

97-GS-50 VOTED: The Twenty-first General Synod adopts the recommendations contained in the Resolution AFair and Just Compensation A Report to the Twenty-first General Synod.®

FAIR AND JUST COMPENSATION:  
A REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD TWENTY-ONE

The Twentieth General Synod (1995) of the United Church of Christ adopted a Pronouncement and a Proposal for Action on Fair and Just Compensation for those Called and Employed by the Church.

The Pronouncement acknowledged that the church generally, and the United Church of Christ in particular, has a history of witness on behalf of the fair and just treatment of persons in the workplaces of society. Comparable attention and vigilance must also be given to the fair and just treatment of persons called and employed by various settings of the United Church of Christ. The Pronouncement lifted up the danger that the church may speak about fairness and justice to and in society while exploiting the people whom it calls and employs.

The Pronouncement called for both fair and just compensation.

The word "fair" has to do with the relational, with right relationships between, and among, people. If a person, called and employed by the church, is not provided with compensation comparable to others providing similar service, the calling body and employer may be contributing to an unfair situation.

The word "just" has to do with what is right in relation to standards known in valued custom, rule or moral law. If half of those called and employed by the church are not able to secure compensation according to standards held in high moral regard, calling and employing bodies contribute to an unjust situation.

The Proposal for Action adopted by the twentieth General Synod called upon local churches, conferences and associations, those called and employed by the church, and various national bodies to act in a variety of ways in support of the fair and just compensation of all persons called and employed by the church. One action named in the Proposal for Action was for:

"the Office for Church Life and Leadership to convene instrumentalities and other national entities to envision and implement a division of labor that...reports to the twenty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ a survey of the present compensation of lay persons employed by the church and corresponding recommendations.®

This report is a response to that request.

Many settings of the United Church of Christ have shared concern about the ways in which persons called and employed by the church are compensated. Although information is regularly gathered about compensation of ordained leadership in the United Church of Christ, less reliable information has been available about compensation of lay persons employed by various settings of the church.

Following the Twentieth General Synod, the Office for Church Life and Leadership convened representatives from the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries Research Office, the Office of the Secretary, the Pension Boards, the Council of Conference Ministers, and the Office of the President of the United Church of Christ. Among the tasks undertaken was a survey, sent to each local church in the United Church of Christ, requesting information about the presence and compensation of lay employees. We hope you will find the following summary of the survey results of interest.

Summary of Findings:

The information that follows is based upon information collected by the Yearbook Office of the United Church of Christ for the year ending December 31, 1995. Thirty six of the 39 conferences of the united Church of Christ participated in the collection of information. A total of 3,494 churches returned the survey forms. This represented 58% of all current congregations in the 36 conferences participating in the survey. Of the 3,494 churches participating in the survey, 84% reported having one or more paid lay employees, while 16% reported that they have no paid lay workers. In most cases, the survey form was completed by the pastor of the church reporting.

Local churches with paid lay employees reported employing a total of 12,574 workers. Of this number, 90% were part-time and 10% were full-time. The vast majority are women, employed on a part-time basis. Note the following breakdown of the types of positions in which persons are most frequently employed:

	Part-time	Full-time
Custodians	2516	316
Secretaries	2065	453
Choir/Music		
Directors	3700	72
Organists	2070	25
Treasurers	705	32
Religious Educators	517	82

Figures gathered indicated that, on average, the tenure of lay employees exceeds the average tenure of pastors. In many instances, lay employees contribute substantially to the ethos and continuity present within congregations.

Survey results sparked concern about the apparent lack of benefits provided to both full-time and part-time workers. For example, of all full-time custodians, 41% lacked health benefits and 61% lacked any pension payments. The figures are similar among those employed in other full-time positions. The percentage of those lacking benefits is even greater among those employed on a part-time basis.

Concern about the apparent absence of full benefits for full-time employees, and pro-rated benefits for part-time employees, is heightened by the changing role of part-time work within American society. Whereas in the past, part-time employment may have been viewed as primarily supplemental in nature, part-time work is increasingly becoming an integral part of a worker's full employment. Thus, pro-rated benefits such as health insurance, social security and pension payments are becoming a critical aspect of compensation needs for part-time workers. This trend is expected to grow in the future.

