to ministers who contribute to Social Security. For purposes of income tax reporting, the offset is additional compensation and must be included in cash salary on form W-2.

#### E. Life & Disability Insurance

Life & disability insurance coverage is available at a premium of 1.5% of the salary basis to all ministers, whether ordained, licensed, or granted lay ministerial standing. Such coverage is highly recommended because it provides

1. Long-term disability benefits after 90 days of disability.
2. Short-term disability benefits are payable prior to the qualification for long term benefits.
3. Term life insurance on a minister’s life to ensure that survivors have some financial protection in the event of the minister’s death.

The terms of the disability policy are not easily summarized. For a more complete explanation of the Pension Boards Disability coverage, please consult the Pension Boards directly.

#### F. Workers’ Compensation

Churches are required by law to provide workers’ compensation insurance for all employees including clergy.

#### G. Flexible Spending Accounts

There will be tax savings for the pastor if a Flexible Spending Account is established into which the pastor may designate pre-tax deductions from their salary be deposited. Upon presentation of proper documentation for certain medical and dependent care expenses, those amounts are reimbursed to the minister tax-free. The UCC Pension Boards will administer such a plan at modest cost. The church may administer the plan itself but must be careful to follow all the pertinent regulations.

#### H. Malpractice Insurance (pastoral counseling and misconduct)

Each church should purchase malpractice insurance to protect both the church and its staff in the event of a lawsuit.

### **V. Reimbursement of Expenses Incurred on Behalf of the Church**

Reimbursable expenses are those costs reimbursable to the minister or lay minister, which are incurred in the performance of pastoral duties. **They are not part of the**

**person's compensation. They are "business" expenses for which the congregation is responsible.** The IRS considers the following to be reimbursable expenses.

**A. Automobile**

The minister should be reimbursed for travel expenses related to costs incurred for using an automobile in ministry. These expenses should be seen as cost to the church and not the minister. Churches should choose one of these options:

1. Reimburse the minister for use of their personal automobile at the current IRS rate for employee use.
2. Provide the minister with an auto for church business by purchase or lease. When such an auto is used for personal use, the minister should reimburse the church for such use. Please note that IRS regulations apply to all these options and should be carefully consulted.

**B. Conference and Association Meetings**

Ministers are expected to attend official Conference and Association meetings and should be encouraged also to serve in wider ministry settings—in the association, conference, or national settings. Such service, in appropriate amounts, should be considered part of both the congregation's and the pastor's ministry and mission. Such wider service is neither time off nor vacation. Expenses not reimbursed by the wider ministry setting should be reimbursed by the local church.

**C. Continuing Education**

Congregations should expect their minister to pursue professional growth and development, since both benefit from it. Continuing education leave of two weeks each year, including two Sundays, is recommended, with an amount budgeted in the expenses of the congregation (\$500-\$1,000) to cover a major portion of the expenses for tuition, travel, housing, and meals that might be involved. The appropriate church board should be involved in approving a mutually beneficial experience.

**D. Community of Practice (COP)**

Congregations should expect their minister to participate in a Community of Practice for support, growth, and accountability among their peers. It is highly beneficial for both the minister and congregation to participate in such a group. It is recommended that the congregation budget for the annual participation fee (\$300 in 2022), reimburse mileage according to the travel expense reimbursement listed above, and provide time for regular participation in the group.

**E. Professional Coaching, Spiritual Director, and/or Counselor**

Congregations are best served by ministers who are attentive to their own professional development, spiritual health, and emotional well-being. To ensure the minister has few barriers to utilizing a professional coach, being supported by a spiritual director, or working with a counselor, Congregations should allocate at least \$50-\$150 monthly as an amount that may be reimbursed to the minister to cover these costs. The minister should submit receipts alongside the request for reimbursement.

#### **F. Other Professional Expenses**

A specific amount should be negotiated each year to cover other professional expenses. Items such as books, magazines, publications not otherwise covered by the church budget, work related meals, cost of entertaining church members and groups, gifts, cost of participation in program activities of all church groups, association and conference responsibilities, vestments and dues would be covered. The minister should submit regular reports with receipts to request reimbursement.

#### **G. Criminal Background Check**

When a pastor is first called to a church, the congregation will reimburse the newly called and settled pastor for the cost of the background check required for the search & call process.

### **VI. Other Benefits and Provisions**

#### **A. Personnel Policies**

Personnel policies governing days off, vacations, holidays, and leave for clergy and lay employees should be developed by each congregation. Such policies are wise to anticipate special situations or needs such as illness, personal emergencies, and the birth or adoption of a child. Personnel policies regarding such needs can avoid confusion and avert tensions in the relationship.

