

The Report to the Synod Council Regarding Compensation Guidelines for Associates in Ministry & Diaconal Ministers

Introduction

In 2002, the Pacifica Synod Assembly adopted Resolution 02-01, “Concerning Compensation for Rostered Leaders.” The Synod Council appointed a Compensation Review Task Force which surveyed and studied compensation issues in the Pacifica Synod and produced a set of materials concerning clergy compensation which was presented at the 2003 Assembly for review and response by congregations. With only minor changes, they were adopted by the Synod Council in August 2003 and distributed to congregations in September. The Compensation Task Force reviewed that result, revisited the data collected in the initial survey, talked with some of the rostered lay leaders and synod staff, and now proposes a similar process for this initial approach for compensation guidelines for Associates in Ministry (AIM) and Diaconal Ministers (DM).

Using the data collected in 2003 and feedback from AIMs, DMs, and synod staff, the Task Force determined that the realities and issues for AIM/DM compensation were sufficiently different from those of the Clergy Roster to warrant a different approach. The guiding principles formulated in 2003 for clergy were adapted for rostered lay ministers and are listed below.

Guiding Principles

- To be on the AIM or DM rosters of the ELCA, one must complete at least a bachelor’s degree appropriate to the field of specialization (or have established equivalent experience), have theological education (a minimum of 20 semester units for AIMs and a theological degree at the master’s level for DMs), and complete supervised experience. These are to be considered professional positions.
- Rostered lay ministers do not take a vow of poverty. Commonly shared middle class expectations of home ownership, education of one’s children, vacations, etc. will usually be one’s goals, with the specific lifestyle and financial goals and timing to achieve them the responsibility of the person. Because the ELCA pension system is tied to salary earned, rostered lay ministers with lower salaries may need to examine various options available to them including additional contributions or shared time (part-time) ministry. From the congregation’s perspective, low salaries may limit the number of available candidates when in the call process.
- As much as we might wish we could, we will not be able to develop a perfect system of salary guidelines that meets the needs of every rostered lay minister and congregation. It is our intention to develop an approach that addresses the diversity of these rosters and our synod and to propose an approach which facilitates conversation between congregational leadership and rostered lay ministers that is face-to-face, healthy, constructive, and future oriented. We want to be moving toward healthy relationships.
- Changing congregational leadership and the expected growth of these rosters means we need to have an ongoing educational process and conversation regarding compensation.
- When failure to address compensation issues in the current call is the prime reason a rostered lay minister enters the mobility process, we may be losing possibilities for growth and mission that often accompany experience.
- There are creative and individual approaches to staffing smaller congregations or congregations with limited financial resources. However, this also limits the number of available candidates. These issues are important to address for congregational and rostered lay ministers’ well-being to support a future-oriented mission mindedness.

- In this society, it is common to value persons according to the size of their salary and their wealth. We encourage everyone to thoughtfully critique this reality and examine the power money has in our lives. We also encourage realistic appraisal of economic factors since we share one economy that has many choices in it but some bottom line realities also. The level of stewardship in a congregation influences the mission possibilities in that particular context.

Factors/issues considered in developing this approach:

Compensation for AIMs and DMs is more difficult to standardize than that of the Clergy due to the greater diversity of positions held by persons on these rosters, the wide variety in required and actual levels of education, and the low numbers currently on these rosters. Currently, there are four Diaconal Ministers, one who serves in a congregation. There are eight Associates in Ministry on the active roster: six in congregations, two on leave from call, and one about to be commissioned. We identified factors and issues in AIM/DM compensation and present them here as a way for our synod to begin a conversation regarding AIM/DM compensation in general and for these rostered leaders and the congregations which call them to use in developing actual compensation. Ongoing evaluation and study will need to be done.

