

Study: Southern pastors garner top salaries

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [October 15, 2014](#) issue

Large churches in the South tend to pay their senior pastors the highest salaries, a new survey finds.

That's one of the conclusions on churches and finances released in September by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based church think tank, and the Vanderbloemen Search Group, a Houston-based search firm for churches and ministries.

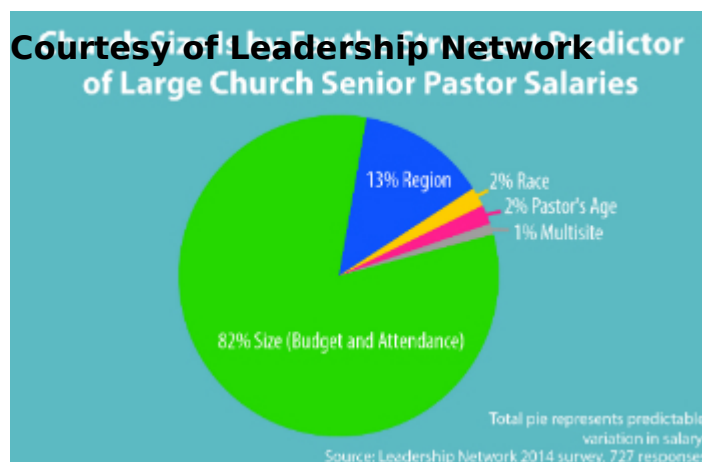
Warren Bird, research director at Leadership Network, said pastors have long held a lofty place of authority in the South, and that may be why they are paid more. Northeastern churches are the second-highest paying, followed by the West and the Midwest. The lowest-paying part of North America is Canada.

The higher pastor salaries in the South contrast with lower-than-average wages for the region, according to the Department of Labor Bureau of Statistics.

A total of 727 North American churches with attendance ranging from 1,000 to more than 30,000 answered survey questions.

Researchers found that donations are slightly higher at those churches that pass the plate, but all churches in the study (available for free at leadnet.org/salary) offered more than one option for giving: 81 percent provide online giving options; 37 percent had a donation box in the lobby; and 25 percent had an electronic kiosk in the lobby. Congregations with more than 10,000 worshipers were least likely to pass offering plates.

Although researchers agreed not to divulge salaries of particular pastors or the identity of participating churches, they were able to determine trends in these congregations, which reflect about one-quarter of the nation's Protestant



worshippers. For example:

- The larger the church, the more the senior pastor is likely to be paid.
- The second-in-command at many churches earns about 70 percent of the salary of the top executive.
- Three-quarters of the churches gave pay raises between 1 and 5 percent; the most common raise was 3 percent for 2014.

Towers Watson, a Virginia-based professional services company, also released a survey in September, finding that U.S. employers plan to give professional employees an average raise of 3 percent in 2015.

Bird said most congregations will get some kind of a report from their leaders about church finances.

“It is extremely rare that the entire congregation will be privy to specific salaries,” he said.

But even people with inside knowledge about church salaries need to know more about how to handle their finances, said Holly Tate, director of business development at Vanderbloemen.

“Churches are known to fall behind in compensation trends, and they end up losing their staff because of it,” she said. —Religion News Service

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