



2026 CLERGY COMPENSATION RECOMMENDATIONS

For Pastors and Deacons

The New Jersey Synod Clergy Compensation recommendations are shared with the hope of unleashing excellence in ministry by helping our rostered ministers and congregations live well together; offering, to congregations, suggestions regarding the investment appropriate to call a rostered minister (salary and housing, benefit plans, professional reimbursements, and other expectations) and, to rostered ministers, the encouragement to grow personal giving toward and beyond a tithe of their defined compensation. These guidelines are intended to be used within a culture of generosity and gratitude; rejoicing in the many gifts and resources that are shared and received in the context of congregational ministry. Assisting each other to live, love, and lead generously, we strengthen our ministries, and we grow stronger, healthier, and better equipped to carry out God's work in the world.

These recommendations in compensation assume full-time responsibilities. Appropriate adjustments in defined compensation need to be made for those serving part-time and bi-vocational venues.

DEFINED COMPENSATION

SALARY

The table below suggests amounts for a BASE SALARY that includes the current full social security reimbursement. The table also calculates DEFINED COMPENSATION that adds together BASE SALARY with any HOUSING. In the case of pastors living in church provided housing, defined compensation is calculated by multiplying BASE SALARY by 1.3. (Defined Compensation is used by Portico in calculating the cost of benefits and by Pastors in calculating their Social Security obligations. Income tax responsibilities reference Base Salary). The recommendations shown below provide a range of compensation based upon years of experience in ministry. The lower figure should be considered a minimum level of support; the higher figure should not be seen as an absolute maximum. Congregations may account for other variables in determining appropriate Defined Compensation. Examples of these are education, special skills bearing on performance, unique cost-of-living/housing situations, congregational size, special challenges, the responsibility within a staff setting and merit.

2026 PASTOR BASE SALARY-DEFINED COMPENSATION GRID

	<u>CHURCH OWNED HOUSING PROVIDED</u> Cash Compensation	<u>HOUSING ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN CASH COMPENSATION</u>	<u>CHURCH OWNED HOUSING PROVIDED</u> Defined Compensation Calculated
Completed Years of Ordained Ministry	Base Salary (Cash Compensation paid to the pastor)	A portion of the Cash Compensation, paid to the pastor will annually be designated as Housing Allowance. Defined Compensation (used to calculate benefit costs) equals the total cash compensation.	Defined Compensation is a calculation equal to Base Salary X 1.3. This figure is used to calculate benefit costs and is not the amount the congregation pays nor the pastor receives.
0-4	\$60,187 - \$76,630	\$80,187 – \$96,630	\$78,243 - \$99,619
5-10	\$66,442 - \$82,432	\$86,442 – \$102,432	\$86,375- \$107,162
11-20	\$72,440 - \$90,043	\$92,440 – \$110,043	\$94,172 - \$117,056
21-30	\$77,082 - \$94,238	\$97,082 – \$114,238	\$100,206 - \$122,509
30+	\$78,282 - \$95,438	\$98,282 – \$115,438	\$101,767 - \$124,069

HOUSING

Housing shall be provided as part of pastoral compensation in one of the following ways:

- A. **Parsonage**, including fuel, electric, water, sewer, systems maintenance, and internet. Additionally, the establishment of a Housing Equity Fund is recommended, with an annual contribution (paid as additional retirement contributions) based on the following:

0-3 Years of Ordained Ministry Completed	\$1,600
4-12 Years of Ordained Ministry Completed	\$2,100
13+ Years of Ordained Ministry Completed	\$2,600

- B. **Housing Allowance** (intended to support costs that relate to mortgage or rent, taxes, utilities, maintenance, furnishings and insurance). In accord with IRS practices, the amount of defined compensation that will be designated as housing allowance must be set in advance of each calendar year by a congregation council resolution following consultation with the pastor. If a parsonage is not provided and the purchase of a home by the pastor is not economically feasible, the pastor is left in a rental situation. In that event, a housing equity fund (as shown in the above schedule) should be provided in addition to the housing allowance.

BENEFITS

The current contribution rates and additional information for ELCA Retirement and Other Benefits Program can be found at the Portico Benefit Services website: www.porticobenefits.org.

HEALTH CARE

Congregations are responsible to provide resources for health care for the rostered minister and family. Portico offers different levels of health coverage. Go to www.porticobenefits.org to use the calculators to determine the cost to the congregation for these options. Decisions about which health plan is chosen should be made in consultation with the rostered minister and council.

