

EMC Pastor Severance Guideline

Though we make every effort to relate to one another as healthy and loving brothers and sisters in church ministry, situations can arise when a church decides that a pastor must resign or be terminated. In these painful situations it is important that the church relates to the pastor with fairness and a concern for the pastor's personal well-being and family. It is important to have reasonable guidelines in place so that in emotionally intense times, neither resentment nor unhelpful feelings of regret for the pastor determine the church's employment responsibilities. Ideally a guideline such as this is part of an employment contract that is agreed to when the pastor begins ministry.

This guideline is not a full human resource policy on severance. It provides a basic framework for a healthy termination but it cannot provide direction on every detail. The church will need to consult with human resource professionals if there are more detailed questions, or if exceptional circumstances arise.

Basic Principles for Severance Pay

- Severance pay is provided when a church terminates a pastor's employment. Possible terminations include;
 - A failed confidence vote.
 - A decision the church needs to make for financial reasons.
 - A restructuring decision that leaves the pastor without a role, or in a role with significantly less salary.
- Severance pay is also appropriate when a church seeks a pastor's resignation. In most situations it is better for the pastor and for the church if the pastor resigns voluntarily rather than face a forced termination. In cases where a resignation is requested of the pastor by a church body such as the council it is appropriate for the church to provide severance pay. The severance payment amounts are the same in this situation as when a church terminates a pastor.
- Severance pay is not given when pastors resign for personal reasons. This includes leaving the church for retirement, other employment, or further education.
- A pastor does not receive severance who is terminated "with just cause". In employment terminology "just cause" termination is rare and occurs when the pastor has grievously broken the employment contract through grave moral failure.
- Severance pay is not a "love offering" or thankyou gift to the pastor, neither does it take the place of such a gift.
- Severance pay is not given to compensate a pastor for not having received a sabbatical during the pastor's term of service.
- The minimum amount of severance pay given equals the pay for the legal "notice period" employers are required to give employees before termination. Severance cannot be less than employment standards require, though it can be more. Provincial employment standards are available on provincial government websites. This is normally calculated as weeks of severance pay for every year the pastor was employed.
- However, there are factors relevant to pastoral work that may point to a more generous severance pay, including,
 - How near the pastor is to retirement. This affects the possibility of quickly finding other work.
 - The availability of other pastoral work in the immediate area.
 - The ability of the pastor to do sustainable secular work if no ministry work is immediately available.

- The size and age of the pastor's family.
- The emotional toll a church's termination has caused the pastor, necessitating counselling and an extended period away from pastoral work.

Because of these factors, an additional week of severance pay per year of employment beyond the provincial requirement is appropriate, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

- Benefits and pensions are paid during the severance period but vacation is not accrued.
- The severance pay continues despite the pastor finding other employment.
- In addition to a financial payment, the church might also consider providing the departing pastor with professional support in resume writing, job applications, and interview training.
- Determining severance amounts is rarely a simple black and white formula. It is advisable that the church council work together with the financial committee in determining the appropriate amount.
- Severance pay comes with the assumption that a departing pastor will not encourage parishioners to leave the church. It assumes mutual non-disparagement between the pastor and the church.
- The EMC has a counselling fund for ordained ministers and their families that can be used by pastors after their departure.