Title

Minimum Compensation and Church Pension Fund Participation for Non-Stipendiary Clergy

Proposer(s)

The Community of Deacons

WHEREAS, the 81st General Convention, through Resolution 2024-A135, encouraged dioceses to consider minimum compensation and Church Pension Fund assessments for active, otherwise non-stipendiary clergy of any order who meet the specified eligibility conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church recognize the Order of Deacons without establishing separate canonical orders of "vocational" and "transitional" deacons; and

WHEREAS, supporting the ministry and well-being of clergy benefits the whole diocese and is a responsibility shared by the whole Church; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the 137th Annual Convention of the Diocese of West Missouri establish as diocesan policy that active clergy of any order, under age 72, who are currently serving without stipend, are canonically resident in and serving within the Diocese, and have a current written letter of agreement with the bishop and a congregation or entity served, shall receive compensation of not less than $25 per month and have applicable assessments remitted to the Church Pension Fund, subject to the governing pension plan rules; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Diocese shall administer payment of such compensation and assessments through a designated diocesan fund, subject to applicable diocesan budgetary authority, financial controls, employment and tax requirements, and Church Pension Fund rules; and be it further

RESOLVED, that parishes, congregations, missions, and other diocesan institutions be invited to contribute to the designated fund, according to their means, without making a contribution a condition of an eligible cleric receiving the minimum compensation; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Bishop Diocesan, in consultation with the appropriate diocesan officers and the Church Pension Fund, shall establish procedures for determining eligibility, documenting and approving letters of agreement, making payments, and remitting assessments, with no change to canonical authority or ecclesiastical oversight resulting solely from the administration of compensation; and be it further

RESOLVED, that compensation provided pursuant to this resolution shall not replace or reduce otherwise authorized reimbursements or support for mileage, continuing education, Clergy Conference, Diocesan Convention, discretionary funds, or other ministry expenses, nor shall it displace higher compensation otherwise required; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this policy shall apply without distinguishing among deacons on the basis of the descriptive terms "vocational" or "transitional," while recognizing that participation in specific benefits remains governed by Church Pension Fund rules; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Bishop Diocesan and Diocesan Council be requested to make provision for implementation as soon as practicable in 2027, including any necessary budgetary authorization and consultation with the Church Pension Fund.

Explanation

This resolution is in response to Resolution A135 Compensation for Non-stipendiary Clergy adopted at the 2024 General Convention. A135 required congregations and/or the diocese to make a nominal payment of $25 (or more) a month to their vocational deacon(s), as well as a monthly assessment of 18% ($4.50 for $25) to the Church Pension Fund (CPF), to enable deacons to participate in programs and benefits through the CPF that they would then be eligible for.

Over 20 other Episcopal Dioceses, that we know of, have approved similar resolutions requiring minimal compensation for vocational deacon, including the Diocese of Missouri in 2024. The cost is modest. At the $25 a month rate, total financial impact per congregation or for the diocese would be $354 per annum per deacon.

This resolution does not apply to deacons over the age of 72 because the rules of the Church Pension Group specify that retirement contributions cannot be made for clergy aged 72 years or older.

The example below outlines some of the benefits CPF provides to eligible clergy under this resolution. This example, provided by CPF, is based on a deacon having Total Assessable Compensation (TAC) of $300 per year ($25 per month), with 10 years of earned Credited Service (CS) at the time of retirement. The assumed Highest Average Compensation (HAC) is $300 ($25 a month). The total assessments paid over a deacon's 10-year career is $540.

- While Active, life insurance benefit (6 x TAC): $1,800
- When Retired, life insurance benefit (6 x HAC): $1,800
- Annual pension benefit (2.75% x HAC x CS): $82.50
- Annual Christmas benefit ($25 x CS): $250
- Resettlement benefit one-time payment at the time of retirement equal to 12 times the monthly retirement benefit with a minimum of $2,000): $2,000
- Invitation to CREDO and Planning for Wellness Conferences Vocational Deacons in the Episcopal Church.
- The Church Pension Fund also provides pension and retirement savings plans, health benefits, and educational services.

