

A black and white photograph of a man walking from left to right in front of a white brick wall. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and jeans, with his arms crossed. The image is used as a background for the article's title and author information.

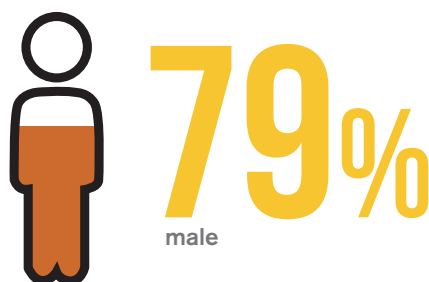
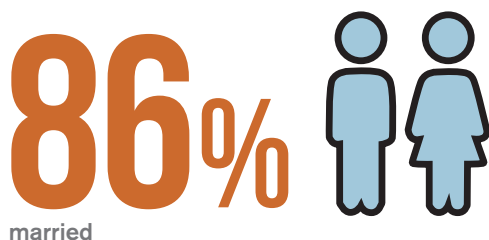
# YOUR RAPIDLY-CHANGING REALITY

OUR ONE-OF-A-KIND SURVEY OF YOUTH MINISTRY SALARIES  
HAS IT ALL—THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY.



By Rick Lawrence

It's the one thing we don't talk about in "polite company"—our financial life. In our 2015 Youth Ministry Salary Survey, you'll confirm what you already know, and ram into some surprises. For example, the typical youth pastor in our survey is... married (86 percent), male (79 percent), 35 years old, has 9.2 years of paid experience, has served at their church four years, and has 40 teenagers in their ministry.

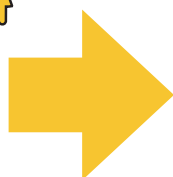
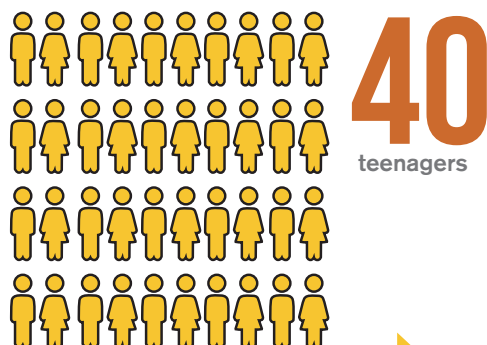


9.2 YEARS OF PAID EXPERIENCE

AT CURRENT CHURCH 4+ YEARS

JUST SHY OF 35 YEARS OLD

AVERAGE CHURCH YOUTH MINISTRY  
IN OUR SURVEY HAS...



- If you're a paid youth pastor, you're among the highest-educated people in the culture, with a third of you (32 percent) earning a Master's or PhD. degree, and four out of five (39 percent) earning an undergrad degree in a youth ministry-related major.
- Most (56 percent) of you have no official limit on paid sick or personal days—if you do, you get an average of eight days per year. A quarter (26 percent) of you have no limit on your paid vacation days—if you do, you get an average of 12 days per year.
- Four out of five of you have not asked for a raise in the last year, but half of you who did, got one. And four out of five of you say you'd consider leaving your current church for a better-paying job at another church.
- Even though average salaries have been slipping for years, three-quarters of the youth pastors who responded to our survey say they're paid fairly.
- A little over half of you (55 percent) know what your senior pastor makes, and about a third (35 percent) think your own salary is fair in comparison.
- A little over half of you (53 percent) say you can afford to live the average lifestyle of an average member of your congregation.
- Only one-third of you get a yearly cash bonus (most likely a "Christmas Bonus"). And hardly anyone (10 percent) thinks it's wrong to accept gifts of money or resources from congregation members.
- A quarter of all married youth pastors say their church expects their spouse to serve as an unpaid "helper" in their ministry.
- Four out of five (80 percent) of you say you're either "very confident" or "confident" in your ability to manage your finances.

