

2027 Rostered Minister Compensation Guidelines

Western North Dakota Synod compensation guidelines for Rostered Ministers; Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors) and Ministers of Word and Service (deacons).

WHEREAS, the 2025 Synod Assembly invited the Synod Council to form a task force to study rostered minister compensation guidelines and include their findings in the 2026 compensation guidelines recommendations resolution to the 2026 Synod Assembly, and,

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the synod provide ongoing guidance to its congregations and staff regarding salary and benefits for pastors and deacons; therefore be it;

RESOLVED, that the attached document serve as a Minimum Base Salary Guideline for the Western North Dakota Synod beginning in January 2026; and be it further

RESOLVED, that all Western North Dakota Synod congregations be encouraged to increase their rostered minister's compensation to these levels at a minimum.

SUBMITTED BY:

Western North Dakota Synod Council

Note:

On May 13, 2026, the Reference and Counsel Committee voted to recommend adoption by the Synod Assembly.

Report from the Synod Compensation Review Task Force to the WND Synod Council and 2026 WND Synod Assembly

Synod guidelines provide non-binding guidance to congregations on fair minimum compensation for rostered ministers and other leaders. Ideally, compensation would be based on the skills, leadership, training, and the relationship that exists between rostered ministers and congregation, providing adequately for the rostered minister and their family and enabling them to live without undue financial distress that would distract from the work of the Gospel.

So how much should we pay our rostered minister? One answer would be the least amount that we have to in order to have a rostered minister—but we know how that works out for secular employers. Secular employers that pay the absolute minimum to fill a position end up with low morale, lackluster performance, high turnover, high training costs, and long vacancies due to a shortage of qualified candidates—and then still end up accepting less qualified candidates. Arguably, with the exception of low morale and lackluster performance, this describes the ELCA in general and the Western North Dakota Synod in particular. Long vacancies and high investments in training for SAMs have become part of our reality.

So how much do other synods pay their rostered ministers? Synod guidelines in neighboring rural synods to our east, west and south are about the same as ours—but they all face serious clergy shortages, too. The Minneapolis and St. Paul synod guidelines are about fifteen to twenty percent higher than ours and they do not have a clergy shortage.

So how much would someone with a rostered minister's education and skills earn in secular employment? The ELCA has demanding requirements for its rostered ministers which would be highly valued in a secular setting, including:

- Leadership skills
- Strong communication skills—public speaking, verbal, and written
- Specialized knowledge requiring both a college education and a four-year seminary degree. (In many disciplines, the eight years of education required for pastoral ministry would be sufficient for a combined bachelor's-doctoral program.)
- Management Skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Teaching skills, teaching children, youth, and adults

With many second-career rostered ministers, these skills are well-developed even before entering professional ministry. In civil service in North Dakota, this level of education and expertise would result in salaries in the \$80-120K range, roughly fifty percent higher than

our 2025 synod guidelines for a rostered minister's starting cash salary. Based on limited information from the private sector, compensation might be double synod guidelines or, in specialized technical fields, three to four times typical rostered minister compensation.

In addition, there are contextual considerations. A two-income family will generally settle where the higher-paid spouse finds work, which means that to entice a rostered minister from elsewhere, rural congregations may need to pay enough of a premium that the rostered minister is the primary breadwinner and the family can survive economically until the spouse finds work. Traveling distances to visit family and rural limitations for shopping, dining, and entertainment are also matters to take into consideration when determining compensation. And one cannot forget the unpredictability of North Dakota weather. The canola isn't in full bloom throughout the year.

Synod guidelines are intended only to establish fair levels of compensation for rostered ministers and therefore cannot address the question of how much staff a particular congregation can afford. Congregations that cannot afford a fairly paid, full-time rostered minister at current giving levels may need to 1) address congregational stewardship in a meaningful way, 2) reconsider whether they need a full-time rostered minister, or 3) seek stronger partners for a parish partnership arrangement. Such options should be discussed with the synod office.

Based on this analysis, the Synod Compensation Review Task Force recommends that congregations strive to raise their base cash compensation by \$5,000.

Respectfully submitted task force members:

Valerie Fischer, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bismarck, WND Synod Council member
Rev. Michael Burns, First Lutheran Church & Trinity Lutheran Church, Tioga
James Gray, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Bismarck
Rev. Kathi Nygaard, Zion Lutheran Church, Beulah, WND Synod Council member
Bishop Craig A. Schweitzer

2027 Minimum Base Salary Guidelines for Rostered Ministers

This chart represents the minimum guidelines recommended for single point congregations. These figures represent base cash salary only and do not include housing and utilities, social security off-set, pension, medical insurance, continuing education, professional expenses or any other benefits.

Other Considerations for Rostered Ministers:

1. Prior work experience of 1st Call Ministers should be considered, and credit given at the rate of one-half year for each year of experience.
2. Multi-point Parishes:
If serving more than one congregation, it is suggested \$500 per additional congregation be added to their compensation.
3. Large Congregations:
For congregations over 800 baptized, it is suggested that \$1,500 be added.
For administrative pastors serving congregations over 1,500 baptized and supervising staff, it is suggested that \$2,500 be added.
4. Ministers with advanced degrees:
ie D.Min., Ph.D., S.T.M. or other degrees the congregation deems relevant to their ministry, add \$1000.

These guidelines are based upon on a rostered minister compensation and benefits review by a Synod Compensation Task Force (November 2025-April 2026), requested by the 2025 Synod Assembly and appointed by the Synod Council. The Task Force recommendation is an increase of \$5,000 for 2027.

Year Ordained	Low	High	Additional Considerations
2026	\$ 49,750	\$ 59,750	
2025	\$ 50,750	\$ 60,750	
2024	\$ 51,950	\$ 61,950	
2023	\$ 52,550	\$ 62,550	
2022	\$ 53,150	\$ 63,150	
2021	\$ 53,750	\$ 63,750	
2020	\$ 54,350	\$ 64,350	
2019	\$ 54,950	\$ 64,950	
2018	\$ 55,550	\$ 65,550	
2017	\$ 56,150	\$ 66,150	
2016	\$ 56,750	\$ 66,750	
2015	\$ 57,350	\$ 67,350	
2014	\$ 57,950	\$ 67,950	
2013	\$ 58,550	\$ 68,550	
2012	\$ 59,150	\$ 69,150	
2011	\$ 59,750	\$ 69,750	
2010	\$ 60,350	\$ 70,350	
2009	\$ 60,950	\$ 70,950	
2008	\$ 61,550	\$ 71,550	
2007	\$ 62,150	\$ 72,150	
2006	\$ 62,750	\$ 72,750	
2005	\$ 63,350	\$ 73,350	
2004	\$ 63,950	\$ 73,950	
2003	\$ 64,550	\$ 74,550	
2002	\$ 65,150	\$ 75,150	
2001	\$ 65,750	\$ 75,750	
*Add an additional \$750/year for each year of experience beyond 25 years.			