

PASTORAL STIPENDS

A PERSPECTIVE



INTRODUCTION

Baptist Churches of SA (BCSA) has a history of utilising the term “stipend” when referring to remuneration of pastors. This practice continues to the present day even though in practice the payment of such stipends is in the form of an arrangement with the local church that reflects contemporary employment practices.

In late 2005 a project was commenced to “produce a recommendation regarding the foundation on which pastors’ stipends are calculated”. This review project culminated in a final report and recommendations dated 16 April 2007 with resultant roll out of the recommendations during 2007 and 2008.

In light of the changing context of pastoral ministry, perception of the church by society, and employment law it was agreed by the BCSA Assembly Board Nomination and Remuneration Committee in mid-2019 that a further review be undertaken.

This paper seeks to outline our understandings of “stipend” from a Baptist perspective through the lens of which further review may be undertaken.

DEFINITIONS

- The word ‘stipend’ comes from Middle English, from the Latin – stips = money, payment, gift; pendere = to pay. It referred to a fixed sum paid periodically/regularly rather than that based on work/hours done.
- A stipend has traditionally been seen as a living allowance to cover a person’s needs as they exercise ministry rather than as a salary or fee for services rendered. The church and pastor mutually agree to provide in this way so as to allow pastors to devote themselves to ministry, free from anxiety about needs.
- Stipends were thus traditionally to allow a minister to devote their ‘whole time’ to their ministry call. This means they work well in practice for full time ministry.
- Because a stipend is not paid for particular duties or hours of work, the idea of a part time stipend is somewhat complicated. It has usually been seen as allowing other time to earn income/undertake other duties, not to measure hours in ministry, although this can be difficult in practice.



BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

- In the Old Testament, the priests were provided for by the people’s tithes and offerings (e.g. Numbers 18).
- Jesus and his disciples were provided for by the generosity of other believers (e.g. Luke 8:2-3) and He affirms that the one working is worthy of recompense (Luke 10:7).
- The early church’s practice was to provide for the maintenance and wellbeing of those who gave their lives to serve day by day, Paul calls this a “right” (1 Cor 9:12), although it is one he is willing to sacrifice in order for people to hear the gospel.
- From the church’s point of view, they are to honour and respect those who serve based on the task they are called to (1 Thess 5:12-13). Churches honour their teachers and leaders by sharing with and providing for them (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18).
- Paul notes that there were some whose only motive in ministry was financial gain (1 Tim 6:5), raising the question as to how churches can compensate in a way that does not make money the deciding factor.



THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES



BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES

- Being created in the image of God includes the invitation to work (Gen 1:28) and to rest (Gen 2:2). All employment, including ministry, should promote a rhythm in people's work lives that sustains and encourages active participation in God's mission, and does not destroy rest, recreation, and relationships.
- God always seeks to bless his people, inviting us to share in his goodness and abundance. Those who serve in the church should share in the benefits of the ministry they lead.
- Jesus spoke about the dangers of wealth (e.g. Mark 10:23). There is contemporary research that suggests the more people earn the harder it is to be generous. Pastors are not immune from our shared human tendency towards idolatry.
- Ministry is service and includes choosing to sacrifice and place our confidence and faith in God's generosity and provision.
- Churches as employers should model justice in how they think about compensation. It is a chance to embody the gospel in our practice.
- Across our broader movement and mission, we seek equity and justice, not simple equality. We need to consider how we care for those in more difficult situations and recognise the differential contributions of different persons to our overall mission.
- The church has tended to be somewhat ambivalent towards money: we know we need it, but poverty is more strongly associated with holiness than wealth. At the same time, in certain places and periods, there have been excesses, with churches and church leaders taking advantage of the generosity of others.
- Christians have fallen into various fallacies about the relationship between spiritual and material things which we need to be careful to avoid:
 - Gnostics and ascetics who over-spiritualise life and deny the place of the material;
 - prosperity theology that interprets material wealth as God's blessing and economic success as a sign of God's approval;
 - extreme liberation theology that focuses exclusively on material needs without a wider spiritual context.
- The early church used a common fund to support both the poor and church leaders. Over time, this changed to give priority to payment of ministers, bishops, and other leaders, and the social privileges and prestige of ministry began to grow.
- One reason for the Reformation was clergy misbehaviour, with leaders seen to be taking too much for themselves and the church wanting to avoid both this perception and reality.
- After Constantine, state aid to clergy commenced, allowing churches to hold property and raising questions about sources of income. As Dissenters, the early Baptists were passionate believers in the separation of church and state, wanting to maintain financial independence of churches and avoid any potential for state interference. Baptists did develop their own equivalent to the state's stipend scheme, however, where larger congregations would raise money for a fund to help financially support pastors from small congregations.
- While holding to the priesthood and ministry of all believers, Baptists acknowledge the calling and gifting of pastors for specific leadership roles. These roles come with opportunities and demands that are difficult to describe in fixed hours and days of work. This fits well with the idea of stipend rather than wages paid for services rendered, however it also comes with the danger of a culture of pastoral staff giving of themselves regardless of personal cost or even being unfairly exploited.
- Australian Baptists have developed a range of recommendations for pastoral stipends in order to recognise that different pastoral roles come with different



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levels of responsibility, and to recognise that pastoral training, experience, and accreditation add benefits to churches, thus it can be just and equitable to increase the level of stipend based on these factors.

- As Baptist Churches SA affirms both men and women in pastoral ministry, we should name gender equity in compensation as a matter of principle.
- Conversations about pastoral compensation should never just be about money, but also about providing healthy and supportive working conditions, caring for pastoral families, creating healthy and effective churches, modelling faithfulness and generosity, and managing social and theological expectations.
- We seek to enable pastors to devote their emotional energy to the ministry by relieving any burden of concern in providing for the needs of themselves and their families.
- Pastoral compensation is not just salary, but extends to vacation, retirement, work hours, family time and more, these need to be part of the conversation.
- We want to encourage a culture of generosity in our churches, alongside principles of justice and equity.
- Churches also seek to model faithful and simple living and may consider how to encourage pastors to lead their communities in these, without this becoming a way for churches to control or exploit staff. Pastors can be better equipped to be examples of sacrificial generosity when they make the decision to live below their means rather than have the church make it for them.



RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- We recognise that there are certain public perceptions of churches having too much money or too many financial concessions, and an awareness of some high-profile pastors being perceived to have undermined their ministry by living in financial luxury. We seek to model generosity and humility to the wider community and not make financial compensation a stumbling block.
- We seek to abide by, and exceed, societal expectations and government requirements in how employees are to be fairly treated and compensated, even while theologically considering pastors as more than employees.

CONCLUSION

- There is a complex matrix of factors to be considered when discussing pastoral stipends, and it requires wisdom and grace to balance them.
- It is helpful for churches to have an objective standard to base their decisions upon, rather than what feels generous to particular people.
- Recommendations from the association also provide transparency across our movement and enable us to name together our principles, values, and goals.
- Maintaining the language of 'stipend' appears to be helpful in order that we include biblical, theological and pastoral considerations in our decisions, however it needs to be carefully explained and applied in our contemporary context.