Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

2020 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Service
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Synod Compensation Guidelines: A Resource to Assist Congregations/Parishes and Church Workers

The Northwestern Minnesota Synod has prepared the following 2020 Compensation Guidelines for use by congregational councils, parishes, other ministry agencies, and church workers. These guidelines offer guidance regarding the minimum levels of compensation that are appropriate for rostered ministers, Synodically Authorized Ministers and non-rostered employees of congregations in the synod.

These guidelines are designed to be a resource to assist church leaders in compensating church workers in ways that are fair, supportive and mission-driven. These are recommendations, not legislative mandates. They are meant to be helpful, not dictatorial. Those who have drafted these guidelines hope that this resource will allow compensation planning to occur in such a way that the partnership between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the synod, the congregation/parish and all church workers will be strengthened.

How have these guidelines been created?

- First, they were drafted by a team of laity, rostered ministers, and synod staff members.
- Second, these guidelines have been reviewed by the Synod Council, which is made up of laity and rostered ministers from each of the synod’s eight conferences.
- Upon the recommendation of the Synod Council, these guidelines were reviewed, discussed and approved by the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly, to which every congregation in the synod is responsible to send voting members.

Throughout the process there has been considerable input from both lay leaders and church workers.

As you use these guidelines, please keep in mind that Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Ministers of Word of Service, and other church workers are valuable resources for the whole church. Rostered ministers, in particular, are called to serve the whole church. When a Rostered Minister is called to serve a congregation, there are four partners to this process:

A. God, who calls persons into ministries, through the church;
B. The congregation/parish which issues the Letter of Call;
C. The rostered minister who accepts the Call; and
D. The synod which supports the call process, with the synod bishop attesting each Letter of Call.

The compensation provided to a rostered minister is part of the Letter of Call documents that represent a covenant among all parties. This Call may not be altered without consultation among and agreement from all parties. Thus it is important that all negotiations for change in compensation be done in conversation with the rostered minister and congregation/parish.

Finally, it goes without saying that compensation decisions should be viewed in light of other significant commitments by a congregation/parish—such as a commitment to justice for church staff persons and a commitment to supporting the work of the wider church through ELCA/synodical mission support. If a congregation/parish is chronically under-compensating its staff, or if a congregation/parish is compensating staff in ways that are significantly higher than synodical guidelines, it may be important to ponder the implications of this and consider alternatives such as those suggested in Appendix E. Congregational leaders are encouraged to consult with the synod bishop or a member of the synod pastoral staff in such discussions.

We warmly commend these compensation guidelines to the congregations and church workers of our synod.

Synod Council of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.
Introduction: How Our Faith Informs Us

Decisions about compensation for rostered ministers\(^1\) and other church workers, like other issues the church faces, are best made in light of our core biblical and theological convictions. What are some of the faith commitments that will influence our approach to this important subject?

1. Our starting point is that the grace of God in Jesus Christ can be neither bought nor sold. God insists on giving it freely. Indeed, all Christians receive in baptism a call to serve and proclaim the Good News of God’s undeserved love in Jesus Christ.

2. All Christians are to declare the gospel, especially to those who have never heard it. Within the church, however, some are called to make this task a major occupational commitment. Some members of the church are asked to devote a significant amount of their time and energy to the ministry of equipping all of God’s people for service in the world. When the church calls such persons to dedicate so much of their lives to public ministries that they cannot be employed elsewhere, the church takes upon itself a responsibility to pay those persons an appropriate wage.

3. The principle that laborers deserve their food (Matthew 10:10) is attested throughout the scriptures. In the Old Testament, priests were granted a portion of the sacrifices made by the people; tithes and other offerings were received to support God’s servants. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of the duty of churches to support their leaders, even though Paul chose to waive this right for himself (I Corinthians 9).

4. Insofar as the church is institutionally embodied, it is subject to the same standards of justice to which all human institutions are accountable. The church, however, is more than a human institution. At a deeper level, the church is the community of faith drawn together by God around the Word and Sacraments, empowered for witness in the world. Pastors, associates in ministry and other lay staff are simultaneously employed by congregations and called by the church to be fellow workers with all of God’s people in the Body of Christ.