#### Ministry responsibilities vary widely...

- More than half (57 percent) say they have additional responsibilities outside of youth ministry at their church.
- Four out of five (37 percent) are responsible for young adults (college age).
- Nine out of 10 (90 percent) are responsible for senior highers.
- A little over nine out of 10 (93 percent) are responsible for junior highers.
- A little over a quarter (27 percent) are responsible for elementary-age kids.
- Four out of five (44 percent) are responsible for family ministry programming.
- Only one out of seven (14 percent) is responsible for music ministry.
- One out of eight (13 percent) is responsible for ongoing building maintenance.
- Over a third (36 percent) are responsible for ongoing tech support at their church.
- Most paid youth pastors contribute from their own personal finances to support their ministry—the average is around \$100 per month.



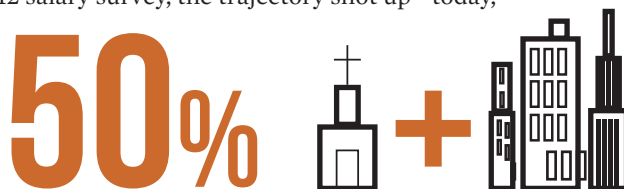
# YEAR-BY-YEAR COMPARISONS

We like to track some aspects of our salary survey results from year-to-year, to watch for trends and insights. Here you can see the profound impact of both the Great Recession (from roughly 2007 to roughly 2014) and the continuing decline in church attendance—that decline has been steeper in the last five years.

- Average salaries peaked in 2010. It took three years of a recessionary economy to begin to drag down compensation in the church. That fits with a general “rule of thumb” in the relationship between church finances and the wider economy—a downturn in the broad economy takes a few years to impact the church, and it takes a few years after an upturn in the broad economy to get traction in the church.
- Salaries are worse-than-flat, if you take inflation into account. Like the rest of the economy, numerical pay gains (even at

their peak in 2010) have not kept pace with cost-of-living increases (the inflation rate over the last 10 years is 22 percent, while average salaries were basically flat over that period).

- The average number of hours-worked goes up, generally speaking, as salaries go up. And, of course, the average goes down as salaries decline or flatten. As a whole, paid youth pastors work an average 45-hour week.
- The most astonishing result of the entire survey is the rapid rise of paid youth workers finding additional sources of income to supplement their salary. For five years (2005 to 2010) the percentage of paid youth workers who reported having another job outside of youth ministry hovered around 15 percent. But starting with the 2012 salary survey, the trajectory shot up—today,



half of all paid youth workers are earning income outside of their church job. This is a reflection of a steep decline in church budgets during a time of steep increase in the costs associated with raising a family.

	2015	2012	2010	2007	2005
Overall Average Base Salary	\$32,300	N/A	N/A	\$32,500	\$30,300
Overall Average Salary Package	\$38,800	\$37,500	\$44,000	\$42,500	\$39,000
Average Salary Package—Men	\$42,850	\$41,200	\$46,000	\$42,500	\$42,500
Average Salary Package—Women	\$27,500	\$27,000	\$36,000	\$37,500	\$33,200
Average Work Week	44 hours	44 hours	52 hours	45 hours	48 hours
Yes, I'm Compensated Fairly	75%	71%	77%	75%	72%
I Have Another Job Outside of Church	50%	36%	13%	15%	17%

# GETTING SPECIFIC

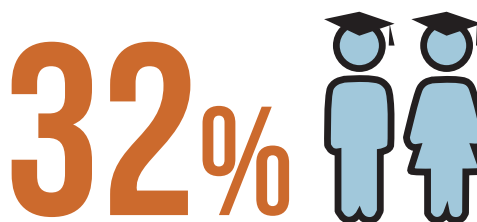
While general numbers give us some broad perspective on salaries and benefits within the American youth ministry community, the really interesting stuff is in the details. Here, you'll find slices of youth ministry salary data you won't find anywhere else. For example...

- The denominations that have the highest average salaries for paid youth pastors include Evangelical Free (\$44,464), Lutheran (\$44,274), Southern Baptist (\$42,894), and Non-Denominational Evangelical (\$42,549).

- Even though more than two-thirds of paid youth pastors responding to our survey (78 percent) say they've seen no impact on their salary from completing a formal youth ministry degree program, it's clear that the higher up you are on the educational ladder, the more money you will make (topping out at \$51,250 for a Ph.D.).
- Generally speaking, the more teenagers in your ministry, and the larger your church, the more you can expect to make.
- Urban youth workers are at both ends of the pay continuum—those who minister in large-city environments make the highest average salaries, those who live in small cities or towns make the least.

