



South-Central Synod  
of Wisconsin

## **2026 Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers**

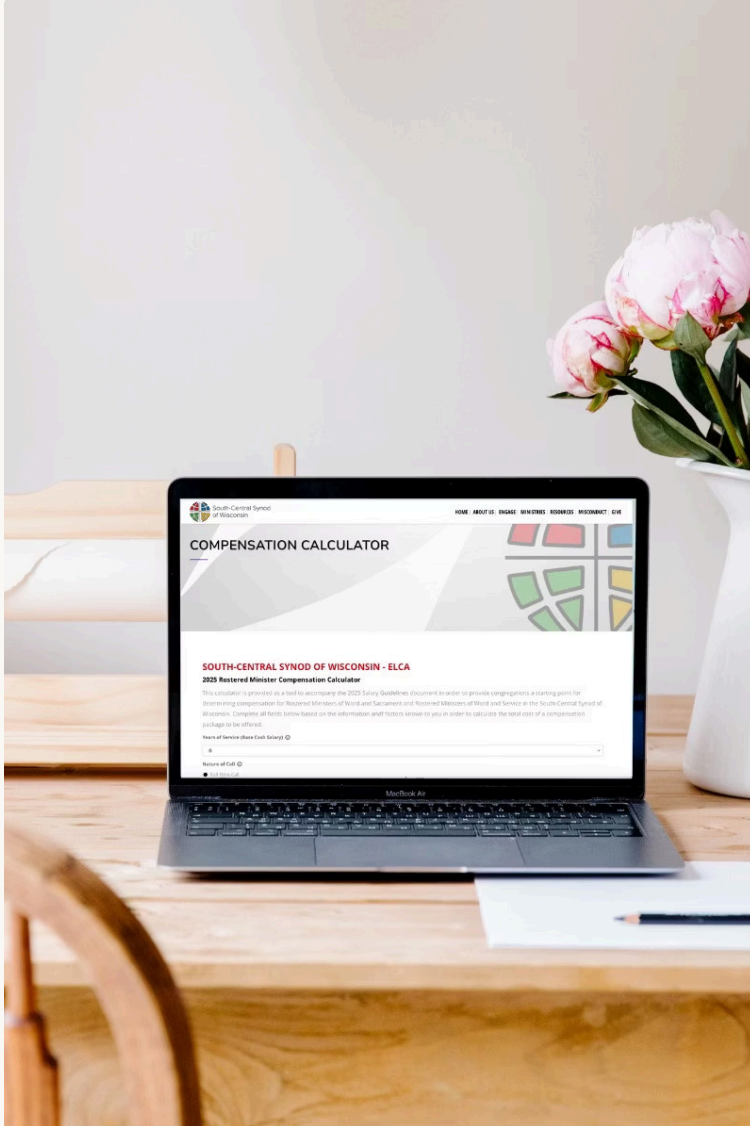
This document provides comprehensive guidelines for determining compensation for Rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Rostered Ministers of Word and Service in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin for 2026. It covers base salary, housing allowance, benefits, reimbursable expenses, and other important considerations for church leaders.



# Introduction

The 2026 Compensation Guidelines are provided as a starting point for determining compensation for Rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Rostered Ministers of Word and Service in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin. They are intended to be minimum guidelines. However, these are only guidelines. They cannot possibly speak to all our congregations with their varying financial resources, personnel resources, and expectations. These guidelines emerge from ongoing review of current salaries, salaries paid in other synods, the Portico overall picture of compensation, and the ongoing work with congregations by synod staff.

The following pages provide information on providing proper and fair compensation for all Rostered Ministers.



# Compensation Calculator

In addition to the resources found in this document, we have created an online calculator that can be used to determine minimum compensation package for your rostered minister. If you are a congregation in transition, this calculator can be used to enter different likely possibilities for your future rostered minister to get a sense of the range of totals a minimum compensation package might come to.

The calculator uses these 2026 Minimum Compensation and Benefit Guidelines, as approved by the 2025 Synod Assembly, as the framework for all calculations.

[Open Calculator](#)

# Part I – Determining the Cash Salary

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## **Step 1: Base Salary\***

Base salary is that portion of compensation that is provided to sustain the rostered leader who is called to lead ministry through the congregation or another organization. Base salary does not include housing, social security allowance, or professional expenses. Please refer to Salary Guidelines in Appendix 1.