As churches and ministry agencies make decisions about compensation for staff members, they will bear in mind the identity and calling that are ours in Jesus Christ. Compensation decisions should be made in such a way that (a) God’s mission flourishes, (b) staff members are cherished as servants of God, (c) there is a sense of faithful partnership between church members and staff members, and (d) all areas of the church’s ministry thrive.

The following guidelines are designed to assist congregations/parish and ministry agencies (hereafter referred to simply as “congregations”)\(^2\) as they make decisions regarding the compensation of rostered ministers and non-rostered church staff. For additional assistance in determining a fair salary and benefits package for rostered ministers, please contact a member of the synod pastoral staff.

Adapted from a document used in the Southwestern Minnesota Synod.

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\(^1\) For the purpose of this document, the term rostered minister refers to a person who is on the roster of Ministry of Word and Sacrament or Ministry of Word and Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

\(^2\) “Ministry agencies” include organizations such as Bible camps, long-term care facilities, hospitals, campus ministries, etc.
I. MAKING COMPENSATION DECISIONS

The synod recommends that each congregation/parish have a Personnel Committee with a minimum of three persons, whose responsibilities would be:

- to develop, review, and revise personnel policies for the congregation/parish;
- to draft and periodically revise clear ministry descriptions (job descriptions) for each employee;
- to provide for regular (annual or semi-annual) evaluation of all members of the staff that includes goal review and goal setting;
- to assist with any needs, concerns, problems that may arise among the members of the staff, rostered ministers, and support staff;
- to meet annually with each staff member to discuss compensation needs and concerns;
- to recommend to the budgeting body (e.g. congregation/parish council, board of trustees, etc.) specific salary and benefits for each staff member;
- to advocate with the budgeting body on behalf of the salary needs of each staff member.

In congregations/parishes, compensation packages for staff persons should be set by the congregation/parish council or whichever elected body has the responsibility and authority to manage the fiscal affairs of the congregation/parish. This should be done in consultation with the staff person(s) and Personnel Committee with possible input from the Mutual Ministry Committee as an advocate for the staff person. *Congregational meetings are too large to be deliberative regarding specific compensation packages.* Facts necessary for responsible decisions about compensation are not always available to all members of the congregation/parish. The council should place the recommended compensation package(s) in the budget and present it to the congregation(s) for ratification at the annual meeting (or at a special congregational meeting when a new call is being extended).

It is helpful if the compensation review is held in the fall as part of the budget process.

- An annual compensation review is normally conducted by the Personnel Committee using these guidelines as the basis for the review. The Personnel Committee makes its recommendation to the appropriate budget-drafting committee and/or to the congregation/parish council.

For help in establishing a Personnel Committee, please refer to the resources listed in *Appendix C - Pastor and People: Making Mutual Ministry Work*, Augsburg Fortress. You may also contact a member of the synod pastoral staff for assistance.
II. COMPENSATION SPECIFIC TO MINISTERS OF WORD AND SERVICE

Ministers of Word and Service are on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In matters of compensation and benefits, these employees are similar in many respects to Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Major differences arise from the unique Federal tax treatment given Ministers of Word and Sacrament.

A. Minimum Base Salary Guidelines

In determining salary for a Minister of Word and Service, consider whether the staff person is serving in a support staff position or a program staff position. **These salaries are minimum levels, not a range.**

   a. **Rostered Support Staff**
      Rostered support staff work with pastors and other program staff. Examples include secretaries and bookkeepers. Rostered support staff salaries could be comparable to those for executive support staff within the local community. Adjust this figure to the degree that the rostered support staff person has administrative responsibilities.

   b. **Rostered Program Staff**
      Rostered program staff carry responsibility for program areas in the congregation/parish or agency. Examples are youth and family ministers or directors of Christian education. Historically, the church has looked to the public school for determining comparable salaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Ministry</th>
<th>Bachelor’s Degree (or equivalent)</th>
<th>Master’s Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5</td>
<td>$39,954 - $43,809</td>
<td>$44,732 - $49,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>$44,658 - $53,310</td>
<td>$48,833 - $56,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+</td>
<td>$54,348 - $75,520</td>
<td>$56,458 - $79,681</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These guidelines reflect a $1400 increase over the 2019 Guidelines.

