

E.5 The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia Report of Commission on Personnel (2025)

The Diocesan Commission on Personnel began in 1974 by an act of diocesan convention. Its purpose is to consider compensation and benefits for clergy and other church employees and to make recommendations that seek justice, equity, and fair compensation. The Commission's work focuses on human resources issues: creating and consulting on personnel policies for the diocese and congregations, benefits recommendations for clergy and lay employees, and the clergy compensation scale.

Your Diocesan Commission on Personnel continues to take up, along with the good support, input, and guidance of our Canon for Human Resources, Dede Moore, and our Canon to the Ordinary, The Rev. Cn. Cristi Chapman, ongoing resource support for congregations in the form of an [annual update to congregations](#). Through this annual update, congregations can stay current with changes in Washington State Paid Family and Medical Leave, changes to Washington State Minimum Wage and Overtime rules, updates to the [Personnel Handbook Template](#) and encouraging wellness for all lay and clergy employees through use of the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#).

Benefits recommendations this year include **selection of base medical and dental plans** for 2026 (with updates to both medical and dental plans - see diocesan resource website). Medical premiums for the base plan increased just under 5% from 2025 and basic dental premiums did not increase at all. The Commission **proposes a 2.7% COLA** for 2026 clergy and bishop's staff salaries (see **Resolutions Committee Report**).

Continuing in our common discernment around equity regarding **clergy compensation** in our diocese, we did not receive substantial feedback around a wholesale salary scale revision, which we proposed and asked for feedback in 2023-2024, to precipitate the energy that such a change would likely need to be efficacious and constructive. We did, however, continue to get interest around applying a **geographic differential** to the salary scale, and thus, spent our energy in this convention cycle considering how a geographic differential could be applied.

Regarding the **geographic differential**, we continue to be aware that a notable number of congregations in our diocese are in some of the most expensive housing markets in this nation. We are also aware that we have 3 different metropolitan areas in our diocesan bounds (Seattle-Tacoma, Vancouver WA-Portland OR, Bellingham-Vancouver BC), and we also have a unique reality with congregations on multiple islands, as well as locations that are not as expensive as those metropolitan or island locations. How can congregations both offer viable salaries to attract gifted clergy given the housing realities of our region and approach offering a clergy position that is feasible for a congregation, as well as equitable for a clergy person?

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The Commission has worked from the premise that housing cost should be about 30% of a person's income. There are locations in the Diocese of Olympia where the current salary scale makes salaries feasible for that percentage of income, and there are a few that are below 30%, but especially in our very urban areas, the cost of housing considerably exceeds 30%. The Commission has examined census, Mission Insite, and Church Pension Group data to be able to gather the median housing cost in the zip code for each congregation and merged that with the average household income in each of those zip codes, along with the congregational grade. The commission was open to feedback from anyone and had interviews and correspondence with clergy serving in more than 10% of diocesan congregations to test our premises. Given the input received, we have prepared a formula. For the year of 2025-2026, we hope to receive feedback on the possibility of applying this formula for clergy and congregations to consider. Based on that feedback, it is the commission's hope to present a resolution for a helpful and effective geographic differential to be applied to the clergy salary scale at the 2026 Convention of our Diocese of Olympia.

Why are we doing this work? We do this in order that our congregations can be as sustainable as possible, and our clergy can either afford to live closer to their congregations, or it is determined that it is not feasible for the congregation to have their clergy person living as close by because of housing costs.

A Possible Example: St. John the Baptist, West Seattle

The Chair will use as an example the congregation with which I serve. St. John the Baptist is located in the 98116 zip code of Seattle, in the North Admiral district of the West Seattle neighborhood. As of the time of the publication of this report, St. John the Baptist is a Grade C Congregation according to the 2025 Congregational Grade Report. The median housing cost in the area of the church is \$1,039,441. Thus, the percentage of the midpoint salary of grade C is \$125,041. Once we apply the cost of mortgage payments in the current housing market, 52% of that salary of \$125,041 is needed to pay mortgage payments on a house costing the median price, according to Zillow. Applying the geographic differential, we are proposing that a new call for rector at a congregation in these circumstances would adjust the midpoint of the salary scale up 10% (\$137,545) in order to make affording a mortgage payment in the area of the church more feasible.