CREDO is a conference conducted by CPF that helps active and retired clergy by presenting a holistic approach to wellness. Participants examine and evaluate their health and wellness from spiritual, vocational, physical, emotional, and financial points of view. Many priests that have attended CREDO in the past report their wellness greatly benefitted through participation in CREDO.

In the Diocese of West Missouri, deacons currently serve in parishes and in diocesan positions without remuneration. Deacons give freely of their time - totaling hundreds of hours each month - while being unable to participate in any CPF service, benefits, or activities.

This sacrificial life comes at a cost if said deacons find themselves without adequate retirement resources, appropriate financial advice, and/or the means necessary to live a healthy ministry/life balance. Approval of this resolution would be a step forward in addressing this disparity.

It could potentially be helpful to be able to offer this benefit in our efforts to recruit younger deacons.

Q & As Concerning Minimal Compensation for Deacons Allowing Participation in Church Pension Fund Benefits

1. Q. Are deacons even eligible for inclusion in CPF? A. Yes, and they have been since 1970. All deacons (if their ordinations were properly recorded) have an inactive account at CPF. Paying assessments activates this account. Canon law requires that compensated and "employed" deacons have assessments paid on their behalf. (1)

2. Q. What would minimal compensation get younger (under age 72) deacons? A. The longer the active participation, the larger the benefit. Primary benefits would be:
   - Access to an excellent benefit retirement system in which even a minimal contribution, made faithfully over many years, will be of value.
   - Access to professional financial planning and investment vehicles. Many deacons have no access to similar assistance from an employer retirement plan; and
   - After five years of active participation in CPF, access to subsidized enrollment in an excellent Medicare Advantage plan. (2)

3. Q. Haven't deacons made a vow that they would never accept compensation? A. From 1954 to 1970, deacons were required by national canon to submit an affidavit to their diocese prior to ordination that their families were provided for by independent means. This requirement was abolished in 1970. (1)

4. Q. Won't this damage CPF's ability to provide pensions for priests? A. CPF made changes allowing participation of clergy through minimal compensation primarily because of concern that their existing rules did not adequately serve the many priests employed part-time or who were non-stipendiary. CPF affirmed that inclusion of deacons in these changes was intentional. (1)

5. Q. How many deacons in our diocese are currently under the age of 72? A. There are currently seven deacons in our diocese between the ages of 35-68 who would potentially benefit from participation in CPF. Four are between the ages of 64 and 68 and three are between the ages of 36 and 47. (4)

6. Q. Did the Episcopal Church consider CPF support for vocational deacons before GC81 Resolution A135? A. Yes, this has been under consideration since at least 1976:
   - 1976 GC65 requested that the CPF Board study and report to CG66 on non-stipendiary deacon participation in the CPP.
   - 1985 GC68 referred back to committee a resolution on the extension of GPG benefits to non-stipendiary deacons.
   - 2022 GC80 resolution C047, which would have established minimum deacon compensation at $25 per month; referred to a Standing Commission (2)

7. Q. The resolution mentions a "Letter of Agreement". Does one exist that churches could use and adapt as needed? A. Yes, the Council on Deacons recently drafted a LOA template. It is currently being reviewed for approval by the Diocesan office.

8. Q. Why does the resolution say that the minimal compensation could be paid by a parish or parishes, by the diocese, or by a mutually agreeable cost split? A. The language was crafted that way to cover all possible scenarios. For example, most deacons are assigned to just one parish however it is possible that, in the near future, some could be assigned to serve two parishes at the same time. There might also be a deacon under age 72 that is non-parochial for a period of time and the diocese might need to cover the cost so that benefits would not lapse. Or ,in the case of a very small parish, if the cost was burdensome there might be the need for a mutually agreed upon cost split.

Sources:

- A Primer About Minimal Compensation Resolutions, updated 1/6/22. By Deacon Lori Mills-Curran, M.Div., J.D., previous Executive Director, Association for Episcopal Deacons
- (2) 136th Convention of the Diocese of Oregon Resolution for Compensation for Non-Stipendiary Clergy FAQs 10/4/24
- (3) Association for Episcopal Deacons web site. www.episcopaldeacons.org (2026)
- (4) Diocese of West Missouri Deacon Directory, updated June 2026.