B. Social Security

All Ministers of Word and Service are considered employees for Social Security purposes. The deacon and the congregation/parish pay equally as provided by law. Currently this amount is 7.65% of salary.
III. COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

A. Letter of Call

Every Rostered Minister serves under the terms of a Letter of Call. The bishop/synod staff are consulted prior to the issuance of the Letter of Call.

B. Moving Expenses

Good beginnings are important. It is helpful that the relationship between a rostered minister and congregation/parish “get off on the right foot.” The congregation/parish and rostered minister are urged to give thoughtful consideration to the needs of the other when undertaking a move. Because moving can be both exciting and stressful, the congregation/parish and rostered minister will want to reach a mutually satisfactory decision about the move as part of the compensation negotiations.

In making such decisions, the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

- The congregation/parish is normally responsible for moving all household, professional, and personal goods of a newly-called rostered minister and his/her family.
- This same principle applies during the course of a rostered minister’s ministry if the congregation/parish takes steps that require a rostered minister to make a local move;
- It is recommended that professional movers be utilized. If their services are not used, the means of transporting the rostered minister's belongings must be mutually agreed upon ahead of time.
- When the services of professional movers are not used, a separate insurance policy covering the transported goods should be purchased by the congregation/parish. These policies are available from most insurance agencies.

C. Portico Benefit Services (ELCA Pension) and Other Benefits Plans

Congregations/parishes are to participate in Portico Benefit Services (ELCA Pension) and other benefits plan on behalf of their deacon, their spouse, and their eligible children. Complete information on enrolling and maintaining the pastor’s membership in Portico Benefit Services and other benefits plan at https://porticobenefits.org/.

We continue to recommendation to maintain appropriate level health benefits for our rostered minister and lay church workers, all the congregations and parishes of the NW MN Synod are encouraged to offer to pay for Portico’s GOLD PLUS plan option that is comparable to gold plans offered on the exchanges. This will both continue to care for the health of all who serve under call or terms of employment and eliminate many of the variables facing congregations/parishes.

- a. ELCA Health Plan benefits should be provided for the deacon, spouse and eligible children unless such coverage is waived because family members are covered by the spouse’s health insurance.
- b. Health Care Benefits should be provided through the ELCA Health Plan.
- c. Rostered ministers serving under call are eligible to enroll if they are employed by an eligible employer and are scheduled to work at least 15 hours per week for six or more months per year.
- d. In order to insure adequate retirement income for all deacons, the synod encourages congregations/parishes that may be paying a deacon below “guidelines” to make Portico Benefit Services contributions/parishes based on a compensation package that is “at guidelines.”

D. Travel Expense Reimbursement

Automobile and other work-related travel expenses are business expenses for the congregation/parishes and should not be regarded as part of the deacon’s salary. The current IRS mileage reimbursement rate, based on actual miles driven and reported by the deacon using his/her personal vehicle, should be used by congregations/parishes. Congregations/parish are advised to stay abreast of current IRS regulations pertaining to auto expense reimbursement rates.
Instead of reimbursing the pastor for use of his/her personal vehicle, the congregation/parish may choose to lease or purchase a car and assume the operating costs of the vehicle. For additional guidelines on auto reimbursement, see Appendix A - Northwestern Minnesota Synod Travel Expense Reimbursement.

E. Professional Expense Reimbursement
It is recommended that professional expenses such as books, vestments, periodicals, professional dues, entertaining, communication (basic cell phone) and hospitality costs incurred in the performance of the duties of the call be shared by the congregation/parish.

