

Study reveals pay, benefits lagging for pastors, ministerial staff

NASHVILLE (BP) – A study conducted by Southern Baptists' LifeWay Research and GuideStone Financial Resources in cooperation with state Baptist conventions has found compensation for full-time Southern Baptist senior pastors has remained flat over the past four years, while the total pay package has decreased.

The Consumer Price Index jumped 17.6% from 2018 to 2022, but compensation which includes salary and housing has increased only 0.2% for full-time senior pastors at Southern Baptist churches during the same period.

In addition, pastors' total pay package which includes compensation plus any retirement or insurance benefits actually fell 2.1%.

A previous LifeWay Research study of U.S. Protestant pastors indicated 41% were worried about their family's financial security. Eighteen percent in the earlier study reported financial stress is one of the greatest concerns they have in ministry.

"The last four years have included two good financial years and two difficult years for the typical church," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "A church cannot pay what they do not have but at the same time, Scripture says a pastoral worker is worthy of his wages (1 Timothy 5:18) – not what his wages were worth four years ago."

Church staff

Other full-time staff ministers have seen both compensation

and pay packages increase since 2018, but not in line with inflation. Full-time ministers at Southern Baptist churches who are not senior pastors saw a 7.5% compensation increase and a 7.1% pay package increase in the past four years.

Full-time office personnel are the only Southern Baptist church employees who had compensation and pay package increases closely aligned with the Consumer Price Index. Since 2018, their compensation increased 17%, while their pay package went up 18%.

“Office staff can get a job in many nearby businesses, and churches have had to raise their pay to keep these positions filled,” McConnell said. “Just because pastors and ministers don’t have numerous ministry alternatives to jump to doesn’t mean they don’t deserve raises to keep pace with rising costs of living.”

On average, a Southern Baptist church spends 46% of budget on employee compensation and benefits. The percentage increases slightly with the size of the congregation. The smallest churches, those with fewer than 50 in attendance, spend a median of 45% on personnel.

Churches with an average weekly attendance between 50 and 99 spend 46%. Those that average 100 to 249 devote 48%, while congregations of 250 or more spend 50% on employee compensation and benefits.

Considerations

Various factors contribute to the likelihood of a Southern Baptist pastor getting paid more. On average, for each additional resident member of their church, a pastor earns \$14 more each year. For each additional attendee, their pay goes up \$33 on average.

Experience also plays a role in compensation. For each year of ministry, on average a pastor earns \$382 more. For each year

he stays at his church, a Southern Baptist pastor's pay goes up \$124 on average.

However, for each year of a pastor age when entering ministry, he typically earns \$635 less. "For some, that may be by choice because they're in a position to give back" McConnell said. "When age and other factors are similar, more experience is related to higher pay. When experience and other factors are similar, higher age is related to lower pay."

Those with both bachelor and masters degrees earn similar amounts. Those with less education are paid less. On average, pastors whose highest level of education is high school or less are paid \$6,736 less than those with a four-year degree or more.

Those with an associate degree earn \$7,206 less, while those with some college are paid \$4,800 less than those with at least a bachelor's degree. Southern Baptist pastors with a doctorate earn \$9,794 more, on average, than their counterparts with bachelor or masters degrees.

Pastors in the South and West earn similar amounts, but those at Southern Baptist churches in the Midwest earn \$4,765 less while those in the Northeast earn \$21,511 more.

Health care

Most Southern Baptist churches do not provide medical insurance for their pastor, but as the size of the congregation increases so does the likelihood the pastor will receive those additional benefits.

Overall, 59% of Southern Baptist churches do not provide medical coverage, while 18% pay for the pastor and his family, 14% pay for the pastor and his wife, and nine percent pay for the pastor alone.

In churches with fewer than 50 in attendance, 69% of their

pastors receive no medical coverage. Fifty-eight percent at Southern Baptist churches with 50 to 99 at an average worship service don't receive medical insurance.

Forty-nine percent of those at churches that average 100 to 249 in attendance aren't provided health insurance. For churches with 250 or more, 26% receive no medical insurance from the congregation.

"Churches love and care for their pastors as people and shepherds," GuideStone President Hance Dilbeck said. "One tangible way to demonstrate that love and commitment is to provide them with the proper pay and benefits.

"It can be wise to look at other professionals in the community with similar education, credentials, and responsibility when determining the salary and benefits – retirement, health, and other coverages – they should offer. This helps build their financial security and improves their resilience as they face the financial, health, and other challenges that will always come our way."

Other benefits

Fewer churches provide life and/or accident coverage (24%), disability insurance (20%), dental insurance (18%) or vision insurance (nine percent). Again, the churches with fewer than 50 people are less likely to provide any of those, while the churches with 250 or more are more likely.

There are many factors that have an impact on the amount of vacation provided to pastors. Full-time senior pastors receive an average of around 14 vacation days each year. Larger churches give their pastors slightly more vacation time.

For every 309 attendees, pastors get one more vacation day on average. Additionally, the longer a pastor remains at their current church, the more vacation time they are provided at an average rate of one day for every six years.

Confronting the issue

“People have been quick to talk about the mental wellbeing of pastors and ministers in the aftermath of the pandemic, but far fewer have been willing to talk about the financial wellbeing of their ministers,” McConnell said.

“The government isn’t sending stimulus checks to pastors in 2022. It is time for congregations to give their pastors and staff a raise to help them through this time of inflation,” McConnell pointed out.

Methodology

The Southern Baptist Convention Compensation Study was conducted between April 1 and June 30, 2022 by Baptist state conventions along with GuideStone Financial Resources and Lifeway Research. Data acquired by the study can be accessed [here](#).

Responses from 6,671 full-time senior pastors, staff ministers, and office personnel were used in this report. Responses from 3,102 full-time senior pastors were used for the regression analysis.

Responses for senior pastors were weighted by average attendance to reflect the population more accurately.

Included in compensation were:

- Office and custodial personnel: Salary (part-time salary is calibrated to reflect 50 weeks per year at median number of hours: 15).
- Non-ordained ministers: Salary (part-time salary is calibrated to reflect 50 weeks per year at median number of hours: 15).
- Ordained ministers: Salary, housing allowance, fair rental value of church-owned housing and utilities for church-owned

housing (part-time salary is calibrated to reflect 50 weeks per year at median number of hours: 20).

Included in pay package:

- Office and custodial personnel: Salary, retirement benefits paid by the church, and insurance paid by the church.
- Non-ordained ministers: Salary, retirement benefits paid by the church, and insurance paid by the church.
- Ordained ministers: Salary, housing allowance, fair rental value of church-owned housing, utilities for church-owned housing, Social Security equivalent, retirement benefits paid by the church, and insurance paid by the church.

For more information, download the study report and the regression report, and visit LifewayResearch.com and the online compensation tool.