

## **A Theological Vision for Pastoral Compensation**

The Summit Church seeks to norm its practices by Christian Scripture and to center its practices on the gospel, and nowhere more so than in the way it compensates its pastoral staff.

In seeking guidance for pastoral compensation, we begin with the patterned discerned in the Bible's overarching gospel story. In this narrative, we learn that God created the world as one of abundance rather than scarcity, one of wealth and delight rather than poverty and despair. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, however, God's good intentions for his creation have been thwarted. One of the negative consequences of the Fall is that many of his people are not able to experience the abundance and delight he intended. However, God has promised that, through Christ, he will renew and restore his creation in such a manner that his people will once again experience abundance and delight. In the meantime, as we live in a fallen world that has not yet been renewed and restored, we as a church are to live as a "preview" of the renewed creation, a kingdom which will be marked by abundance and delight. One of the ways we can do so is by providing generously for our pastors.

The apex of God's saving acts was the cross and resurrection, by which he put his glory on full display, and in which he set a pattern of generosity for his people to follow. God did not give meager provisions when he saved us; he lavished upon us the unspeakable gift of his Son. As the epistles of Paul demonstrate, that affects Christians in every way of life. Gospel-saturated Christians become generous with their talents, their time, their mercy, and their money. Generosity is not isolated to a few areas—everything the people of God do is marked by generosity. Thus, we as a church wish to be "generous in every way" to our pastoral staff, including generosity in compensation. And likewise, because of Christ's generosity toward us, we hire pastoral staff who themselves demonstrate such generosity. This is why we take joy in blessing them financially; we know that they in turn give generously and joyfully.

The Bible addresses this environment of gospel-centered generosity and applies it specifically to the issue of pastoral compensation. Paul writes to Timothy, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says... 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 Tim 5:17–18). Later he writes to the Corinthians, "Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." (1 Cor. 9:14). Scripture teaches clearly that the congregation should honor our pastoral staff by compensating them generously.

Finally, we draw upon explicit biblical teaching concerning a pastor's motivation for ministry. In 2 Cor 2:17, Paul says, "We are not, like so many, peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity,

but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” Again in 1 Thessalonians 2:3–5, we encounter Paul making clear that he had no motive in ministry other than the advance of the gospel. In Paul’s day, just as in our day, some ministered with the primary goal of making money. The Summit church wishes to compensate our pastors in such a manner that compensation does not (or should not) become a factor in deciding whether to continue in their position of pastoral ministry at our church.

In summary, the Summit Church commits to compensating its pastoral staff *generously*, based upon biblical teaching. At the same time, we are careful not to compensate them *lavishly*. We believe that ministers do not (or at least should not) enter ministry because it is a place where they can make lots of money, and we as a church want to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us. We are spending other people's sacrificial giving, given to God. That is a weighty matter. Thus, for example, we do not merely base salaries on how much executives are paid at for-profit businesses of similar size and scope.<sup>1</sup> Such organizations have different goals and objectives and are not held to the same stewardship standards. While we desire to bless our pastors financially, therefore, we also wish to protect them from an excessive love of money and from slander in the event their compensation should become an issue for those outside of our church.

### **A Rationale for Tying Pastoral Compensation to Indices**

Pastoral compensation extends beyond a salary package to vacation, retirement, work hours, family time, and other factors. These factors are no less significant than salary. A pastor’s vacation time allows him to be refreshed and renewed, and helps provide for sustained time with his family. A pastor’s retirement package places value on his years of service and allows him to live his final years with a tangible reminder of the church’s appreciation.

The Summit Church uses as a starting point for conversation the pastoral compensation packages provided by comparable churches of similar size. In doing so, the Summit Church recognizes the helpfulness of an objective standard upon which to base our decision. Without an objective standard, the church might end up giving to various staff members whatever "feels" generous to the leadership team. Also, without an objective standard, salaries can quickly become a sticking point for members of the congregation because they desire a rationale for salary range that is

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<sup>1</sup> Members of Summit staff who come from corporate positions do so knowing that they are making a financial sacrifice to follow God’s calling. More than a few of our staff have taken reduced—and sometimes drastically reduced—compensation as they left the corporate world to serve at Summit Church.

transparent and objective. By tying our compensation discussions to national indices of comparable churches, we meet those that criteria.

The Summit Church wishes to communicate its appreciation to staff members. Many staff are aware of the average national compensations of their position (either through talking to peers in their same positions elsewhere or through consulting the online indices). A salary lower than the index communicates (even if implicitly) that the church undervalues a staff member's contribution, while a comparable or higher compensation communicates appreciation. While one can give regularly positive verbal feedback to a staff member, that feedback may ring empty if that person's compensation package seems to contradict it.

The Summit Church also understands the replacement value of a staff member who resigns. We do not want to make a habit of paying staff members in such a way that they are open to the solicitation from other churches simply because they feel under-appreciated at our church.

Finally, the Summit Church seeks to create an environment that encourages the staff person to be generous. We want staff members to be examples of sacrificial generosity, and to live below their means as examples to the flock. They can do this better if they make that decision, rather than have the church make it for them by paying them less than they could make elsewhere. If the church pays below the average compensation, then the staff member may feel like the church has already sacrificed for them, which discourages their development in generosity. In fact, if a staff member is not giving generously, it will be dealt with on a pastoral level—as in, "We can see that you give very meagerly... is there a reason for that?" A pastor who does not give generously will be approached about this matter, and may eventually disqualify himself from being a pastor.

In opting for this approach, The Summit church opts not to take other approaches. On the one hand, there are approaches that unnecessarily restrict a pastor's compensation. Certain restrictivist approaches determine that the pastor's salary must be minimal in order to demonstrate the radical nature of discipleship. We differ from this approach because we wish to give "double honor" to our pastors; taking the "double honor" approach allows the church to obey biblical teaching about compensation and allows the pastors the opportunity to practice radical generosity.

On the other hand, certain inflationary approaches bloat a pastor's salary. They might do so based upon a "health and wealth" rationale, in such a manner that the pastor's lifestyle is luxurious, and sometimes via making pastoral compensation analogous with industry standards for executive compensation at a for-profit organization. We reject this option because the church

is not a for-profit organization. It chooses not correlate its compensation packages to those of for-profit corporations with budgets similar to its own; it rejects a view of the church in which it is closely analogous to the broader corporate world.

### **Conclusion**

As The Summit gains more exposure nationally and internationally, we want to ensure that talented staff are drawn here because they want to do ministry in a gospel-centered and missional environment, not because employment at the Summit Church is a way to get wealthy. We also want to be a good testimony to our community. At the same time, we want to be known as a generous church where pastoral employees know they are appreciated, not taken for granted, and those who lead well are treated with double honor.

We hope this helps clarify our objectives, and that God will continue to lead and cover us with grace as we shepherd the flock over which he has given us oversight.