F. Official Synod Events
The constitution of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod requires all Rostered Ministers under call to attend meetings of the Synod Assembly.

In addition to the Synod Assembly, the synod expects that all rostered ministers under call will attend the
- Synod Theological Day (normally in the spring)
- Theology for Ministry Retreat (normally in the autumn)
- First Call Theological Education core event (for rostered ministers in their first three years of called ministry)\(^3\)

Attending these events is part of working in a collegial relationship with other pastors and sharing mutual accountability with one other. Because these are expectations the synod has for all rostered ministers under call, congregations/parishes will pay registration fees and/or reimburse the pastor for expenses incurred in participating in these events, not as compensation, but as part of the cost of doing the business of the congregation/parish.

The synod also encourages rostered ministers to attend text studies, conference pastoral meetings, and conference gatherings.

G. Continuing Education
All full- and part-time rostered ministers of the ELCA are expected to complete at least 50 contact hours of continuing education annually.\(^7\) Therefore, continuing education time and funding should be provided for them for updating skills and for professional growth in order to strengthen their ministries.

It is recommended that a minimum of two weeks (including up to two Sundays) and a minimum of $1000 be granted annually for continuing education. The unused portion of the rostered minister’s annual continuing education leave or continuing education allowance may be accumulated over a period of no more than three years for more major continuing education opportunities.\(^4\) Continuing education may include courses, seminary classes, workshops, or independent study when directed toward a specific goal.

Use of continuing education funds is granted by the congregation/parish council or other appropriate authority. Termination of employment may cancel all time and money contributed by the employer for that employee.

Congregations/parishes are encouraged to consider a sabbatical policy for their rostered ministers. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recommends that rostered ministers be granted a period of extended study and renewal, a period of 1-3 months every 5-7 years in the present call.

H. Sabbath Rest and Time Off
Adequate time off for rostered ministers is essential. It is recommended that vacation time be 4 weeks

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\(^3\) Newly rostered ministers are required to participate in First Call Theological Education during the first three years of rostered service.

\(^4\) The compensation form that accompanies the Letter of Call urges that a minimum of $1,400 be available annually for the rostered minister’s continuing education. Example: the congregation provides a minimum of $1000 and the rostered minister provides $400 to reach the $1,400 goal. The rostered minister may, through a voluntary salary reduction agreement, augment the congregation’s contribution in order to reach the $1,400 of annual support.
(including 4 Sundays) for all rostered ministers regardless of how long they have served in rostered ministry. Two full days off per week are recommended.\(^5\)

**Vacation:** Vacation time is offered purely for the rest, relaxation, and renewal of rostered ministers. The following should not be considered part of vacation time: official synod events at which attendance is required; continuing education; time spent in outdoor ministries and retreats with congregational/parish youth and family groups; work on synod or Churchwide boards or committees.

**Holidays:** Holidays should be granted as days off in addition to vacation days. When the services of the rostered minister are required on recognized holidays, time off with pay should be granted at another time which causes minimal disruption to the congregation/parish. The following eight days are traditionally considered paid holidays: New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Day or Presidents Day, Easter Sunday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.

**Other Circumstances:**
- On rare occasions the pastor and congregation/parish may need to negotiate the carrying over of unused vacation time into the following year.
- An additional two to four Sundays a year may be granted a pastor, with the congregation/parish providing for worship supply. This may be especially appropriate in congregations/parishes that have only one pastor.
- Employers may find it useful to negotiate with the pastor for additional vacation time or additional continuing education time in lieu of appropriate full salary increases, if acceptable to all parties.

I. **Mutual Ministry**

In order to help each congregation/parish of the NW MN Synod function effectively, the Synod strongly recommends that each congregation/parish form a Mutual Ministry (Staff Support) Committee. According to the model constitution of the ELCA, this committee should be composed of six persons who are appointed for two year terms, three each on alternating years. Appointments are made by the president of the congregation/parish together with the pastor. However, it may be that size and method of appointment may vary in a given entity.