- Average salaries are remarkably consistent throughout all five regions of the U.S.—the Southwest region is slightly higher, and the West region is slightly lower.

So get a second cup of coffee, find a comfy chair, and dig into the details...



Have a Masters or Ph.d degree

### Average Salary by Denomination

DENOMINATION	SALARY
Assemblies of God	\$27,171
Baptist	\$38,103
Southern Baptist	\$42,894
Church of Christ	\$41,630
Church of God	\$19,444
Christian & Missionary Alliance	\$40,681
Disciples of Christ	N/A
Episcopal	\$32,500
Independent—Charismatic	\$22,500
Independent—Non-charismatic	\$42,236
Lutheran	\$44,274
Messianic Jewish	N/A
Nazarene	\$23,928
Non-Denominational Evangelical	\$42,549
Pentecostal	\$22,261
Presbyterian	\$37,045
Roman Catholic	\$33,500
Salvation Army	\$34,166
Seventh-Day Adventist	\$37,500
United Methodist	\$36,231
Vineyard	N/A
Willow Creek Association	\$35,500

### Average Salary by Type of Town or City

TYPE OF CITY OR TOWN	SALARY
Large City, in an urban environment	\$46,557
Large City, in a suburban environment	\$36,750
Medium-Sized City, in an urban environment	\$40,046
Medium-Sized City, in a suburban environment	\$34,270
Small City or Town, in an urban environment	\$31,463
Small City or Town, in a suburban environment	\$37,880
Rural area	\$31,989

### Average Salary by Education Level

EDUCATION LEVEL	RESPONDENTS	SALARY
High school graduate	2%	\$21,500
Some college	13%	\$26,319
College graduate	37%	\$33,151
Some graduate work	15%	\$40,213
Graduate degree (Masters)	31%	\$44,427
Graduate degree (Ph.d)	1%	\$51,250
Other	2%	N/A

### Average Salary by Total Number of Teenagers in Ministry

NUMBER OF TEENAGERS	SALARY
less than 10	\$16,818
10-19	\$25,717
20-29	\$32,247
30-39	\$35,581
40-49	\$40,729
50-59	\$43,571
60-69	\$43,796
70-79	\$49,621
80-89	\$58,611
90-99	\$46,428
100-149	\$49,411
150-199	\$55,108
200-249	\$54,375
250-299	\$64,166
300 or more	\$59,833

### Average Salary by Region of the U.S.A.

REGION	SALARY
Northeast (ME, VT, NY, NJ, CT, MA, NH, RI MD, PA)	\$38,844
Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV)	\$38,447
Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI)	\$38,484
Southwest (AZ, NM, OK, TX)	\$39,391
West (CA, OR, WA, AZ, NV, UT, CO, WY, ID, MT, AK)	\$34,967

# Why I Hate Everything to Do With Money

By Brian Berry

I should confess this right away: I hate money, because it never feels like there's enough of it. I'm a husband, a dad to five kids (12 to 17), and I've been a full-time youth pastor for over 20 years. I'm not complaining about my salary, and I'm not trying to make a theological statement about Paul's description of money-love as the "root of all evil."

It's simply the epicenter of the most draining work related to my job and family.

I hate creating and managing budgets, prioritizing purchases, turning in mileage, itemizing receipts for reimbursement, and collecting it from students who want to go on retreats or pay for events. It's my least-favorite "management responsibility" in my most important relationships.

So when I read the early results of GROUP's latest salary survey of American youth workers, the youth pastor in me groaned, while the dad in me (with the first of five kids graduating and heading off to college) had a heart attack. I searched my soul for what was really going on in me, and I discovered that it wasn't a money thing... It's the money comparisons that really gnaw at me.

The survey forced me to ask questions I try to avoid, including:


- How much more money does the senior pastor really make than I do? And is that fair?
- Should my salary really be based on the median income of the constituents of my church?
- Is there really a "master pay scale" that can justify my pay based on experience, schooling, size of congregation, and job responsibilities?

