



The 2024

YOUTH PASTOR COMPENSATION REPORT



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THE YOUTH CARTEL



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

We've been at this for seven years, and the Youth Pastor Compensation Survey has now passed 10,000 lifetime responses! The survey is brought to you by Chemistry Staffing in association with The Youth Cartel and ChurchSalary.com. Dan Navarra is the lead researcher and author of this report and serves Chemistry Staffing as a Church Coach, where he helps churches find healthy long-term fits for key roles. Dan also has over fifteen years of youth ministry experience. Special thanks are well deserved for the general editing done, as always, by Mark Oestreicher of The Youth Cartel. The heart of this team remains the empowerment of youth workers to understand their compensation best and equip them to have conversations about their careers and compensation with their churches, ultimately leading to long-term health for the youth workers and the ministries they lead. We care about youth workers!

2023 was an interesting year in the world of compensation for youth pastors. As you'll discover below, the national average continued its slow climb, but that doesn't tell the whole story. A peek underneath the hood of the numbers reveals some...how should we say this?...not-so-good realities. We also chose to revisit the denominational impact on compensation this year since it has been several years since we did this. Which denominations are the most generous? Which pays the least? How do our non-denominational brothers and sisters stack up? Is there such a thing as a 'typical' youth pastor? All this, and more from 2023's data...in the 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report!



DAN NAVARRA
LEAD RESEARCHER & AUTHOR
THE YOUTH PASTOR COMPENSATION REPORT



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

THIS YEAR'S BIG NUMBER

This year, we had 1,108 respondents, over 300 more than last year's survey. Of those 1,108 responses we gathered, 950 youth pastors meet our definition of full-time. For our purposes, full-time is defined as being regularly scheduled for 30 hours or more per week, and our report will mostly address this employee classification. Also, please note that we use the term "youth pastor" as synonymous with any other term meaning an employed youth worker. This language is not meant to indicate anything other than referring to a person who is paid to lead a youth ministry.

The national average salary for a full-time youth pastor in 2023 was \$52,186.

This represents a 1.9% increase over the 2022 national average of \$51,234, the same percentage increase we observed in last year's report. The chart at the end of this section illustrates the trend in our field over the past seven years we've collected data. We've seen an overall increase in the average full-time salary of about 14.5% over the past seven years. We think it's helpful to point out that larger number in the overall landscape of time because we hear from youth pastors all the time who have gone "many years" without seeing a pay increase. Suppose you're not receiving about a 2% increase in salary every year. In that case, you're effectively seeing a pay decrease compared to your peers, and that's before considering how inflation is impacting our economy's wages.

As a basic tool to grow your career, we try to remind our community every year that having an annual review with your supervisor is an essential practice to give yourself a shot at increasing your compensation and being paid a higher wage. When comparing this year's data pool to last year's, a nearly identical percentage of youth pastors did NOT receive an annual review from their supervisor where they had an opportunity to talk about compensation. In 2022, this number was 53%, and was 54% in 2023. Every year, we point to this as a huge factor impacting compensation. Those who had an annual review in the past year earned an average of 7.7% more than those who did not.