The purpose of the Mutual Ministry (Staff Support) Committee is to affirm and strengthen the mission efforts of the congregation/parish and the ministry which is performed by the staff.

Functions and benefits of a Mutual Ministry (Staff Support) Committee include:
- Helps develop open communication about expectations, attitudes, and concerns within the congregation/parish, the community, and staff.
- Identifies early warning signs of misunderstandings and takes action to diffuse certain problem situations before they escalate.
- Serves as a group with whom the rostered minister and other staff members can test new ideas and share confidential matters.
- Can plan strategies to improve skills of staff members or help develop plans within the congregation/parish to solve problem situations.

It is important that congregations/parishes establish a Mutual Ministry (Staff Support) Committee as part of their normal programming and not wait until there is a time of crisis in the congregation/parish with misunderstandings and hurt feelings. The committee should be understood as a significant element in the life of the rostered minister with regular reports to both the council and the congregation(s), although these reports will NOT include confidential matters.

For more information about Mutual Ministry (Staff Support) Committee it is suggested that each

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\(^5\) Author and pastor, Eugene Peterson, describes Sabbath rest as follows: At regular intervals we all need to quit our work and contemplate [God’s Work], quit talking to each other and listen to him. God knows we need this and has given us a means in Sabbath a day for praying and playing, simply enjoying what he is. One of my tasks [as pastor] is to lead you in the celebrative keeping of Sabbath each Sunday. But that is not a Sabbath for me, I wake up on Sunday morning with the adrenalin flowing. It is a workday for me. Monday is my Sabbath, and I need your help to observe it. From *Working with Angles: That Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) pg 82.

\textbf{J. Military Leave}

A congregation/parish whose rostered minister serves simultaneously as a chaplain in a military reserve unit must by law grant leave time for the pastor to fulfill his/her military obligations. Such military leave time is to be granted exclusive of vacation and continuing education time.\footnote{The same law applies to rostered and non-rostered persons who belong to military reserve units and who work in congregations or ministry agencies.}

It is recommended that each congregation/parish develop written policies relating to \textit{compensation issues} for rostered ministers while on military leave. Policy guidelines are available from the ELCA Federal Chaplaincy website (www.elca.org/federalchaplains/involuntarycallupguidelines.html).

\textbf{K. Part-Time Staff}

Rostered Minsters serving part-time in congregations/parishes should have consideration for salary and benefits corresponding to a percentage of a full-time salary and benefits package. The required minimum continuing education should not be reduced by a percentage, however.

\textbf{L. Severance Policy}

It is recommended that each congregation/parish develop written policies relating to severance compensation for rostered ministers

\textbf{M. Other Provisions}

Please see section IV for provisions that normally apply to all employees of congregations/parishes.
IV. **PROVISIONS THAT NORMALLY APPLY TO ALL EMPLOYEES OF CONGREGATIONS/PARISHES**

A. **Disability - Sick Leave**
   In the event that any church staff person covered under the ELCA Pension (Portico Benefit Services) and other benefits plan becomes medically disabled, it is expected that the congregation/parish provide up to two (2) months of continued salary, housing, and contributions to the ELCA Pension (Portico Benefit Services) and other benefits plans in a 12-month period.

   It is recommended that each congregation/parish develop written policies regarding sick leave for all its employees. In general, one day of sick leave is granted per month worked, cumulative to 90 days. Normally sick leave policies allow employees to use sick leave days to care for immediate family members who are ill. “Immediate family” is typically defined to include spouse, parents, siblings, children, in-laws, grandparents, and grandchildren.

B. **Emergency/Funeral Leave**
   Absence of an employee for up to five days due to a death in the immediate family is normally permitted. “Immediate family” is typically defined to include spouse, parents, siblings, children, in-laws, grandparents, and grandchildren. If more than five days are needed, additional leave time may be granted at the discretion of the congregation/parish council.

