



Subject: Tax Tips for Pastors

Clergy who are “ordained, commissioned and/or licensed”, and who are employed by churches or other religious organizations, are subject to a unique set of tax laws which create tax-savings opportunities for them.

Pastors can save taxes by carefully considering the following factors:

- ✓ Carefully establish your tax-exempt “housing allowance” by estimating each year’s housing expenses. Don’t forget furnishings and décor when estimating your annual housing costs. **It is better to “set” the housing allowance “on the high side”** as opposed to setting it too low. The housing allowance should be approved in writing every year by the employer.
- ✓ A pastor should be reimbursed for job-related expenses, such as vehicle business mileage, reference materials, supplies, etc., pursuant to an **“accountable expense reimbursement plan”**. Expenses reimbursed in that manner are not subject to tax, whereas non-accountable “allowances” are fully taxed.
- ✓ Pastors can “opt out” of social security taxation **IF** they are religiously opposed to a government system of retirement and disability benefits. The election to “opt out” must be made shortly after the pastor is officially ordained or licensed. **IF** a pastor has opted out of social security, the pastor should contribute as much as possible to other retirement accounts, including Roth-IRAs, 401(k) or 403(b) Roths. **Roths are particularly attractive if the pastor’s housing allowance and deduction for charitable contributions limits the pastor’s tax bracket to 15% or less.**
- ✓ **A pastor should thoroughly review the fringe benefit package offered by his/her employer.** Flexible spending accounts, health savings accounts and Section 125 “cafeteria plan” benefits can all be used to generate income tax savings for pastors and their families.
- ✓ A church or other religious organization employer is not required to withhold Federal or State income tax from a pastor’s wages. **HOWEVER, many churches agree to withhold those taxes as an “accommodation” to their pastors** so that those pastors need not pay quarterly estimated tax payments.

AccuPay processes payroll for dozens of churches, and also works with numerous business owners who hold leadership positions in their local churches. Call us at 885-7600 if you have any questions about payroll for your pastor or church.

PayDay is an email communication of payroll news, legal updates and tax considerations intended to inform clients and colleagues of AccuPay about current payroll issues and planning techniques. You should consult with your CPA or tax advisor before implementing any ideas, comments or planning techniques.