I feel exhausted just typing out these questions, much less go digging for the answers to them. I'd much rather take students out to lunch, pay the bill, then just hand the receipt to someone and move on. And if you resonate with

that thought, then I have two suggestions in response to the data in this survey

**1** Resist the urge to play the comparison game. If we give in to the temptation to find a logarithm that can tell us whether or not we're over- or under-compensated, we'll fall into a trap. Yes, we've earned a wage. No, we don't need to apologize or feel bad about that. But that wage is unique to us—our needs, our church, our physical location, and about a million other variables. There is no real "apples to apples" comparison, so comparison is only valuable if it opens up a conversation about our unique circumstances.

**2** Talk about it. Don't sit in your office and chew over the results of this salary survey on your own. Connect with a few youth ministry peers and talk about your needs, your work, and your pay. In my journey through more than two decades in full-time youth ministry, my pay has changed several times. But I've never received a raise that wasn't tied to a general cost-of-living increase given to all staffers, without me specifically asking for it. My compensation has never been automatically tied to changes in my family or in my role on staff, longevity on a team, the masters of divinity degree I earned, or even growth in my ministry.

Outside of the staff-wide "raise the waterline" raises, we'll NEVER get a raise that doesn't follow an explicit explanation of why we need it, and why it's justified. So talk to others about your situation and get some perspective. Like a tumor, ignoring it won't make it go away or grant you any peace. 

**BRIAN** is a longtime youth pastor in Southern California who is married with five kids—he's author of *As For Me and My Crazy House* and *Criticism Bites* (both published by Group), and is our Family columnist.

## Average Salary by Age

AGE RANGE	SALARY	AGE RANGE	SALARY
Under 25	\$21,810	46-50	\$32,205
25-30	\$39,000	51-55	\$37,111
31-35	\$40,089	56-60	\$42,500
36-40	\$41,603	61-65	\$45,833
41-45	\$40,220	65 and up	N/A

## Average Salary by Years of Paid Youth Ministry Experience

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	SALARY
1	\$19,141
2	\$25,217
3	\$31,075
4	\$32,500
5	\$36,945
6	\$35,227
7	\$33,823
8	\$38,437
9	\$43,352
10	\$45,370
11	\$42,777
12	\$46,667
13	\$54,375
14	\$54,583
15	\$44,239
16	\$51,250
17	\$40,625
18	\$44,642
19	\$66,500
20	\$62,500



# 57%

Have additional responsibilities outside of youth ministry at their church.

## Average Salary by Church Size

NUMBER OF WEEKLY ATTENDERS	SALARY
Less than 50	\$10,500
50-100	\$20,092
101-150	\$25,905
151-200	\$32,653
201-250	\$41,096
251-300	\$32,651
301-500	\$38,413
501-750	\$47,172
751-1000	\$42,750
1001-1,500	\$56,500
1,501-2,000	\$56,911
2,001-2,500	\$47,916
2501-3,000	\$48,500
3,001-3,500	N/A
3,501-4,000	N/A
4,001—and up	\$53,235

## A PEEK INTO THE FUTURE

By Stephanie Caro

As a consultant who travels all over the country, helping churches build healthy youth ministries, I know:

- 1 Churches expect too much work from too little staff, and
  - 2 Youth workers are still working harder, not smarter.
- Half (50 percent) of all youth workers say they need another source of income. Mark DeVries (president of Ministry Architects and my boss) predicts this “outside income” percentage will grow as the number of youth ministry jobs continues to decrease. “Churches are running out of money,” he says. He’s so sure of this trend that he’s launched a non-profit to help youth workers find other sources of income (ministryincubators.com).
  - Youth groups are getting smaller. The Pew Research Center confirms that church attendance is in a continuing decline. What hasn’t decreased (but should) is church leaders’ expectations that “growing the youth group will save the church.”

- Youth workers are making less and doing more. Four out of five paid youth workers make less than \$45,000, and a little under half earn less than \$30,000. Meanwhile, a little over half (56 percent) say they’re expected to serve in other areas outside of youth ministry.
- There IS longevity in youth ministry. Nearly a quarter (22 percent) of the survey respondents have served for 20 years or more. The “profession” of youth ministry is healthier than the dark diagnoses of its critics..
- I hear lots of horror stories about youth workers getting “suddenly fired.” Declining numbers make churches desperate, and it’s easy to make a stagnant youth ministry the target. Two-thirds (65 percent) have been at their jobs five years or less, and more than a third (36 percent) have a tenure less than two years.