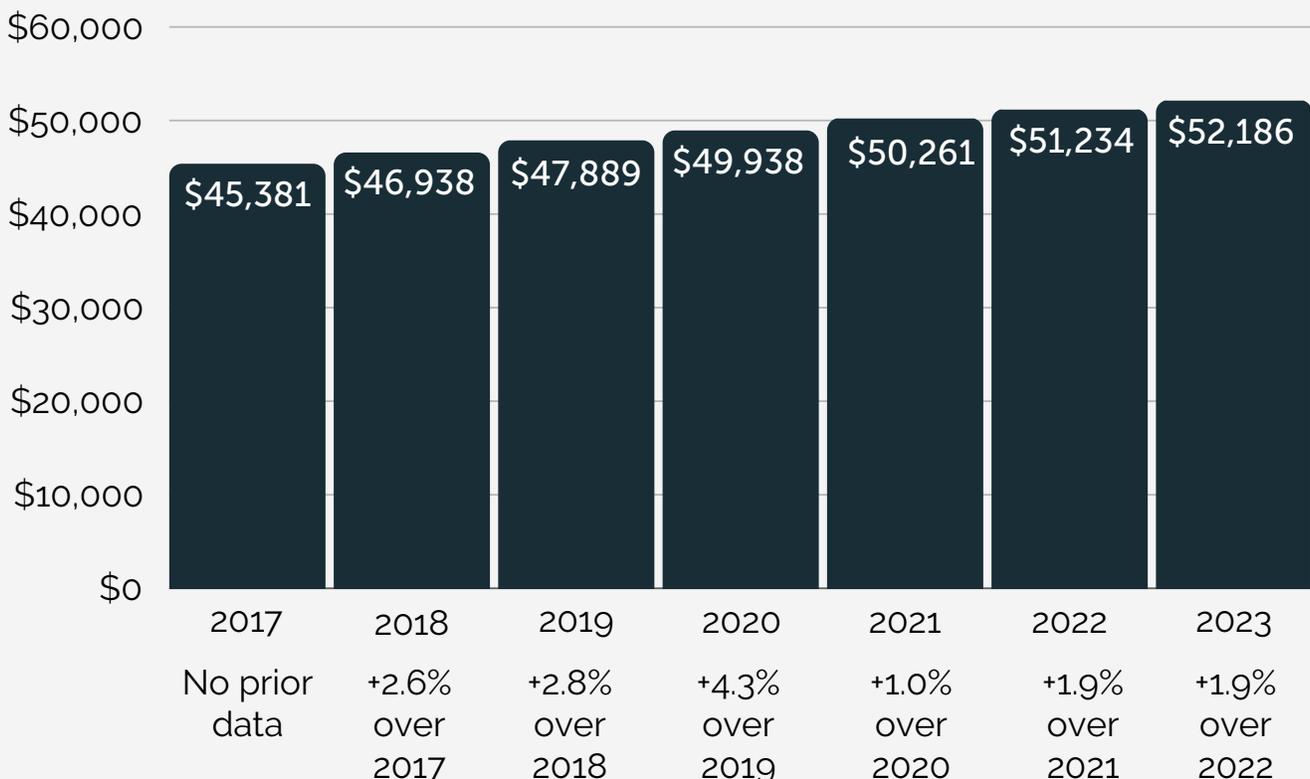


The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

What does this all point to?

Among those respondents who reported receiving no change in compensation in 2023, the total number of those who did not have a review outnumbers those who did by more than a 2:1 ratio. The number of self-declared “pure merit” raises received is also nearly doubled for those who have reviews compared to those who do not. Among those who had a review, there were significantly more “cost of living” raises and more “increased workload” raises earned.

What does this all point to? If you’re NOT talking about compensation with your supervisor every year, odds are you’ll earn less, and are 60% less likely to receive a raise than your peers who are. Not everyone gets to control if they have an annual review, but asking your supervisor or your board for a review is the first step to fixing that. We said this last year, and it continues to prove more true every year: the squeaky wheel has a better chance of getting oil. Just be sure to squeak with humility.





The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

THE FIRST OF THE TWO BIG FACTORS

Church attendance and total church budget have proven over the years to be the two biggest determining factors of a youth pastor's salary.

That trend continued this year. Therefore, you can have less experience or education than another youth pastor. Still, chances are if you work at a bigger church with a bigger budget, you will earn more despite the possibility of having relatively lower qualifications. Attendance, first.

796 churches with an average weekend attendance of 1,000 or less reported having a full-time youth pastor, and their average salary was \$50,882.

Church Attendance	Avg Annual Salary	Number of Churches
50 or less	\$39,750	12
51 - 100	\$41,768	42
101 - 150	\$46,400	103
151 - 200	\$48,148	108
201 - 250	\$48,741	106
251 - 300	\$52,601	97
301 - 400	\$53,309	115
401 - 500	\$54,577	74
501 - 625	\$55,460	47
626 - 750	\$60,222	40
751 - 1000	\$53,490	52
ABOVE TOTALS	\$50,882	796
1000+	\$59,442	157



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

The other 157 churches from the data that carry weekly attendance over 1,000 have an average salary of \$59,442, or 14.4% more than the smaller churches. This represents a similar number to last year's data, so we know this continues to be a trend. Below, we will include a chart illustrating average compensation by church attendance.

