

2025 Guidance for Churches Preparing Terms of Call

A Presbyterian Pastor in PCUSA who is called to a Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of South Louisiana and installed in that church is a “Called” pastor. The compensation terms for a “Call” are defined in a “Terms of Call” document. The Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of South Louisiana has established a form for churches to define the Terms of Call for their pastor. The following is intended as a guide for churches using this form.

Note: If your pastor is retired and yet serving as your pastor, or you have an interim pastor or a transitional pastor, or a pastor from another denomination, they are not installed. You use the Terms of Service document to define your compensation agreement with them.

The Presbytery of South Louisiana is not a tax advisor. This guidance is not tax advice.

Changes for 2025:

- The Board of Pensions has completely redesigned their program for 2025.
- Churches will need to determine which program will be the best for them. There are a couple of ways to do this.
 - Go to this link and walk through the options: <https://www.pensions.org/decision-guide/>
 - Call or email BOP Consultant Kevin Keaton at 215-435-1301 or kkeaton@pensions.org
 - Call or email the PSL Stated Clerk, Sharon Fortin at 504-376-3325 or sharon@pbysouthla.org

Note: For 2025, every called and installed pastor has had a conversation with Kevin Keaton, and had a spreadsheet of the options provided by the PSL Stated Clerk. Your pastor should know what they would like you to do.

Presbytery Minimums

The Presbytery of South Louisiana has established the following Terms of Call minimums.

- Minimum Total Effective Salary: \$50,000/year (to be voted on at the November 2nd, 2024 Presbytery Meeting)
 - This is for full-time of at least 35 hours per week
 - Part-time minimum is based on percentage of the full-time rate:
If a position is part-time, divide the number of hours per week by 35 then multiply this by \$50,000 to get the part-time minimum
- Minimum Leave: Four (4) weeks of vacation, and two (2) weeks study leave.
 - A week includes Sunday
 - Study leave is cumulative up to 3 years. That is, the church must allow their pastor at least 6 weeks of study leave over 3 years.
 - Leave for a part-time pastor is no different from a full-time pastor.
- Minimum Continuing Education Reimbursement: \$500/year
 - This is for either a full-time or a part-time pastor

Income

Line 1 – Enter the Annual Cash Salary the church is paying the pastor.

Line 2 – Enter the amount the church is providing for housing costs.

- This amount may be used for any costs associated with housing: mortgage, rent, utilities, yard maintenance, furnishing, etc.
- If a Manse is provided:
 - This line includes the value of the Manse (minimum 30% of line 7)
 - It also includes any allowance for other housing costs such as utilities, yard maintenance, furnishings, etc.

Line 3 – Enter the sum of lines 1 and 2.

- What is SECA? See the “SECA Tax Allowance Explanation” section, below.

Lines 4 and 5– Enter the cost of any forms of income that the church is providing to the pastor that are not subject to SECA.

- Deferred Compensation is explained, below. The option of a 403(b) plan from the BOP must be offered to every pastor.

Line 6 – Enter the sum of lines 3, 4, and 5.

Medical and Pension

Use the information generated from the 2025 Decision Guide <https://www.pensions.org/decision-guide/>, the information you received from Kevin Keaton, or the spreadsheet figures you received from the PSL Stated Clerk to fill in the numbers on lines 7, 8, and 9.

Installed Pastors, whether full-time or part-time are required to be enrolled in the Board of Pensions

Line 7 – Enter the Employer Total Dues as found on the Decision Guide or through conversation with Kevin Keaton or the PSL Stated Clerk.

Line 8 – Enter the total for any optional benefits the pastor would like.

- The most common Optional Benefit is Dental coverage, contact the board of pensions.
- For the eyewear benefit, contact the board of pensions. (See exceptions, below)

Line 9 – Enter the sum of lines 7 and 8.

Allowances

Allowances are forms of income that are not subject to BOP dues calculations or SECA Tax Allowance Calculations.

Pastors are considered to be self-employed in terms of Social Security and Medicare. Churches are expected though not required to contribute 50% of a pastor’s SECA tax. (See SECA Tax Allowance Explanation, below)

Line 10 – Multiply line 3 by .0765 and enter the result.

Line 11 – Enter the amount of any additional income not subject to BOP dues or SECA taxes.

- The most common form of additional income is when a church chooses to contribute to the pastor’s 403(b) retirement plan through a “match” to the amount the pastor is contributing. See Deferred Compensation, below.

Line 12 – Enter the sum of lines 10 and 11.

Reimbursable Expenses

Reimbursable expenses are items that a church will reimburse to a pastor. Receipts or other proof of payment are required to be submitted to the church for repayment. Reimbursable expenses are not subject to BOP dues calculations or SECA tax calculations.

If items included as Reimbursable Expenses are submitted by the pastor and reimbursed by the church, the reimbursements are not taxable. If expenses are paid to a pastor “up-front”, or at regular intervals independent of use, and not accounted for, then the allowances are treated as taxable salary. It is important to handle expense allowances by some kind of receipted request-and-reimburse system.

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The amounts entered into this section are budgeted amounts for church accounting purposes. This money may or may not be spent, depending on if the pastor uses the benefit and submits the needed documentation.

Line 13 – Enter the amount the church has budgeted for the pastor’s use of their automobile for church business.

- The automobile allowance may be reimbursed at the IRS approved rate for mileage, or by the actual operating costs for professional use of the pastor’s automobile.
- Many churches put a maximum amount that they will cover (add “up to” to line 14)

Line 14 – Enter the amount the church has budgeted for the pastor’s continuing education expenses. (Minimum \$500 for either a full-time or part-time pastor)

- This includes the costs of tuition, travel, seminars, etc.

