

Negotiating the Pastor's Salary

INTRODUCTION

Pastors' salaries can be a sensitive issue for congregations, pastors and pastors' families. Fair pay is important; but how fair pay is determined is as important for morale and ministry as the salary numbers.

Most pastors are uncomfortable with negotiating a salary. They knew when they were called that they weren't going to get rich in this "career." And our theology (and the typical pastor's personality) upholds the value of self-sacrifice and submission. In fact, pastors may have faint doubts about really deserving a salary increase—especially in light of the needs of other church programs and the state of the world. Yet they recognize that an inadequate salary affects their family in adverse ways. And it affects their own attitude toward the congregation and their vocation.

Careful calculations are needed to determine an appropriate balance between congregational resources, family and personal needs, community standards and kingdom values. Fortunately, much of this work has been eliminated by the production of denominational salary guidelines by Congregation and Ministerial Leadership of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. These guidelines can be used for a formulaic calculation of an appropriate salary.

But the guidelines are not a complete answer. Pastors tend to view the guidelines as a minimum standard, while the congregation views it as a maximum. And it is always necessary to customize the formula by a variety of criteria, each one of which is susceptible to a variety of interpretations. A negotiated salary which both pastor and congregation feel they have truly helped to shape according to their circumstances will be better accepted by all parties than one that is handed to them without input. Some discussion about the published guidelines is necessary.

The following principles are offered to assist the pastor and those charged with salary negotiation, whether the church council or board or its working committee. It is assumed that the denominational guidelines (available from any area conference minister or from the denominational offices, and on the Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA web site) are being used, and that there is room for negotiation of some details.

PRINCIPLES

- A. The scriptures support the principle of adequate, even generous, financial support for pastors. "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves to be paid'" (1 Timothy 5:17-18) 1 Corinthians 9 is an extended discussion of the right of a pastor to be adequately paid.

- B. You usually get more than you pay for, but there is a relationship between salary and service. One congregation begrudgingly concedes the lowest possible salary; its members grumble and make cutting jokes about the pastor's pay; it squeezes every concession (minimal vacation time, extra work expectations, no continuing education provisions) in the hope of getting a bargain. Another congregation calculates the salary guidelines, offers a salary slightly above that, notices extra costs (child care, hosting, conference attendance) and pays for them and then asks the pastor whether that is enough. Which pastor will happily work hard to provide the best possible service; will keep a keen personal growing edge to live up to the trust of the congregation and will joyfully stay on for another term of ministry? Whose family will be supportive of the pastoral call and whose children will stay in the church, perhaps themselves hearing a call to ministry? Which congregation will produce people who consider ministry a worthy calling for themselves? Which one will easily find a new pastor when it is time to call one? Of which congregation would you be proud to be a part of?
- C. Negotiating a salary is not a competition between opponents holding contradictory values—as if it were a labor dispute. The goal of the congregation should be to provide the very best financial support possible to its spiritual leader. The goal of the pastor should be to keep the salary portion of the budget reasonable so that more money is available for missions and charitable activity of the church. The congregation and the pastor have common goals: to provide fair and adequate compensation; to enable the pastor to provide adequately for family needs; to free the pastor from financial anxiety; to model for the congregation good financial management and suitable stewardship values.
- D. A salary negotiation committee, comprised of a representative of the Pastor Congregation Relations Committee, the treasurer, and appointed members of the church council or board, undertake the negotiation of the pastor's salary. Salary questions need to be addressed openly every year. When a new pastor is being called or a job description is being reviewed, it is necessary to review basic agreements. Between those times at least a modest discussion and revision in light of adjustments to the cost of living are needed.
- E. There is really no way to determine the market value of pastoral work. What monetary value could we place on preaching the gospel, on attending to the spiritual well-being of people inside and outside the church, on praying and listening and loving? Yet we can assume that comparisons will be made with the income that one could earn in other professions. Appropriate comparisons might be made with the salaries earned in the community by teachers, social workers or nurses. That perspective does not determine what is a fair salary, but it should inform the attitude with which the congregation approaches salary negotiations.
- F. Salary negotiations are not the setting for decisions about continuing ministry. If the pastor is not suited to the congregation, then a decision to make a change should be made in another setting. And it should be made openly, not by financial harassment forcing the pastor to resign in bitterness.
- G. Some symmetry is appropriate between a pastor's salary and the income range in the church and community. In a congregation where the average income is \$20,000 and a community where unemployment is 15 percent, a pastor whose salary is \$45,000 (plus benefits and a high level of job security) will have difficulty understanding the members and establishing credibility with those outside the church. But a pastor whose salary is significantly lower than the congregational average and the community standard may feel slighted and undervalued and may have a resentful family.
- H. Salaries are considered personal information in our society. Pastors and their families already live "in a glass bowl," subject to more than usual public scrutiny. For the whole congregation to discuss upon, or even for the whole congregation to know the details of the pastor's salary is inappropriate. Only the members of the salary negotiation

committee should be authorized to negotiate the salary with the pastor. Strict confidentiality needs to be observed about the pastor's salary negotiation.

- I. It is important for the pastor to be directly involved in salary negotiation. It is crucial that all concerns or questions around salary decisions should be surfaced and processed in an open manner, with great care given to ensure healthy "power-balance" in the negotiation.
- J. A member of the Pastor Congregation Relations Committee should be available as an advocate and a support person for the pastor in the salary negotiation. Such a person might talk with the pastor and the pastor's family about personal goals and needs and all the emotional elements related to a salary, determining together a reasonable negotiating stance, and then accompany and support the pastor in the negotiating meeting. In any case, if a pastor is negotiating with several congregational representatives there would be advantages in being accompanied by a supporter. The conference minister is also a resource to be drawn upon in such situations.
- K. Each pastor is entitled to his or her own salary negotiations. If there are several pastors on a team, it is unfair to work at a "package deal" that does not deal individually with each one. Special sensitivity needs to be exercised in a multiple-staff setting.
- L. It is unfair to ask a pastor to work full-time for less than full salary. Some congregations cannot afford a full-time pastor and some do not warrant a full-time pastor (or additional associate/assistant). It is generally assumed that one pastor can serve a congregation of up to 200 average attendance. But fully half of Mennonite churches have fewer than 100 members, and many of these want a full-time pastor. It is difficult to persuade a fully-trained and competent pastor to move and accept a part-time salary. But it is unfair to both congregation and pastor to keep one from earning an adequate salary. If the congregation can only afford a reduced salary, the pastor should be free to work elsewhere to make up the difference.

Written by Dan Nighswander
Revised by Sven Eriksson, January 2005

Second edition © 2005 Ministerial Leadership Office of Mennonite Church Canada and
Congregational and Ministerial Leadership of Mennonite Church USA.
All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Updated October 2010:dlr
Mennonite Church USA, Leadership Development