

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Pastors' pay headed in right direction, study's author says**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Compensation for the average Southern Baptist pastor has grown 8.8 percent during the last two years, according to a study conducted in 13 states.

Despite the gain, ministers are still paid less than workers in other fields with comparable skills, said Don Spencer, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's annuity department.

"It's a matter of trying to bring things more in line with what compensation ought to be," Spencer said. "We've still got a long way to go, but this is a definite step in the right direction."

Spencer said paying pastors and other staff members adequately not only helps the minister but benefits the church as well. Ministers who are underpaid must spend more time seeking outside income or managing finances, he said, and that detracts from time for ministry.

According to the study, the average full-time pastor in a Southern Baptist church earns \$36,046 in salary and housing allowance, up from \$33,125 in 1996.

Compensation for full-time pastors varies significantly by church budget and congregational size. More than three-fourths of the churches included in the survey average fewer than 250 in attendance.

Pastors in larger churches fare better than the norm. Churches with an average attendance between 251 and 300 pay their senior pastor an average of \$43,607 in salary and housing. With an average attendance between 401 and 600, the figure rises to \$55,036. Among the 38 churches in the survey with an average attendance over 1,000, the pastor receives an average salary of \$85,066.

At the other end of the scale, churches with an attendance between 126 and 150 pay an average of \$32,966. Between 101 and 125, it drops to \$30,914. For 76-100, the average salary is \$28,162. For under 75, it is \$24,406.

The highest salary reported for a full-time pastor in the survey is \$162,000. The lowest is \$4,200.

On average, churches spend \$7,357 a year in addition to salary and housing to provide for their pastor benefits such as medical insurance, life insurance, annuity contributions and Social Security equivalency payments. That brings the average pay and benefits package for a Southern Baptist pastor to \$43,403.

Beyond that, churches on average spend another \$4,332 to reimburse the pastor for ministry-related expenses such as mileage, conference fees and book purchases. Spencer said these ministry-related expenses should not be considered part of a minister's pay package but must be taken into account as part of the cost of hiring a minister.

Of the 3,843 full-time pastors responding to the survey, 80 percent said they receive contributions toward a retirement fund, an average of \$3,176 per year. Medical insurance is provided for 73 percent of full-time pastors, life insurance for 56 percent and disability insurance for 45 percent.

Full-time pastors surveyed receive an average of 2.6 weeks of vacation annually and 2.3 weeks off for revivals and conferences. Less than half (44 percent) live in church-owned homes, a figure that has been declining for several years.

The 13 states participating in the 1998 Compensation Study were Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Virginia.

Among those states, pastoral salary and housing allowance averages were highest in Georgia (\$39,907) and lowest in Missouri (\$30,800).

The study reported that bivocational pastors, those who preach part time while holding down another job, are paid an average of \$11,807 for salary and housing, up 12 percent over two years ago.

A slightly higher percentage of churches now contributes to a bivocational pastor's retirement than two years ago (33.6 percent, up from 32.1 percent), but the percentage of bivocational ministers receiving medical insurance from their church declined, from 11.4 percent in 1996 to 6.9 percent in 1998.

Non-pastoral staff who work full time in Southern Baptist churches gained 7 percent in compensation on average over the last two years, slightly less than the gains experienced by full-time pastors.

This year's average compensation (salary plus housing allowance) for full-time ministerial staff members is \$36,169. That's up from \$33,755 two years ago.

In addition to base pay, the average ministerial staff member receives another \$6,570 in benefits such as medical insurance, life insurance and annuity contributions. That brings the total average pay package to \$42,739.

Churches on average spend another \$2,479 for reimbursable ministry-related expenses for each staff member, covering items such as mileage, conventions and books.

On average, full-time ministers of music fare best in direct compensation, followed closely by ministers of education.

Staff members with single-focused titles on average are paid more than staff members with combination responsibilities such as music and youth or education and youth. The only exceptions are for associate pastors with other responsibilities, which register about the same compensation as full-time music ministers or education ministers.

Among the national sample of full-time staff members other than pastors, 75 percent receive contributions to an annuity.

Also nationally, 71 percent of full-time ministers receive medical insurance as a benefit, 56 percent receive life insurance and 50 percent receive disability insurance.

Salaries for non-pastoral staff also varied considerably by church attendance and budget.

Compared with other fields, ministers -- who often are college graduates with a master's or doctor's degrees from a university or seminary -- appear to lag behind those with similar education levels. According to the U.S. Commerce Department, the average male American with a high-school education earned an average salary of \$29,624 in 1994, compared to \$52,193 for college graduates and \$62,368 for those with a master's degree.

## **Pastors of Baptist churches paid more than other denominations, study says**

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Baptist pastors on average were higher paid than their counterparts in other denominations in a recent national church-staff compensation study.

The average salary for a senior pastor in a Baptist church, including housing and utilities, was \$67,057 in the 1997-98 National Church Staff Compensation Survey, conducted by the National Association of Church Business Administration in Fort Worth, Texas.

That figure is much higher than a \$36,046 average pastoral salary reported in another recent survey of ministerial salaries in Southern Baptist churches in 13 states. That is at least partly because the Southern Baptist study includes a large proportion of small churches, which pay their ministers less, while the interdenominational study is skewed toward larger congregations.

Following Baptists in the study by church business administrators were senior ministers or priests in the Episcopal Church, who earned an average salary of \$65,995; Presbyterian, \$65,567; Methodist, \$64,940; and Assemblies of God/Pentecostal, \$62,343. Those in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ were paid \$53,577. Other figures were Lutheran, \$55,487; Nazarene/Evangelical Free, \$54,108; and other, \$60,844.

The highest-paid ministers were those categorized as non-denominational or independent. Senior pastors of those churches reported an average annual income of \$69,570.

The average Roman Catholic priest, meanwhile, was paid \$21,580.

Almost 900 churches, representing more than 8,000 church-staff employees, participated in the survey, which is conducted every two years. A total of 839 senior pastors or priests responded to the survey, which also includes compensation figures for church-staff members and ranks salaries by denomination, church attendance and the size of the budget.

According to the survey, the typical Protestant church with a budget between \$750,000 and \$2 million spends about 45 percent of its annual operating budget on personnel.

The average number of staff members for a church with 250-699 in worship attendance is 13, an average of one staff member for each 85 church members. That number includes full-time, part-time, ministerial and support staff.

The study reports salary levels far above another recent study of Southern Baptist churches conducted in 13 Baptist state conventions. In that study, however, more than three-fourths of the churches averaged attendance of 250 or lower.

In the study by church business administrators, only 17 percent of the churches surveyed reported an attendance below 250. Nearly 55 percent had an attendance of 700 or more, and one in six averaged 1,500 or more.

The "Baptist" grouping in the business administrators' study included ministers of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Baptist General Conference, Conservative Baptist, Independent Baptist, Fundamental Baptist, National Baptist, North American Baptist, Regular Baptist, the Southern Baptist Convention, and other Baptists.

The other study dealt only with Southern Baptists in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Virginia. A total of 3,843 full-time pastors responded to the Southern Baptist survey.

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-- By Bob Allen

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