C. **Flexible Spending Accounts**
   All employees of congregations/parishes covered under Portico Benefit Services and other benefits plan may set up a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) to cover the family’s eligible health care expenses and eligible dependent (day) care expenses. For complete information on this option, please refer to https://porticobenefits.org/.

D. **Ministry Descriptions (“Job Descriptions”)**
   The personnel committee or congregation/parish council should provide clear, well-defined ministry descriptions for all employees of the congregation/parish. Doing so will enhance performance and satisfaction for all employees.

E. **Parental Leave**
   Parental leave with full compensation and benefits should be granted to an employee for 8 weeks when a child is born or adopted. It is recommended that each congregation/parish develop a written policy relating to parental leave. 

F. **Personal Days**
   The congregation/parish may grant each employee 1-2 personal days off per year. Personal days are similar to vacation days. If they are not taken during the year granted, they may not be carried over to the following year.

G. **Unemployment Compensation**
   Federal and state law generally exempts churches from this requirement as service performed in the employ of a religious organization.

H. **Workers’ Compensation**
   All congregations/parishes are required by law to provide Workers’ Compensation coverage for all employees. For purposes of Workers Compensation, pastors are employees and therefore must be covered under Workers Compensation.

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7 Congregations that have called a rostered couple (two rostered persons married to each other) should give particular attention to the question of whether both rostered persons will receive full parental leave.
Appendix A: Northwestern Minnesota Synod Travel Expense Reimbursement

In the total planning of the compensation/reimbursement package for the rostered minister, it is important to disconnect compensation from reimbursement. One is salary; the other is repayment to the rostered minister for out-of-pocket expenses incurred during his/her ministry on behalf of the congregation/parish.

The automobile reimbursement\(^8\) may be the single largest item of reimbursement for the rostered minister, so it is important to plan wisely. Although the ministry of the congregation/parish must be of primary importance, pertinent tax issues must also be considered. The congregation/parish must fully reimburse the rostered minister for official use of his/her vehicle for church business. Automobile expense reimbursement should be considered a congregational ministry expense not a part of the salary.

The following are options that rostered ministers and congregations/parishes may consider:

1. The congregation/parish leases the automobile and provides insurance, tolls, parking fees, maintenance, and repair coverage including a credit card for fuel.

2. The rostered minister owns his/her car and is reimbursed from a draw account by the church treasurer.

3. The rostered minister owns his/her car and the congregation/parish pays a flat car allowance as detailed in the church budget. If this option is chosen, the rostered minister must file a Form 2106 detailing his/her costs and reimbursements. If the rostered minister cannot verify that all dollars received were for professional miles driven, the residue must be claimed as taxable income.

4. The rostered minister leases a vehicle and is reimbursed from a draw account by the church treasurer.

Regardless of the option used, the rostered minister must keep complete records of automobile expenses, professional miles driven, and personal miles driven.

As leaders of congregations/parishes consider what is fair reimbursement for expenses incurred, they need to remember that the rostered minister is assisting them in their ministry. The automobile is as important a ministry tool as is the telephone. Without full access to such tools, the entire ministry of a congregation/parish may be inhibited.

Adapted from documents used in the St. Paul Area Synod and the Southwestern Minnesota Synod.

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\(^8\) Congregations/Parishes should stay abreast of changes in IRS regulations pertaining to automobile reimbursement
### Appendix B: Compensation Worksheet for Ministers of Word and Service

This worksheet is designed to help congregations/parishes and ministry agencies build a compensation package for *Ministers of Word and Service*. Each item listed below is described in this document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compensation</th>
<th>2019 Actual</th>
<th>2020 Guidelines</th>
<th>2020 Proposed</th>
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<td>Other:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Income</td>
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<td>Taxes Paid</td>
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<td>FICA tax – employer’s share</td>
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<td>Official synod meetings</td>
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<td>Continuing Education</td>
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<td>Other:</td>
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Appendix C: Resources for Personnel and Compensation Issues in Congregations/Parishes of the ELCA


Rueter, Alvin C., *Personnel Management in the Church*, Minneapolis: Augsburg 1984