While it's not a hard and fast rule, there is a pattern of larger churches paying their youth pastors more. The outlier in our data set, with a fairly significant response pool to back it up, is the church with average weekly attendance between 626 and 750. This church size has a large spike up to \$60,222. While there is no quantitative data to prove this, it is worth wondering if this is the size church that has a smaller handful of pastors and pays them more generously, rather than being in the 751-1000 sized church where perhaps they have a few more pastors but the pie is divided into more slices, so everyone makes a little less, and it comes out more like a church in the 301-400 range. A quick, inquisitive look at these 40 churches reveals they mostly profile as financially stable with low debt and healthy giving (most budgeting in the 1-2M range), 60% of them reporting numerical growth last year, and 40% of them having online viewership of more than 100 each week. Speaking of online viewership, we found a correlation worth discussing.

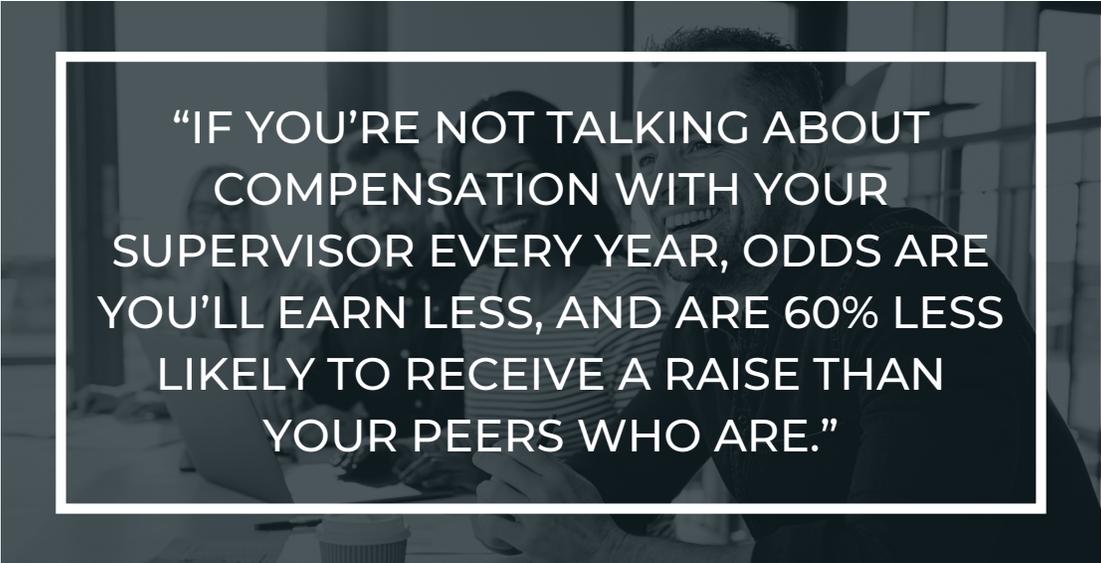
ONLINE VIEWERSHIP AND ITS CORRELATION TO COMPENSATION

Churches with online viewership of 100 or less each week (including those churches who do not make their services available online) averaged a salary of \$50,494–629 of 950 churches with a full-time youth pastor fall into this category. Churches that are in the 100-200 range for online viewership average \$55,959, an increase of about 10%, with 102 out of 950 churches fitting this category. The 128 churches reporting online viewership of 201 or more each week have an average salary of \$57,541, up another 2.8%. Ninety-one youth pastors were unsure of their church's online viewership and averaged a salary of \$52,166.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

The numbers here substantiate a claim that churches with a higher dedication to digital ministry, resulting in higher viewership, pay their staff more generously. Indeed, 881 out of 950 youth pastors do NOT have their youth services available online each week, and they earn an average salary of \$51,900. The 69 youth pastors who ARE providing their youth services online (either live or recorded) each week average \$55,890, an 8% increase in average salary. To further illustrate this point, churches with an in-person weekly attendance of 1,000 or less, youth pastors who do not have their youth services available online average a salary of \$50,768, while those who do make their services available online have an average salary of \$52,786. At churches of more than 1,000 (in-person weekly attendance), youth pastors who don't make their services available online average a salary of \$59,028, and those who do provide online services earn \$61,711. Want to make a case to your boss for a raise this year? In 2024, embrace (emphasize?) digital ministry to expand your reach. Then, discuss this at your annual review.