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## **Step 2: Merit Adjustment**

Consider factors such as education (1% to 5% multiplier for advanced degrees), responsibility (1% to 5% multiplier for unique leadership or workload), and previous work experience prior to ordination, whether ministry related or otherwise, may be added as additional base compensation (1/3 to 1/2 year credit for each year of prior experience, not exceeding 5 years).

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## **Step 3: Calculate Total Cash Salary\*\***

Calculate the final total cash salary by adding the base salary and merit adjustments together.

\*See Appendix 1

\*\*See Appendix 3

# Part II – Determining Housing Allowance

## Option 1: Homeowner or Renter\*

If your congregation provides a housing allowance for your pastor and family, this amount should be sufficient to provide adequate housing as well as care for the related expenses of upkeep and utilities. Your rostered minister may exclude the housing allowance from taxable income up to the Fair Rental Value of a furnished home plus utilities to the extent that the housing allowance is actually spent for housing (see [IRS FAQ's Related to Minister's Housing Allowance](#)).

## Option 2: Parsonage Provided

Portico Benefit Services determines 30% of Total Cash Salary is to be added to the Defined Compensation. This is its value only, not an amount paid to the rostered minister.

Congregations are encouraged to pay utilities directly, but may instead add an allowance of about \$3,600.

A furnishings allowance may also be added. Purchases made with this allowance are the property of the rostered minister.

\*See Appendix 2

## **Parsonage Housing Equity**

When a church-owned or rented parsonage is provided as part of the rostered minister's compensation, the minister does not have the opportunity to build equity, as do homeowners. Some congregations choose to compensate for this lack of equity with a housing equity allowance. These funds are vested in the rostered minister. The congregation pays a predetermined amount in monthly installments directly to Portico (preferred) or to another depository agreed to mutually. If paid directly to the minister, it becomes taxable income. It is recommended that the housing equity allowance be placed in a tax-deferred account with Portico.

The housing equity allowance is intended to assist the minister or the minister's family to provide housing that would be available when the pastor decides to purchase a home, retires, becomes disabled, dies, or when the congregation disposes of its parsonage and begins paying a housing allowance. When the minister resigns, the assets accumulated in the depository (if not Portico) are transferred to another congregation or paid directly to the minister, at the rostered minister's discretion. Our recommendation would be to pay a housing equity allowance of at least \$3,600 per year if this option is elected.

# Part III – Social Security

Rostered ministers are required to pay 15.3% Self-Employment (SE) Tax (12.4% Social Security/2.9% Medicare). The 15.3% is comprised of 7.65% employee portion and 7.65% employer portion. The employer portion of this tax is a deductible item for income taxes. This allowance is taxable income to the rostered minister and subject to SE tax.

It is recommended that the congregation assume at least the employer portion of the Social Security Tax that the pastor must pay. This is done by paying at least 8.235% of the rostered ministers Defined Compensation.\*

Consult **IRS Publication 517** for more information.

\*See Appendix 3 for Calculation Worksheet or online calculator.





# Part IV – Retirement & Other Benefits

For the purposes of calculating contribution and benefit amounts, "defined compensation" is equal to the sum of the cash salary + housing + any social security allowance.

## Retirement

Under the ELCA Retirement Plan, the congregation is required to pay the minimum retirement contribution percentage of 12%. The congregation may choose to pay a higher percentage.

## ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits

Benefits for the Rostered Minister should be paid in full by the congregation. See Portico EmployerLink for full details and to use the [Portico Benefits Calculator](#) to determine accurate costs.

## Disability and Basic Group Life

Contribution is set by Portico Benefit Services at 0.5% of Defined Compensation in 2026.

## Additional Benefits

The congregation may also provide Supplemental Medical Insurance and a tax-sheltered annuity.



# Part V – Reimbursable Expenses



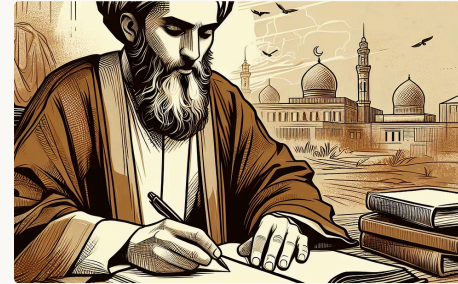
## Automobile Allowance

Three options available (congregation purchases/leases auto, reimburse miles at IRS standard rate\*, or pay monthly allowance).



## Continuing Education

Recommended \$1,200 per year, with 50 hours and 2 weeks annually (14 days, including two Sundays).