- The concept of “rostered lay ministers” and the realities of the AIM and DM Rosters are not fully understood by many. This is also true for the different requirements for each roster. A good resource for basic information is the website of the Division for Ministry of the ELCA. These rosters require at least a bachelor’s degree (or equivalent) in specialized areas (such as nursing, education, social work, business, music) plus graduate level theological education.
- AIM/DM positions vary widely in their responsibility and job descriptions, and these realities must be taken into account as we work toward developing a fair and equitable approach to compensation that can be used in diverse situations.
- Most of the DMs in the Pacifica Synod are currently not under call by ELCA congregations. Those called/employed by other institutions such as schools, hospitals, social service agencies, or regional/national portions of the ELCA are subject to the compensation guidelines of those entities.
- The grandparenting into the ELCA of previous denominations’ rostered lay ministers as AIMs led to a wide variety of educational levels within the AIM rosters. This approach to compensation was developed using current ELCA candidacy requirements of specialized fields and theological education. We commend those who were rostered prior to 1988 with other requirements to use these guidelines as best fits their situation.
- Some AIMs have their training or degrees in several different areas with several systems with which to compare fair and adequate compensation. Some are in fields which have additional or specific certification such as Marriage, Family, and Child Counselor (MFCC), Registered Nurse, Masters of Social Work, etc. Some of these have known equivalent systems for pay and benefits in secular settings.
- Some AIM/DM positions are unique to the church setting.
- The survey showed that, when compared to available secular equivalents, compensation levels are low for rostered lay ministers in this synod.
- The survey showed that not all AIMs or DMs receive the same benefits (vacation, continuing education, sabbaticals, etc.) as clergy serving in the same congregation.
- A concern was expressed that if the expected compensation of AIMs and DMs is higher than their non-rostered counterparts in the similar positions, those who are rostered will be at a disadvantage in the calling/hiring process since congregations are not required to call/employ only rostered lay persons (a requirement for clergy). However, this overlooks the advantage of bringing together expertise in a specific field and graduate level theological education as well as the other requirements to be rostered. (At the same time, congregations are urged to be responsible employers for all lay persons whether rostered or not. This approach could be used for persons

employed by congregations who are not rostered but who are professionals in their respective fields. These guidelines do not address para-professional, clerical, or similar positions.)

- It was discovered that some clergy and congregations do not expect the AIM/DM compensation to exceed that of clergy even though trained and seasoned AIMS/DMs may be more experienced in program ministries than a newly ordained Associate Pastor. The specialized training required for the AIM and DM rosters and the fulfillment of the responsibilities of the pastoral office for those on the clergy roster means that the two are not equivalent. When this question arises, the factors particular to the situation should be taken into account.

Proposed 5 Tier Minimum Compensation System for AIMS and DMs

In response to these factors and issues, a 5 tier system was developed **as a starting place** for congregations and AIMS & DMs to discuss compensation. As with the approach to clergy compensation, we recommend open, honest conversation in the calling process or following yearly performance evaluations. Given the diversity of positions and the differing requirements of the possible areas of "specialization," the rostered lay minister and the congregation will need to be in conversation to determine what level to use for the baseline salary and the appropriate salary range beyond **“minimum compensation.”**

Level A: Bachelor's degree or equivalent in area of specialization; less than 5 years of experience in specialization; at least 20 units of graduate theological education. \$41,393

Level B: Bachelor's degree or equivalent in area of specialization; more than 5 years of experience in specialization; more than 20 units of graduate theological education. \$44,801

Level C: Master's degree with appropriate certification in area of specialization; less than five years in field of specialization; at least 20 graduate units in theological education; \$49,282

Level D: Has Master's degree in area of specialization and a theological degree at the master's level; has at least five years experience in area of specialization. \$53,762

Level E: Has at least a Master's degree in area of specialization and a theological degree at the master's level; recognized expertise in area of specialization. \$60,473

As in the Clergy Compensation Guidelines, adjustments should be made for the differences in the cost of living throughout the Pacifica Synod (the method for calculating the adjustment for clergy will work in this approach also). The above compensation guidelines assume a community with an average home cost of \$200,000. The benefits which are expected for the clergy roster are also expected for these rosters. (The clergy compensation issues which result from IRS regulations [housing allowance and social security taxes] do not apply to these rosters.)

Summary

This approach offers a place to begin addressing compensation issues for rostered lay ministers. Ongoing evaluation and change should be done by the Compensation Task Force or by a subgroup with experience and interests in this area. These compensation guidelines were approved by the 2009 Pacifica Synod Assembly.

This information is also available to be downloaded at www.pacificasynod.org. Current ELCA Board of Pensions information is available at www.elcabop.org.