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The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

THE SECOND OF THE TWO BIG FACTORS

Church Budget	Avg Annual Salary	Number of Churches
1 - 1.5M	\$54,096	128
1.5 - 2M	\$56,174	83
2 - 2.5M	\$58,845	56
2.5 - 3M	\$52,202	25
3 - 3.5M	\$64,146	26
3.5 - 4M	\$65,302	16
4 - 4.5M	\$54,722	9
4.5 - 5M	\$69,360	8
5 - 7M	\$58,243	11
7 - 10M	\$63,241	11
10 - 15M	\$59,485	8
15M+	\$63,602	6
TOTAL	\$57,233	395

The 2023 data regarding the church budget continues to hold. Unremarkably, churches with more money pay their pastors more. 424 Churches with an annual budget of \$1,000,000 or less have a youth pastor with an average salary of \$48,284. In comparison, 395 churches with a budget over the million mark have an average of \$57,233, which is a 15.6% difference similar to the attendance difference highlighted earlier. One hundred thirty-one full-time youth pastors did not know their church's annual budget and earned an average of \$49,601.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

With a budget under a million, a closer look at the breakdown reveals the pattern is still very true. Observe, below, steady increases in average salary as church budget increases.

Church Budget	Avg Annual Salary	Number of Churches
50k or less	\$40,000	1
51 - 100k	\$38,921	11
101 - 250k	\$41,015	44
251 - 500k	\$45,553	124
501 - 750k	\$50,250	132
751 - 1M	\$52,841	112
AVERAGE/TOTAL	\$48,284	423

If you're frustrated with your compensation, it could be for a variety of reasons. Still, the quickest analytics tool you have at your disposal is "Do I know my church's attendance and budget numbers?" If you do, simply ask yourself if you're surprised you're paid what you are, based on where your numbers fall in the compensation landscape. Being informed is step number one. Because no matter how educated or experienced you are, the

biggest hurdles to higher compensation are church size and the corresponding dollars more people coming can give. Here's a piece of (somewhat) good news from this survey: 399 churches from last year's 2022 survey data with a budget of 1 million dollars or less reported paying an average of \$42,485. That means smaller-budget churches increased their youth pastor compensation in 2023 by 12%, when the national average wasn't even up 2%. But there is still work to be done.

It's valuable to speak to a common misconception we often hear about youth pastor compensation. Youth pastors often think youth group size or growth is an indicator of their compensation value, but this simply isn't nearly as reliable of a metric for determining fair compensation compared to church size and church budget.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

In truth, plenty of highly paid youth pastors are running relatively small youth groups when considering the landscape of their church size. They are being paid well compared to smaller-church youth pastors with big youth groups relative to the size of the church. The takeaway is: a bigger youth group doesn't always mean bigger pay, but a bigger church and budget almost always mean bigger pay.

THE OTHER TWO BIG FACTORS

Education and years of experience are the “other” two big factors that can affect compensation.

88% of full-time youth pastors who took this year's survey reported having at least completed a 4-year college degree. 36% of youth pastors have completed a master's degree or higher. Remember, the average annual salary for a youth pastor this year was \$52,186. If you have a master's or higher level of education, your average salary is \$56,004. If you did not, your average was \$50,009– for a gap of 10.7%, similar to last year's 12.2% difference and continuing a narrowing trend from the 14-16% numbers we saw several years ago. A possible implication of this trend where grad school degrees aren't worth the increase they used to be is that churches view qualifications differently than they used to. It also affirms what some of the Chemistry Staffing team have objectively observed in the industry recently where “credentials” on a resume have slightly less weight in job interviews conducted by churches compared to years of experience filled with a proven track record of “skill” in areas which supervisors and hiring staff deem important (for instance: volunteer training, administration, teaching ability, running large events, etc).