**STEPHANIE** is a youth ministry vet, a consultant with Ministry Architects, and our Small-Church Ministry columnist. She lives in Texas.

# The View From the Lead Pastor's Chair

By Tony Myles

As a longtime youth pastor who transitioned into a lead role several years ago, I've lived in the "salary comparison" tension. I once served in a church that paid my senior pastor twice my salary. That was a perfect breeding-ground for bitterness. But now that I'm a lead pastor, I think I was caught in an "apples versus oranges" comparison.


Salary surveys can tempt us into dissatisfaction when we realize how our peers are faring. For example, many respondents in the survey make more than \$95,000, while many others are compensated less than \$10,000 a year.

A better approach is to confess that any amount of money we receive in ministry is an undeserved privilege. Every paycheck or line in a church budget represents the spiritual journey of others' sacrificial tithes and offerings.

I have a pastor friend who's trying to hire a part-time youth worker for his small staff. He's strategizing on how to put together a generous pay package, but adding this position is a stretch. My friend wonders if he should even create the role, since he'd like to offer so much more financially than what his church budget will allow.

I understand his situation—we once had a valuable part-time staffer we almost lost, until we took a risk and

expanded her role to full-time. Our plan backfired when my church couldn't sustain the needed budget. She put up with our financial rollercoaster for a few years, but then (understandably) resigned. Three pieces of advice...

- Be thankful. Celebrate the heart behind your congregation's decision to support your role. Your "graceful" attitude will seed a healthier trust and tone all around.
- Learn trends. Every church has seasons when financial giving dips. It's easy to give in to resentment when these dips impact your income, but that will always make you a victim. Instead, pursue contingency plans—find a seasonal part-time job to tide you over the rough spots.
- Articulate your needs. If you're in a paid role, it's perfectly appropriate to have an honest conversation with church leaders about the congregation's commitment to your position. Honesty in this arena lays the groundwork for trust. 

**TONY** is a lead pastor, youth ministry vet, and regular contributor to GROUP. He lives in Ohio.

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# THE WHOLE PACKAGE

According to a new study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, benefits represent almost one-third (32 percent) of employer compensation costs. That means which benefits you get, and which you don't, have a profound impact on your overall ability to pay your bills. Here's the latest overview of who gets what...

## I Receive These Benefits In My Salary Package:

BENEFIT	PERCENT
Personal/family health insurance	49%
Housing allowance	42%
Ministry resource allowance	39%
Pension/retirement contributions	35%
Continuing education/training allowance	33%
Car/travel allowance	32%
Cell phone & plan	29%
Professional supplies allowance	27%
Contribution to Social Security payment	18%
Use of parsonage or church-provided residence	6%
Home internet access	4%

# THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Everyone knows that issues surrounding money are tough to talk about. The chances are zero in "impolite company." But all of us think about money more than we'd like to admit, and the Bible certainly addresses the topic often enough—with well over 2,000 verses that connect to financial issues in some way. We ask tough questions in our salary survey because we want to make it easier for you to talk honestly and openly about issues that are important in your ministry life.

## How confident are you in your ability to manage your finances?

LEVEL	PERCENT
Very confident	38%
Confident	42%
Somewhat confident	18%
Not very confident	2%



**RICK** Lawrence: has been editor of GROUP for 28 years.

## Compensation Questions

QUESTION	YES	NO	NA
From your most objective viewpoint, have you been compensated fairly this last year?	75%	25%	
If you asked for a raise in the last year, did you get one?	9%	7%	84%
Would you choose to leave a church, or take a job at a new church, because of salary considerations?	40%	60%	
Do you get a yearly cash bonus?	34%	66%	
Do you know the salary of the senior pastor at your church?	55%	45%	
If so, do you think your salary is fair in comparison to your senior pastor's salary?	35%	22%	43%
Do you feel the need to find another source of income—additional paid work—to supplement your church salary?	50%	50%	
Is it wrong to accept gifts of money or resources from congregation members?	11%	89%	
If you had your choice, would you rather be paid an hourly wage instead of a salary?	14%	86%	
If you're married, does your church have an expectation that your spouse will serve in the ministry as an unpaid "helper"?	23%	61%	16%
Can you afford to live the average lifestyle of an average member of your congregation?	53%	47%	