#### **B. Work Week and Finding Balance**

Pastors want to be available to the members of the congregations they serve, and members of the congregation expect their pastor to be available in times of need. Responsibilities often require work on evenings and weekends. Yet not all weeks are equally busy or demanding, and pastor's work schedules are often flexible as a result. A typical full-time pastor's week may vary from 40 hours of work to as much as 80 hours of work. This can place a burden upon the pastor's family and personal life.

Ministers are encouraged to be faithful and professional in carrying out their work. Vital, faithful ministry may at times require extra work.

Ministers are also encouraged to be faithful to themselves and their families. Ministry requires a balance of time spent in the church's ministry and time spent with family and friends—a balance of work and recreation, a balance of exercising the body and the mind, a balance of care of others and care for self.

Congregations are encouraged to support their pastors in their work and in their time off, helping to create the proper balance. The church should also be a witness to other employers in the community of how to create a healthy work-life balance.

The equivalent of two days off per week is recommended. Minister's schedules often require flexibility in how this is taken. At least one full day off should be regularly

scheduled and the minister should not be contacted on that day except for emergencies.

### C. Vacation

Clergy are often expected to work more than the standard 40-hour work week. Responsibilities often require work on evenings and Saturdays as well as Sundays; therefore, an annual vacation of four weeks, including four Sundays, is standard for all ministers, regardless of full-time or part-time. Two days off per week for full-time ministers should also be strongly encouraged to assure a minister's continued health and endurance.

- Understanding that in most professional employment settings multiple three-day holiday weekends are observed, the NE conference asks congregations to provide an additional 2 Sundays per year where the authorized minister is free of church responsibilities. These Sundays will be made known to the leadership team at the beginning of each year. Church events that may require the authorized minister's participation will not be scheduled on those weekends.

### D. Holidays

Paid holidays should at least include New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, the Friday after Thanksgiving, and Christmas. When these occur on a Sunday, another day should be taken as the holiday.

Congregations are encouraged to also include the Sunday following Christmas and the Sunday following Easter to the list of paid holidays so that the Minister is able to celebrate those holidays.

### E. Parental Leave

A period of parental leave is a recommended way for congregations to support a minister and their family. For the period prior to and/or immediately following the birth or adoption of a child, parental leave of up to eight weeks with full compensation is encouraged. Any accrued vacation or sick leave may be used to extend the leave period. Another option for extending the leave would be for the minister to work parttime, engaging some of the responsibilities while making provisional arrangements for others. In each of these instances, prior to the leave, arrangements for the continuation of the church's pastoral responsibilities during the leave should be negotiated.

### F. Medical Leave

Medical leave should be established at 30 days per year with no unused days carried over to the next year. Sick leave may be used for personal illness or accident, the care of a person in the minister's immediate family, or medical and dental appointments. In the event of serious and extended illness and/or disability an additional 60 days may be negotiated with the local church governing body in consultation with the Association Committee on Ministry and the conference staff, if requested (see the section on disability insurance).



#### G. Emergency or Personal Leave

Allowance should be made for the pastor to be with their immediate family at times of special celebration, such as weddings or graduations, and at times of personal sorrow such as illness or death. Also, the pastor may have times of personal emergency or unusual family responsibility. Congregations should identify a number of personal leave days. From 3-7 per year are recommended. These do not accrue.

#### H. Civic Service Leave

Regular full-time and part-time ministers who are members of a US Military Reserve or National Guard unit should be excused from work when called for military duty and training. Churches shall adhere to all federal and state laws affecting military leave.

Ministers should be granted leave for jury duty. They should receive up to two weeks compensation while serving as a jury member. Compensation should be figured as the difference between their regular compensation and the jury duty per diem pay. Ministers are expected to resume pastoral duties once released from jury duty for the day.

#### I. Participation in UCC Wider Church Ministry and Outdoor Ministry

Churches are in ministry beyond the limits of their community. Therefore, Pastors are expected to attend official Conference and Association meetings to maintain their ministerial standing. A pastor should be encouraged also to serve in wider ministry settings - in the Association, Conference, or National Settings.

Outdoor ministry is transformative for congregations, and thus, congregations are encouraged to allow their pastors one week's participation in or service to a camp or outdoor ministry setting. Such wider service is neither time off nor vacation. Expenses not reimbursed by the wider ministry setting should be reimbursed by the local church.

