

Best Practices Church Boards Can Utilize to Care for Their Pastors

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Most pastors have advanced degrees and work 50 to 70 hours each week caring for their congregations, but most Christians are not aware that their pastors and church staffs may not be paid well.

A pastor's week is filled with early morning meetings, office hours, visitations, counseling, sermon preparation and prayer, evening committee meetings and weekend worship services. Yet research shows the majority of pastors make less than \$50,000 per year and do not receive health insurance benefits or retirement contributions from their churches. So, here is a list of seven things church boards and congregations can do to make sure their pastors and church staffs are properly cared for, loved and blessed.

1. Compensate Your Pastor and Staff Using National Research

The best way for church boards or leadership teams to properly compensate church personnel is by using nationally recognized research, recommendations or regulations from their denominations or respected national research (ChurchSalary.com, CompStudy.Lifeway.com and MinistryPay.com). Using objective outside information will give church leaders guidance for what is appropriate and fair based on church size, location, denomination, church budget, experience and education.

2. Plan a Bless Your Pastor Campaign

While many churches have limited budgets for pastor and staff compensation, most people in churches have been blessed by God with skills, abilities, interests and resources that they can use to bless their pastors and church staff members. For many years churches in America have celebrated October as Pastor Appreciation Month. And this year, the NAE will lead a national Bless Your Pastor campaign for churches across America. The Bless Your Pastor website (BlessYourPastor.org) hosts free resources for churches to launch the "behind-the-scenes" Bless Your Pastor effort in their churches. Some churches may decide to extend the campaign and offering to church staff members in addition to their pastors. Free resources in the Bless Your Pastor toolkit include a short training video for church leadership teams, a brochure on 50 Creative Ways to Show God's Love for Your Pastor, social media graphics, template letters and more.

3. Provide Employee Benefits in Your Compensation Package

Most pastors do not receive the typical employment benefits that many working Americans receive. Church boards, finance teams or personnel committees should work with their denominations or other financial groups that serve pastors and churches to make sure their pastors and staff members receive

retirement contributions, healthcare coverage, and life and disability insurance.

4. Properly Set Up a Plan to Reimburse for Ministry Expenses

Pastors regularly need to purchase books and software for sermon preparation, to attend conferences and events for connection and encouragement, to take people out for meals to discuss pastoral needs or church business, to drive to hospital and visitation meetings, to host ministry events at their homes and much more. Many pastors have to pay for these expenses from their already limited salaries. In the past, they could deduct these expenses for tax purposes, but the IRS no longer allows these tax deductions. So, it is important that churches make sure they properly set up accountable ministry expense reimbursement plans to cover these ministry related costs.

5. Offer Time Off and Time Away

Pastors work long hours every week. The demands of leading the church, preparing for worship services, and caring for the flock can be non-stop. Church leaders and congregations need to honor their pastors' weekly time off and vacation time. Some pastors say they can't afford to take time off with their families. Church members who have access to a vacation property, timeshare, RV equipment, unused frequent flyer points, etc., can offer these to their pastors or church staff members who need time away but can't afford it. Also, after pastors have served for six years, consider providing them with some God-honoring sabbatical time to help them rest, restore and refocus their lives.

6. Legally Approve Housing Allowances for Pastoral Staff

In America, current laws allow pastors to receive parsonage or housing allowances free of federal income taxes. This is a major financial benefit for pastors that can be easily implemented by churches. But it is important for churches to properly follow IRS guidelines to make this legal for their pastoral staff members. If housing allowances are not properly approved, pastors and churches can face back taxes, fines and penalties.

7. Conduct Annual Reviews and Planning Sessions

Being a pastor can sometimes be a lonely and difficult job. Oftentimes pastors hear negative comments about all sorts of topics — the sanctuary is too cold or warm, the music is too loud, the sermon is too long and on and on. A good practice for a pastor is for a small group of two or three lay leaders to conduct an annual review with the pastor and review together the good things that have happened, possible areas of improvement, a compensation discussion and review, and positive plans for the coming year.

Pastors and church staff members are God's servants, and church boards, leaders and congregations are responsible to God to care for them well. Galatians 6:6 (NLT) says, "Those who are taught the Word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them." By taking steps to follow many of these Best Practices, church leaders and congregations can bless their pastors, allowing them to do their service with joy and financial freedom.