Essentially, taking the midpoint of the congregational grade of a given congregation, and the median housing cost given by Zillow for the zip code the congregation is located in, based on a mortgage with current lending rates has given us a set of percentages to ascertain the amount of money that it appears to take to live in the zip code of the congregation.

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We have grouped congregations in bands where housing costs of the midpoint of the salary scale, given the formula are

- 24% and below
- 26-29%
- 30-49%
- 50-69%
- 72% and up
-

We are asking for feedback on approaching new calls (not existing calls)

- the 24% and below band would be 20% less from the existing salary scale
- 26-29% would be 10% less from the existing salary scale
- 30-49% would be at current scale –no adjustment
- 50-69% would be 10% more than the existing salary scale
- 72% and up would be 20% more than the existing salary scale

- [Housing Data by Zip Code Geographic Differential Data 2025](#)
- [Geographic Differential Graduated Clergy Salary Scale](#)

We invite you to take time after this convention to carefully review the provided tables of information and please keep in mind these things to note, when considering how this might work in a congregation's context:

- For all congregations, we ask that you review this information and consider what it might mean for calling future clergy.
- The geographic differential, if acted upon by the 2026 convention, would only apply to new calls, not for existing calls. Essentially, all current calls would be exempt under previous terms. For further discussion on this, please reach out to the Canon to the Ordinary.
- If enacted by diocesan convention in October 2026, the Personnel Commission currently proposes that the data be revisited and revised every 2-3 years, rather than yearly, unless extreme circumstances in the housing market occur.
- Please note that congregations who provide housing for a clergy person, for those with housing provided, the Personnel Commission is currently suggesting that those congregations would apply 100% of the salary scale.

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- A question would be raised about if a clergy person does not choose to, or is unable to live in the zip codes around the church; is this because the salary does not make it possible for the clergy person to live in the zip codes close to the congregation, or because the clergy person chooses to live in another area (e.g. they already own a house in the region, and do not wish to sell or they need to live close to family which is further away from the congregation), would the geographic differential be applied in those circumstances?
- Considering where we have the percentage breaks in the table—we are working towards a bell curve, within the current economic/housing cost realities of our communities.
- If we receive constructive feedback to be able to present this differential as a resolution to the 2026 convention, we would likely propose that it be applied to all new calls of clergy in congregations beginning January 1, 2027

Another item of note is regarding church-owned housing. Across the wider Church, congregations with rectories/vicarages in either unique geographies or metropolitan areas are tending towards gratitude given the fact that they are able to provide housing (and also hopefully an equity allowance) for clergy people in expensive housing markets. Thus, it is often more financially feasible to have a clergy person serving in those congregations.

The Commission will be asking for feedback informally (simply email elise@sjbwestseattle.org with your thoughts and feedback), as well as formal feedback in the form of a survey early in 2026.

One other area the Personnel Commission concentrated on was resources for **considering compensation** for music professionals serving on church staffs. The Commission was approached in 2024 asking for recommendations regarding compensation for music professionals. In order to both live within the letter of federal law, but also to provide some resources and guidance, we compiled the following resources that might be referred to when considering how to compensate musicians.

[Resources regarding Church Musician Compensation](#)

Additional topics the Personnel Commission hopes to consider in 2026 are the congregational grade formula and consider the issues of inflation, as well as equity data for clergy compensation.

Congregational grades use congregational data to calculate a ‘grade’ for clergy compensation. Congregational grades for 2026 will be calculated on congregational data from 2024. 2026 congregational grades should be published soon after Convention 2025.

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The Commission also gives thanks for the life of The Rev. Karla Koon, may she rest in peace. Deacon Karla was a large contributor to the understanding and study of salary scales and equity. She is missed by many, particularly by the Personnel Commission.

The Commission offers consultation to clergy and congregations about all matters related to human resources. Please contact Dede Moore, Canon for Human Resources, Governance, and Convention or the Rev. Cn. Elise Johnstone, chair (elise@sjbwestseattle.org) with any questions.

Respectfully submitted by the Rev. Cn. Elise Johnstone, chair.

On behalf of commission members:

the Rev. Canon Elise Johnstone

the Rev. Mike Mayor

the Rev. Chuck Huff

Ms. Diane Santiago

Ms. Julene Levin

Canon Dede Moore, *ex officio* (dmoore@ecww.org)

The Rev. Canon Cristi Chapman, *ex officio* (cchapman@ecww.org)