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

Perhaps the best thing you can do in 2024 for your career is get some coaching to enhance your skills. Our General Editor, Mark Oestreicher, and The Youth Cartel have observed a significant impact in their 750 coaching program participants experiencing a dramatic increase in conversations with church leadership about all areas of ministry growth and health (and those conversations, as we've seen, often lead to better compensation).

Total years of experience balanced with your current tenure can also affect compensation. Only 13 out of 950 full-time youth pastors have been at their present church for more than 20 years. That's the top 1.3% for those keeping score at home. Those youth pastors earn an average of \$61,721. The majority (673 out of 950, or 71%) of youth pastors have been at their current church for 5 years or less, and they average a salary of \$50,739. If you make it to years 6-10 at the same church (204 of 950), your compensation averages \$54,600. Years 11-15 at the same church average \$57,897 (37 of 950, good for the top 5% of all currently tenured youth pastors). Years 16-20 average \$58,710 (23 out of 950).

This year 44 first-year youth pastors (full-time) reported a first-year salary average of \$46,983. There were 306 youth pastors in years 2-5 of their full-time career who earned an average of \$45,971. This tells us that churches are raising their minimum hiring threshold as wage increases continue to climb. There's a large group of youth pastors who are in year three of their career (meaning they started full-time ministry during the pandemic!) who are earning an average of \$41,966, which is the lowest wage average of years 1-5 of total career tenure. The following chart reveals how total career experience affects compensation.

"WITH INFLATION NUMBERS RAISING COSTS AT HISTORICAL RATES OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, CHURCHES NEED TO MAKE HARD CHOICES TO SUPPORT THEIR KEY TEAM MEMBERS ADEQUATELY."



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

Total Experience	Avg Annual Salary	% of Survey
1 - 5 Years	\$45,971	32%
6 - 10 Years	\$50,460	30%
11 - 15 Years	\$57,433	16%
16+ Years	\$60,097	21%

Youth pastors who stick it out working with students for longer than ten years are rare (less than 38%), and there is clearly a wage premium attached to this inflection point of experience.

Youth pastors with more than ten years of full-time experience earn an average salary of \$58,949. While those with ten years or less earn an average of \$48,157.

WHAT IS THE MAKEUP OF A TYPICAL YOUTH PASTOR?

This section will help you realize how you and your career match up to the “typical” average full-time youth pastor from our data set. You’re all God’s children, and you’re all valuable to the body of Christ. And comparison can be the thief of joy. So enter this section carefully, with a pure heart. Or skip it!

We will use two terms in this section to help quantify typical. The ‘average’ will refer to all the numbers in a given sequence, added together, and then divided by the number of responses we previously added together. For example, $(10+12+17)/3=13$ Average. The second term is “median,” which refers to the middle number of the data set. So, the median number in the prior equation is 12, taken from 10, 12, and 17. The median tells you that half of the people are under the median and half are above the median. We know the typical youth pastor earns an average salary of \$52,791. However, the median salary is \$51,000, meaning some very high salaries among our respondents bring up the average, but half of all full-time youth pastors earn \$51,000 or less.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

To help give context, the median salary from the 2023 report was \$47,500. This is a good thing. Regarding how the average and median relate to each other, the bottom line is that elite salaries exist, but they're not that common. The middle (technically referred to in mathematics as 'median') is less affected by these skewed values than the mean and accurately reflects the "typical" salary. We've never done this before because we always wanted our reports to be apples-to-apples comparing year-over-year data. So, there is not a lot of historical context available for the following data set.

The average youth pastor in our data set is 34.5 years old (median age 32), has 10.4 years average experience (median total tenure is 8 years), has been at their current church for 4.6 years (median current tenure is 3 years), has worked at an average of 2.18 churches (median 2), and is regularly scheduled to be out an average of 1.9 nights per week. The median tenure number of our full-time data set is 8 years of total career experience, meaning there are far more youth workers with less experience than the average youth worker because, obviously, the top end of the range brings the average up significantly (negative skew, for you math nerds).

