



## The Question of the Pastor's Compensation

*by Rob MacDougall*

My first call was as an Associate Pastor. I had worked as a social worker for a few years after graduating from college. During these years I married my wife and the two of us soon went off to seminary. While in seminary our first child was born and we lived off a very meager income. When I received my first call our family had no savings, our car was twelve years old and we had almost no home furnishings. The church that called me had been a large, prominent UCC church, but their membership and finances had been shrinking for years and they had not yet moved into their new identity. Though they wanted a relatively young pastor with a family on their staff, they had little understanding of what it would take to provide a compensation package that would sustain a young family. Their budget was shrinking but they continued to believe they should have the size staff they had become accustomed to. If I hadn't been married to a professional person who could earn much more than I did, it would have been impossible for me to serve this church.



Elements of my story can be found in the stories of other churches and clergy today. In many, if not most churches, the pastor's compensation package represents a significant part of the church's budget. If the budget of a church is stagnant or even falling, there may be struggles in the church around the size of the pastor's compensation. Churches that are used to having multiple staff members wrestle with the possibility of having to reduce staff and the ramifications of doing so. Smaller churches may have to wrestle with the possibility of not even being able to support one full-time pastor.

The Wisconsin Conference Commission on Church and Ministry established a working group about a year ago to revise our Conference's compensation booklet. Though the current booklet is only four or five years old, there are many considerations that are not addressed in this booklet. The revision process was to include two steps: a brief document updating compensations figures, written last summer, and then the full revision of the booklet that will be finished for this coming summer. The working group received critiques of last summer's effort and that feedback has helped give guidance to the revised booklet that is now being completed.

As has been true in the past, the revised booklet strives to be a practical guide addressing the importance of churches providing fair and just compensation to their pastors, and reflecting the realities of contemporary church budgets. The revised booklet will include a graph of recommended salaries with factors to consider when deciding where your pastor fits on the graph. The booklet will also lay out recommendations for total compensation packages including benefits and professional expenses.

A new section in the revised booklet is the addition of the national church document, The Call Agreement Workbook. This workbook is helpful as it spells out areas of ministry that full and part-time pastors can be expected to cover. The workbook also offers clarification regarding part-time ministries and how to make them viable. The compensation booklet will include guidance in establishing salaries and benefits for part-time ministry positions.

Attentiveness to fair compensation and the realities of church budgets is not glamorous work, but it is vital for the wellbeing of pastors and the strong, healthy churches in which they serve. A compensation booklet is meant to offer guidance—not a mandate. The revision of our Conference booklet is being done with thoughtful research and faithful consideration of pastors and churches. Look for the revised compensation booklet this summer and please use it as you call a new pastor and as you go about your annual review of your current pastor's compensation package.