#### J. Other Unpaid Family Leave

Unforeseen circumstances and events in the minister's family that necessitate time and attention away from the church should be handled with compassion and concern. Other unpaid leave for the care of a spouse, child, parent, or self should be negotiated as needed according to the following principles:

- Unpaid leave may be used to care for a spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition. It may be used for a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of their job. It may be used for any qualifying exigency, as defined by the Family and Medical Leave Act, arising out of the fact that a spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a military member on active duty or call to covered active-duty status. Up to 12-workweeks of unpaid leave in a 12-month period will be granted.
- In cases of unpaid leave, health insurance will remain uninterrupted and unchanged for the employee and their family.

- Unpaid leave workweeks will not be included in calculations to figure accrued vacation and other benefits (except health insurance).

#### K. Sabbatical Leave

Churches are encouraged to establish a Sabbatical Leave policy for their ministers. The concept of Sabbatical, rooted in Scripture, offers a time of sustained study, travel, and personal and professional renewal, typically enabling ministers to be of greater service within their ministry setting over time.

After every five years of service and in anticipation of further ministerial tenure, the minister should be encouraged to take a three-month sabbatical with full compensation for the purpose of professional study and growth. Local churches are encouraged to pay 50% of the cost of tuition and other expenses—travel, board, lodging, etc. A sabbatical is not a vacation. During a sabbatical year, regular vacation time should also be allowed, either added to sabbatical time or taken separately.

The church should make provision for pulpit supply and pastoral care during sabbatical by setting aside as part of the annual budget, funds that when taken together are sufficient to meet the total cost anticipated.

Congregations can prepare for any expenses associated with sabbatical leave by adding annually to an escrow account for that purpose.

#### L. Minister's Death

In the case of the minister's death, it is recommended that the spouse and/or family receive full salary for the current month plus any vacation time earned, plus three additional months' pay. The family should be entitled to live in the parsonage free of charge, or receive the housing allowance, up to 90 days. Further provisions may be made upon mutual agreement between the church, the spouse and/or family of the deceased minister, and the Executive Conference Minister and/or the Association Committee on Ministry.

### **VII. Working Together for Effective Ministry**

The covenant that binds a minister and congregation in mutual ministry and mission needs to be nurtured, strengthened and sometimes renewed. Here are some specific ways that can be done.

#### A. Pastoral Relations Committee

A small committee of three to seven persons is given the specific job of supporting the minister, the relationship between the minister and the congregation, and clarifying the role of the minister. Such care can build the trust and communication necessary to deal effectively with inevitable tensions or conflicts that arise. Training for the PRC is available from Conference staff.

#### B. Annual Review of Compensation

An important task for the church, either by the personnel committee or some other designated committee, is an annual review of the minister's compensation. The review should be an open and caring conversation allowing the minister to express changing needs or expectations. An annual increase of cash salary reflecting any increase in the cost of living should be considered as well as current housing market figures if a housing allowance is included. Compensation does reflect the congregations' intentions to take seriously their own calling. Additional salary increases reflecting meritorious service or increased responsibilities affirms the mutual covenant between minister and congregation.

### C. Ministry Review

Any planned review of ministerial performance needs to be done at a time sufficiently distant from annual compensation review to avoid linking the two. (For example, if the church's budget meeting and decision regarding ministerial compensation happens in September, the ministry review should happen in March.) A ministry review should be undertaken only when its purpose is clear, and only if there are not immediate tensions in the relationship between minister and congregation. Such purposes might be to clarify congregational goals and objectives, to assess the minister's use of time in relation to those objectives, to identify unmet needs, or skills that need further development. Review of the congregation's performance is as important as review of the minister's performance. Deficiencies in performance by one party can seriously impeded effectiveness by the other. Information on ministry evaluation is available from conference staff.

It is understood that the conference Executive Conference Minister and/or the Associate Conference Minister and the Association Committee on Ministry should be consulted at the request of either the minister or the congregation, should the relationship between them be strained or in jeopardy.

The ministerial staff serving the Nebraska Conference UCC are available or consultation and resourcing and seek to be helpful as you have need while ministering together.

It is understood that the minister is to have freedom of the pulpit in matters of faith and ethics according to the dictates of the Word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, the traditions of the United Church of Christ and the realities of the world.

These guidelines have been developed by the Board of Directors of the Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ. They are then submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Conference for their endorsement. These guidelines are reviewed annually.

The ministerial staff serving the Iowa Conference UCC are available for consultation and resourcing and seeks to be helpful as you have need while ministering together.  
5-18-2019

Revisions: 8/20/20; 4/17/2021; 7/27/2022