We had one respondent who has been a youth pastor for 45 years report, and he has spent the past 40 at the same church! The average youth pastor rates their overall satisfaction in their role at their church as 3.97 out of 5 and has an average satisfaction in their compensation of 3.52 out of 5. All that to say, the average lifespan of a youth pastor is 4.78 years (10.4 average total tenure divided by 2.18 average number of churches worked at). Indeed, our 950 youth pastors reported working a total of 9,908 years combined for their careers. Total years worked, divided by 950 youth pastors is 10.43 for the average career tenure of a youth pastor. This is dramatically higher than many of you guessed in a quick informal pole I took on Facebook while writing this paragraph.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

But what if we took out all the super-veterans who might skew the numbers up and just looked at most youth pastors: the 595 out of 950 (62%) with ten or fewer years of career experience? Those youth pastors with ten or fewer years of total tenure worked at 1,005 churches, creating an average of 1.69 churches worked at. They have worked a combined 3308 years, accounting for an average of 5.59 years worked per youth pastor. 5.59 years divided by 1.69 churches equals a 3.307 average tenure at a church. This is also markedly higher than most people stereotype the average lifespan of a youth pastor to be. For context, a quick informal poll from January 9, 2024, that had 314 responses in three hours revealed that less than 7% of all youth workers guessed the average lifespan of a youth pastor was more than 3 years, with nearly 60% believing the average lifespan was two years. Dan Bergstrom from the National Network of Youth Ministries messaged me while the poll was live and said in a prior survey NNYM did, they found that youth pastors who were connected to a network of other youth pastors had an average tenure that was 2.35 times longer than those who aren't connected. So, in 2024, why not connect to another youth pastor or two or three in your area and pray for each other and root for each other? It just may be the thing you need to continue at your current church.

A CHANGE IN TREND FOR THE GENDER WAGE GAP

Every year, we are committed to highlighting data regarding how men and women are comparatively compensated while performing the same role of a full-time youth pastor. In last year's report, 466 male youth pastors reported earning an average of \$54,441, while 218 female youth pastors reported earning an average salary of \$44,504. That amounted to an 18.2% wage gap for 2022—the highest we've ever reported. In 2023, we saw 694 male youth pastors report an average compensation of \$53,937, while their 256 female colleagues reported \$47,441. A quick comparison across years reveals that we had more than two hundred more males report this year than last, and we actually saw the average compensation of men decrease by \$504, amounting to less than -1% change in compensation.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

So while the national average with both genders combined went up 1.9%, the average among men was essentially static. Women, however, jumped from \$44,504 in 2022 to \$47,441 in 2023, which is a 7.2% increase! This has shrunk last year's catastrophic 18.2% wage gap from 2022 to 12%, which reflects a more similar number to prior years. For context, this trend of women seeing a 7% increase and men not seeing any increase would need to continue for another two years to have that wage gap completely closed.

This year, 26.9% of our survey were female respondents. There were 57 youth pastors (6% of our responses) who took a pay cut in 2023. 31% were female. Another 243 youth pastors (25.6%) reported receiving no change in compensation last year, with 28% of them being female. 19.6% of all youth pastors reported receiving some sort of bonus last year that was NOT cash. 30% of those were female. Each of these numbers represents an improvement from last year where female youth pastors are experiencing similar career paths compared to their male counterparts.

MAINLINE DENOMINATION IMPACT ON COMPENSATION

It has been several years since we've taken a closer look at denominations and their various compensation, so we have chosen to revisit that this year. There are 22 denominational entities that churchsalary.com uses for their salary reports, so we've chosen to mirror their denominational breakdowns as our benchmark every year. We always get feedback in our comment section pointing out how many of you feel like your denomination isn't accurately represented in our options, and while we would love to list all of them, it wouldn't make for a very compelling data set. As it was this year, we had 22 denominations listed and only 10 of them had twenty or more respondents. Here's the breakdown of those ten denominations. We are doing this with a gender slant to it, as that helps inform everyone in an equitable way. The table below represents 865 of 950 (91%) full-time youth pastors in our survey and has a total average salary of \$52,279, which is within \$100 of the national average of all 950 in total.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