## First Call Theological Education

Required for first three years of ministry, 4-6 days per year including program costs of about \$500 annually + travel costs.



## Publications and Other Resources

Up to \$500 annually for subscriptions, resources, other professional tools used by rostered ministers directly.



## Official Meetings

Expenses for synod assembly and other required meetings such as Fall Theological Conference, Boundaries Training, and Racial Equity Training. It is suggested to budget ~\$500 + travel.



## Other Expenses

Reimbursement for ministry-related expenses is based on each congregation's policies. Rostered Ministers may also be able to claim some expenses on their own taxes if not reimbursed by the congregation.

\*The reimbursement amount is the Standard Mileage Rate for business set by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and typically announced annually. Anytime the IRS revises this rate, the revised rate will become the current rate to use for reimbursements. This information is available at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

# Part VI – Work+Life Balance

Because of the "on-call" nature of ministry, consideration needs to be given to the minister's self-care. A minimum of one day off per week is a necessity. It is suggested that the minister should have two consecutive days off whenever possible. Separate salary guidelines are available for part-time calls in consultation with the Office of the Bishop.

## **1 Vacation**

Four weeks of paid vacation time per year, encompassing four Sundays, is considered the minimum. Additional vacation time may be granted based on length of service.

## **2 Holidays**

Appropriate time off for general holidays should be provided. If the actual day cannot be taken, another day should be designated as the holiday.

## **3 Parenting Leave**

Paid maternity/paternity leave of up to six weeks is recommended when a child is born or adopted.



# Part VII – Leave Policies

## 1 Sick Leave

Recommendation is one day per month, cumulative to 30 days. Full compensation should be paid during the illness. The congregation is responsible for compensating a supply pastor during the illness.

## 2 Compassion Leave

Three to seven days of paid leave, potentially including a Sunday, is recommended for a death in the rostered ministers's immediate family.

## 3 Temporary Disability

Full compensation for the first 60 days, then ELCA disability plan pays 2/3 of monthly defined compensation. Congregations should consider paying the remaining 1/3.

## 4 Military Leave

Time off for National Guard or reserve component commitments must be honored and mutually negotiated prior to extension and acceptance of call.

# Part VIII – Professional Development



## **Spiritual Renewal**

Three days to one week or more per year for spiritual renewal, not classified as vacation or educational leave.



## **Spiritual Guidance**

It is recommended that all rostered ministers under call have a spiritual director or guide during their time of call.



## **First Call Pastors**

Congregations are asked to consider making a gift to help pay off any first call pastor's educational loans.



## **Sabbatical Leave**

It is recommended that the congregation consider Sabbatical Leave for their pastor and develop a policy.

# Part IX – Other Considerations

**Moving Expenses:** The congregation is responsible for relocating a rostered minister to the community. All reasonable expenses should be covered by the congregation and negotiated with the incoming rostered minister. Moving services need to be performed by a professional moving company. If other arrangements are made, they must be mutually agreeable.

**Other Benefit Programs:** Additional benefits are available through Portico in the form of Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA), Tax Sheltered Annuities (TSA), and Health Savings Accounts (HSA). These are all ways for the rostered leader to save money while gaining tax advantages. Details about these programs can be found at [www.porticobenefits.org](http://www.porticobenefits.org).





# Part X – Pulpit Supply

The cost of pulpit supply in the rostered minister's absence is borne by the congregation. In addition to mileage reimbursement at the IRS standard rate, the following fees are recommended per Sunday for rostered ministers from outside the membership of the congregation. Arranging for pastoral service during the absence of a rostered minister is typically the responsibility of the Congregation Council (ELCA Constitution C12.04).

|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| One Service    | \$210 |
| Two Services   | \$270 |
| Three Services | \$330 |

If the congregation has worship on different days, an additional \$15 should be added to the total. If the congregation has arranged for pulpit supply, and worship for that Sunday must be cancelled, the congregation should compensate the pastor \$50 in recognition of their sermon preparation during the week.



## South-Central Synod of Wisconsin

# Final Thoughts

As we continue walking together as God's people in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, may these guidelines serve not only as a resource but also as a witness to the value we place on faithful ministry in all its forms. By committing to fair and thoughtful compensation, we affirm the gifts of rostered ministers, support the vitality of our congregations and ministries, and strengthen our shared witness to the gospel.

As you discern next steps, if you have any questions or need additional support please reach out to:

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