The data received indicated that 19%-20% of all full-time custodians and secretaries were not having social security taxes paid on their behalf. While the information gathered did not indicate the number of workers not subject to social security taxes due to their being already retired, given the needs for fair and just compensation as well as the requirements of federal laws, attention needs to be given to insure that all persons subject to social security taxes are having these payments made on their behalf by their employer.

Those completing the survey forms offered substantial written comments about lay workers in the church. The most predominant comments were ones expressing extensive appreciation for the committed, loyal service provided by lay employees. Numerous respondents offered comments similar to these two: "Our experience is that lay employees are loving, dedicated and cooperative in every way," or "Our church would not be where it is today without our lay staff. We bless their presence every day."

While appreciative comments were widespread, a large number of respondents expressed deep concern that many lay workers are significantly under-compensated for the services provided. Frequently, lay employees are reported as doing far more that they are compensated for doing.

Numerous respondents raised concern that health and pension benefits be provided more consistently for full and part-time employees. Many mentioned that the presence of compensation guidelines and sample personnel policies would help in this effort.

Many respondents noted the tensions present when churches are struggling financially to make ends meet and have difficulty accessing the financial means to provide compensation that is fair and just.

As lifted up in the Pronouncement *A Fair and Just Compensation: The Church as Employer*<sup>®</sup> many respondents recognized that compensation included more than adequate pay and benefits. Work climate issues, including flexible hours, child-care provisions, and the presence of deserved recognition and respect, were noted as positive contributions to the church as workplace. Still, the presence of these positive factors did not, in and of itself, negate the need to call attention to the need for adequate pay and benefits.

There was widespread agreement among respondents that all settings of the church (local, association, conference and national) should work, individually and collaboratively, to effect increased presence of fair and just compensation for lay employees.

The appendix of this report provides greater detail from the information gathered. The complete compilation of findings is also available through the Research Office of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

Next Steps:

The information gathered included a request for respondents to name those strategies/actions they thought would be helpful in working towards fair and just compensation for lay employees of the United Church of Christ. The responses received, in large part, form the bases of the following recommendations:

**Local churches and all settings of the church are urged to:**

- make an intentional commitment to being a fair and just employer;
- insure that persons employed are not expected to carry out functions for which they are not compensated and are paid fair, competitive wages for hours worked;
- provide position descriptions which outline clear, realistic expectations and accountabilities;
- provide time, resources and encouragement for staff members' participation in association, conference and national gatherings for church workers;
- provide mechanisms for regular feedback and support, including but not limited to a process for annual evaluation and the presence of a personnel or employee relations committee;
- assess the adequacy of benefits provided, including provisions for full health and pension benefits for all full-time employees, and pro-rated health and pension benefits for part-time employees who work a least fifteen hours per week;
- make appropriate social security payments, in an effort to provide fair and just compensation and to avoid violation of federal laws;
- be generous in offering things which contribute to a positive work climate, including flexible hours where possible, ample vacation, and frequent times of recognition and demonstrations of appreciation;
- clarity the distinction between services provided on a volunteer basis and those for which a person is employed and compensated (be clear about the tasks for which the person is being paid, provide opportunities for volunteer service, and take care not to confuse the two);
- be guided by fairness and justice in compensation decisions as they particularly affect women, children and minorities; and
- emphasize church stewardship, including membership tithing, to assist their ability to compensate lay employees in a just manner;

**Conferences and association are urged to:**

- develop and make available compensation guidelines for various lay positions within local churches;
- provide periodic training opportunities for employers and supervisors;
- gather those employed in similar positions for mutual support and sharing of ideas and resources;
- provide training opportunities for personnel committees and/or church leadership of local churches;
- urge collaborative models which may enable more adequate compensation (e.g. formation of small groups for increased purchasing power for benefits not available through current UCC channels); and
- provide local churches with basic legal guidelines regarding social security and worker's compensation compliance.

**Office of the Secretary and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries Research Office are urged to:**

- continue research of the compensation of lay employees as part of their ongoing work and

publish the complete survey results and make them available to various settings of the United Church of Christ.

**The Office for Church Life and Leadership is urged to continue to convene a variety of national bodies to:**

receive the information gathered through various research efforts;

fulfill the additional tasks outlined in the Proposal for Action adopted by the Twentieth General Synod;

identify and negotiate additional ways in which various agencies and settings of the church may positively contribute to all settings of the United Church of Christ being fair and just employers; and

include in further research the percentage of lay employees with or without other health insurance.