Denomination	# Male	Male Avg	# Female	Female Avg.	Total Avg.
Assemblies of God	33	\$48,038	9	\$37,231	\$45,72228
Baptist	205	\$55,834	21	\$46,434	\$54,961
Church of Christ	25	\$59,549	3	\$51,793	\$58,718
Evangelical Free	30	\$59,479	1	\$37,000	\$58,764
Lutheran	11	\$57,763	20	\$47,750	\$51,303
Methodist	57	\$50,354	92	\$46,850	\$48,191
Nazarene / Orthodox	17	\$43,835	14	\$44,390	\$44,086
Non-Denominational	202	\$53,760	32	\$45,543	\$52,636
Presbyterian / Reformed	36	\$57,626	33	\$52,088	\$54,977
Wesleyan	21	47,708	3	\$55,000	\$48,620

Obviously, there is a wide range of compensation factors affecting these numbers. Everything from theology to licensing and ordination requirements weighs into how different governing bodies view their youth pastors. Some are high, some are lower. The non-denominational melting pot coming in at \$52,636 is \$450 more than the national average and within 1%. 137 out 149 (91.9%) Methodist youth pastors do NOT receive a housing allowance, meaning their denomination hasn't given them licensing that qualifies them for this benefit. 55 out of 69 (79.7%) Presbyterian / Reformed youth pastors do not receive a housing allowance, but they still earn nearly \$10,000 per year more than Assemblies of God youth pastors.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

However, only 12 out of 42 (28.5%) of Assemblies of God youth pastors don't receive the housing allowance benefit; meaning many of these pastors have been licensed or ordained by their denominational body but still are low-compensated compared to other denominations. For comparison, 74 out of 234 (31.6%) non-denominational youth pastors do not receive a housing allowance. The housing allowance is a great benefit for ministerial workers that should be a part of every youth pastor's interview process when they talk to a church so they can best understand their overall compensation package and the tax consequences it entails.

IN SUMMARY & A WORD FOR YOUR BOSS

The male average salary staying basically static in 2023 is a big storyline to follow in future years. Because, if there is a new salary ceiling being established, the church is in danger of losing youth pastors at an alarming rate since our nation's inflation has continued its rapid increase. The industry needs to continue to see wage increases year over year. Females need to continue to see their more aggressive wage increases in order to continue to move towards aligning more equally with their male counterparts. Many churches are employing fewer staff members than they did several years ago, often choosing to take up a departing person's salary and chop it up to add to other remaining staff members rather than re-hire. Charitable giving for many churches has dropped significantly. And yet, many reports offer some hope: millennials are returning to church at their highest rate since 2019. That means young families are coming to church, and their kids are heading for youth groups. Churches will feel the need, and hopefully adjust accordingly. Digital ministry has created a surge for many churches that has led to healthier finances. Yet this career is still difficult for most churches to fund appropriately, let alone create a margin for a less stressful financial picture. With inflation numbers raising costs at historical rates over the past few years, churches need to make hard choices to support their key team members adequately. If not, they will lose these crucial employees, burn them out, or both. And replacing them is often more costly than churches think.



The 2024 Youth Pastor Compensation Report

For the bosses (overseers, elders, boards, senior and executive pastors, etc.) of youth pastors who read this survey every year: you have the power, even if there isn't a lot of money in the budget! Increase non-cash benefits. Give generous paternity/maternity policies to your younger staff members as they start families. Pay for tuition or books if your youth pastor is pursuing higher education. Figure out how to give your youth pastor a housing allowance and teach your youth pastor how to leverage it. Find a cabin or vacation home from somebody in the church and give it to your youth pastor for a long weekend away for free. Give a paid sabbatical to your youth pastor, without them having to exhaust their PTO. Wait, that reminds me...give PTO and additional "comp time" for long weeks with extra hours like camps and mission trips! If you're able to consider a female candidate, pay them the same as a male candidate, regardless of whether or not they are the primary breadwinner in their home. Pay for coaching so your youth pastor can grow their thinking and skillset. And ****please**** have annual reviews with your youth pastor where it is safe for them to talk about their performance and compensation. Finally, give your youth pastor a raise; they probably deserve it!

"IF THERE IS A NEW SALARY CEILING BEING ESTABLISHED, THE CHURCH IS IN DANGER OF LOSING YOUTH PASTORS AT AN ALARMING RATE SINCE OUR NATION'S INFLATION HAS CONTINUED ITS RAPID INCREASE."

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