ELCA RETIREMENT PLAN (403.b)

Required retirement plan contributions begin at 10% of defined compensation. The New Jersey Synod strongly encourages congregations to provide retirement contributions at 12% of defined compensation and that rostered ministers add an additional 3% to that amount, bringing the total retirement plan contribution to 15% of Defined Compensation.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Minimum of four weeks' paid vacation (including 4 Sundays) annually.
2. Minimum of fourteen days of paid study leave annually.
3. Minimum of 40 hours (5 days) sick leave annually is required in accordance with NJ State Law. It is recommended that a minimum of 40 hours (5 days) of additional sick leave be provided for a combined minimum of 80 hours (10 days) annually.
4. It is recommended that an income protection insurance plan [temporary/short term disability] be purchased by the rostered minister to protect defined compensation in the event of illness or injury. It is recommended that the congregation reimburse the cost of the annual policy

premium in whole, or in part, at a minimum of fifty percent (50%) up to \$250. (Portico provides Total Disability Insurance [long-term]. Qualifying coverage begins in the third month from the beginning of the total disability. A temporary/short term disability insurance plan would cover the gap between paid sick leave and the beginning of Portico Total Disability coverage).

5. Consideration of a paid sabbatical in accordance with the New Jersey Synod guidelines.
6. Family leave in accordance with the New Jersey Synod guidelines.
7. Establish a rostered minister funded pre-tax Flexible Benefit Plan to facilitate the payment of the rostered minister's portion of health care and/or day care costs through a Portico managed Health Flexible Spending Account (FSA), Dependent (day) Care Account (FSA), or Health Savings Account (HSA).
8. Develop a Mutual Ministry Committee (ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations C13.04.) to assist in annual review and evaluation.
9. For the health and well-being of the rostered leader, it is expected that at least one day off per week is taken as Sabbath time. It is also suggested that at least once per month two consecutive days off be taken.
10. It is anticipated that the demands of ministry require 45-55 hours/week; however, the expectation will remain that the demands of ministry will be met regardless of the number of hours. A minimum of 15 hours per week of employment for at least 6 months of the year is required for participation in the Portico benefit plan.

REIMBURSEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL EXPENSES

Congregations should be responsible for such reimbursements including:

1. Auto Allowance for church-related use of personal vehicle based upon mileage, tolls and parking (not including commute between home and office/church) at the established I.R.S. travel rate up to \$4,000 annually.
2. Continuing Education Fund: \$1,300 from the congregation with a commensurate contribution from the rostered minister expected. Unused portions of this fund may be carried forward each year.
3. First Call Theological Education expenses up to \$500 annually for the first three years following ordination.
4. Books, Periodicals, Subscriptions, Webinars, Software, etc. (suggested minimum, \$300)
5. Cell Phone Plan for church-related use up to \$600 annually
6. Synod Assembly, Bishop's Convocation, and Ministerium Day Expenses
7. Other professional expenses as agreed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some congregations will find it difficult to embrace these recommendations and guiding principles. It is the annual responsibility of the congregational leadership and rostered minister to mutually discuss and discern just and reasonable compensation in their specific context. In some instances, where clergy are currently compensated significantly below recommended levels, congregations may inquire about a grant from the New Jersey Synod Compensation Aid Fund and establish an intentional plan for closing the gap over a three-year period. If a congregation no longer has the capacity to approximate recommended benchmarks, they are encouraged to consult with the Office of the Bishop to create an adaptive plan to refresh, redevelop, or reposition local ministry and the expectations of pastoral ministry in that venue.

These recommendations are reviewed, adjusted, and approved annually by the New Jersey Synod Council.

2026 DEACONS
COMPENSATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Compensation for Ministers of Word and Service includes salary, benefits and professional expense reimbursements. When a congregation considers compensation for deacons, it should be done with the understanding that these persons are professional leaders of the ELCA who have been prepared and certified for specific ministries. They should receive salaries that take into account certain variables such as special skills or abilities that have a bearing upon performance level, unique cost of living situations, size of congregation, special challenges that they face relating to their responsibilities (such as transitional situations in congregation or community) and the responsibility they fulfill in a staff ministry.

Recommendations on compensation for deacons assume full-time employment. Appropriate adjustments need to be made for persons serving part-time and bi-vocational venues. In cases where deacons are currently compensated significantly below recommended levels, congregations are encouraged to establish an intentional plan for closing the gap over a three-year period.

<u>2025 SALARY GRID</u>		
Completed Years of Service as an Ordained Deacon	Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent	Master's Degree or Equivalent
0 - 4	\$55,508 – \$67,618	\$60,187 - \$73,630
5 - 10	\$61,313 – \$75,458	\$66,442 - \$82,432
11 - 20	\$66,615 – \$82,355	\$72,440 - \$90,043
21 - 30	\$71,254 – \$85,920	\$77,082 - \$94,043
31+	\$72,454 -- \$87,120	\$78,282 - \$95,438

BENEFITS, CONSIDERATIONS, AND REIMBURSEMENTS

Contribution rates for deacons enrolled in the ELCA Retirement and Health Benefits Program are the same as for pastors. The parameters for other Benefits, Considerations, and Professional Reimbursements in this booklet apply to all rostered ministers.