Line 15 – Enter the amount the church has budgeted for the pastor’s professional expenses.

- This includes books, subscriptions, cost of meals with church members or prospective members, etc.

Line 16 – Enter the amount the church has budgeted for anything else it plans to reimburse to the pastor.

- Common examples include the moving expenses for a new pastor or cellphone expenses.

Line 17 – Enter the sum of lines 13, 14, 15, and 16.

Total Cost to the Church

Line 18 – Enter the sum of lines 6, 9, 12, and 17.

Other Benefits

In the spaces provided, enter the number of weeks of leave allotted to the pastor for vacation. Note that there are minimums set by the Presbytery of South Louisiana. (See Presbytery Minimums, above)

Additional Agreements

There are two agreements that are spelled out in the Terms of Call that are requirements. Churches do not take any action with these other than to be aware that they exist. The Severance agreement portion has been a part of the Terms of Call for several years. The Family Leave portion is new, from the 2023-2025 Book of Order.

Family Leave: Should the need arise; this call includes provision for a minimum of twelve weeks of paid family medical leave. During paid leave, the pastor will continue to receive all benefits in these terms of call, including dues paid to and benefits provided by the Board of Pensions. Use of vacation time is not required but may be used to extend leave time. Examples of Medical Leave include: Parental Leave; Caregiver/Family Leave; Personal Loss. (G-2.0804)

Severance: In the event that this pastoral relationship should be dissolved without the pastor having received a call to other work, the Session agrees to Severance Pay with full salary and benefits (excluding reimbursable expenses) for a period of at least three months beginning the day the pastoral relationship is declared to be dissolved by the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of South Louisiana. If the pastor receives another call or other full-time employment, this Severance Pay shall stop on the day the other full-time employment begins. The Session understands this provision for Severance Pay may be waived at its request with the approval of the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of South Louisiana in the event of disciplinary action or pending disciplinary action against the pastor.

Approval Process

A Terms of Call form must be agreed upon by the pastor (or the Pastor Nominating Committee's [PNC's] candidate for a new call), the congregation, and the Presbytery of South Louisiana through its Committee on Ministry.

The following is the typical approval process (in this order):

1. The congregation (through the Session) proposes Terms of Call to the pastor and negotiates until agreement is reached. (The PNC is the representative for the congregation for a new call)
2. The Terms of Call sheet is submitted to the COM Liaison, and COM acts to approve, deny, or modify the document.
3. The pastor and congregation (in a Congregational Meeting) agree to the Terms of Call.
4. Once the pastor, Session, and COM have agreed, an ink-signed copy is mailed to the Presbytery office the address below or may be scanned and emailed to the COM Moderator.

PSL Committee on Ministry, 12909 Old Hammond Hwy., Baton Rouge, LA 70816.

The terms of a call must be renewed yearly, and any changes to the total effective salary approved by the congregation in a Congregational Meeting.

If a pastor is called to serve in multiple churches, Terms of Call are to be completed for each congregation, indicating what benefits that congregation will provide.

SECA Tax Allowance Explanation

SECA stands for the Self-Employed Contribution Act. It is just like the FICA combined tax for Social Security and Medicare that employers and employees pay. Pastors are considered self-employed in regard to Social Security and Medicare, so instead of paying FICA through an employer, they pay SECA taxes independently.

Pastors are responsible for all of the SECA tax, but usually churches pay for 50% of the tax, just like they pay 50% of the FICA tax for regular employees. This 50% is what is captured on line 10 of the Terms of Call form. This is common and expected.

Some churches wish to help their pastors out further by paying for some or all of the employee's 50% of the SECA tax (This would be on Line 5 of the TOC form). This is not common. The first 50% is not included in the BOP benefit calculation, however, if a church pays anything greater than 50%, the excess is considered income and is included in the BOP dues calculation

The SECA tax is a self-employed person's contribution to Social Security and Medicare. The Social Security rate is 12.4% and the Medicare tax rate is 2.9%, hence the 15.3% rate, 50% of which is 7.65%! That's why the calculation on line 10 is the total SECA income from line 3 multiplied by .0765.

Now, to get complicated: If the church and pastor are fortunate enough to be able to provide a total SECA income greater than the limit for taxation defined by the government, the rate is no longer 15.3%. Each year the US government sets a cap on income for the Social Security tax rate, beyond which no additional Social Security tax is paid. This is not the case for the Medicare tax rate. If the church can pay a total SECA income greater than \$125,000, the church and pastor need to look up the latest cap and make sure they are covering the tax appropriately.

Deferred Compensation Discussion

Deferred compensation includes any monies contributed to a tax-sheltered savings plan, housing equity allowance, or employee contributions to the 403(b) Retirement Savings plan of the BOP. Since the use of the BOP's 403(b) retirement plan is more common than other deferred compensation methods, and is encouraged, is addressed here.

Handling the Board of Pensions 403(b) Plan on the PSL Terms of Call Form

A 403(b) plan a retirement savings plan for non-profit employees. It is just like 401(k) retirement plans for regular employees.

A pastor may decide to have some amount of their cash salary put into the BOP's 403(b) plan. When this is done, that amount is usually not taxed until it is withdrawn from the program at some later time. The taxation is then usually deferred until the withdrawal. This amount is documented on line 4 on the Terms of Call form. The BOP dues are calculated including this deferred income.

In addition, the church may choose to put additional moneys into the pastor's 403(b) plan by matching the pastor's contribution. The church's match is documented on line 11. It is not included in the BOP dues calculation.

Any amount a church puts in over a match to the pastor's contribution is considered income and captured on line 5.