Stipends Committee Report

1. Introduction

The Stipends Committee has responsibility for proposing the level of minimum stipend and allowances to apply to ministerial placements. This generally requires an annual process of review which may result in appropriate recommendations to Synod or Synod Standing Committee. Stipends Committee comprises ministers, members of local congregations, local church treasurers and persons with employment, and financial management expertise. The Committee is acutely aware of the difficulty that some congregations experience in meeting costs of ministry and the pressures facing some stipended families in meeting their financial needs. In bringing any proposed adjustments to stipends and allowances the Committee considers a wide range of relevant aspects.

The Committee, prior to recommending changes to the SA Synod stipends and allowances investigates the level of stipends and allowances being paid in other synods; is informed by other information including policies, by-laws and impacting internal and external factors. Local economic data, community wage movements including average weekly earnings, CPI figures and trends in cost of housing are also considered. In addition, the Committee considers the deliberations and outcomes of the Annual Wage Review conducted by the Fair work Commission.

At the last Synod meeting, the Stipends Committee reported on setting both 2024 and 2025 minimum stipends and allowances. This report reflects on the setting of 2026 minimum stipend and allowances, which occurred at the end of 2025. The Committee always wrestles with the challenge of the uncertain economic climate, weighing up a number of factors, seeking to discern whether to recommend an increase, and if so, at what time and how much. It is noted that a challenge in not granting an increase is that the gap can never be caught up.

2. Membership

The Stipends Committee is currently comprised of:
Mr Brian Hern (Chairperson)
Rev Philip Gardner (General Secretary)
Rev Sue Page (Associate General Secretary, Governance & Operations) Secretary
Mr Peter Battersby (EO Resources)
Mr Peter Hampton
Mrs Margaret Davidson
Dr Valerie Aloa
Rev Richard Telfer
Mr Malcolm Wilson
Ms Karen Granger (HR Manager)

3. Setting the 2026 Minimum Stipend and Allowances

Due to the change in the timing of our Synod meetings, it is not practical to present recommendations in relation to the following year's ministerial stipend and allowances to the Synod meeting. The relevant information on which recommendations can be based is not available until later in the calendar year. Accordingly, it is necessary to present any recommendations relating to the ministerial stipend and allowances to Synod Standing Committee. All decisions of approved changes to ministerial stipends and allowances rates are to be reported to the next meeting of the Synod.

Stipends Committee reported the 2024 & 2025 Stipend changes to the October 2024 Synod meeting. This year's report, due to the Synod being held in June will contain information on the 2026 Stipends, approved by Synod Standing Committee in late 2025. The Synod Standing Committee will approve the 2027 Minimum Stipends and Allowances Schedule later in 2026.

3.1 2026 Minimum Stipend

The Stipends Committee always starts its deliberations by being reminded of the Theology of Stipends – that the stipend is not a salary but a living allowance, and that Ministers are not employees of the church, but rather are in a covenant relationship with the church.

The increasing cost of living was a major factor to be addressed. This means we needed to be very careful about relying on historical metrics. These factors have impacted the capacity of some congregation members to contribute and hence, has impacted churches financial position.

Among significant factors considered late last year were that in 2025, CPI and inflation and employment were steadying, with interest rate cuts expected in 2026.

The challenge of recommending any increase of stipend and allowances is what level of increase can congregations afford? However, there is also a justice issue - if we don't increase close to or line with inflation and CPI, we contribute towards a difficult financial situation for recipients. It was recommended that the minimum stipend be increased in 2026 to $70,024.50 per annum. This is an increase of 2.6 % from the 2025 level.

3.2 Accommodation Allowance

All ministry agents in placement are entitled to provision of accommodation, whether by provision of an appropriate manse or an accommodation allowance. Housing costs including rental have risen sharply in the past few years.

In 2025 a review was conducted into how the Accommodation Allowance is calculated. New policy was approved by Synod Standing Committee in October 2025.

Please see:

ATTACHMENT A: Accommodation Allowance Update

3.3 Professional Development Allowance

Professional Development Allowance is payable to ministry agents in placement.

For 2026, it was recommended that the professional development allowance be increased by 2.6%.

3.4 Candidates Resource Allowance

A resource allowance is payable to each candidate in full-time training for the ministry, with a pro-rata allowance to be paid to candidates studying part-time.

For 2026, it was recommended that the Candidates Resource allowance be increased by 2.6%.

3.5 Motor Vehicle Allowances (Depreciation and Standing Charges)

The Motor Vehicle allowances, including fuel prices and travel, were considered by Stipends Committee

For 2026, it was recommended that motor vehicle allowances (depreciation and standing charges) not be increased, with a review to be conducted in 2026 into how the motor vehicle allowances are determined.

3.6 Preaching Fees

In respect of preaching fees, there will a payment of preaching fees to retired ministers, ministers who are in receipt of an annual income which is less than the minimum stipend and theological students (other than students on placement for field education) for one service or an increased amount for two or more services in one day. There will be reimbursement of travelling expenses to all preachers (including Lay Preachers) at the minimum rate of cents per kilometre plus or minus local adjustments, if any.

For 2026, it was recommended that Preaching Fees remain at $100.00 for one service and $150.00 for two or more services.

3.7 Travelling Fees

Motor vehicle running costs are set at the minimum rate of cents per kilometre to reimburse those ministers retired, or other persons serving the church part-time as chaplains or in other capacities for travel on church business.

In November 2025, Stipends Committee reviewed prices over the past year, and noted the continued volatility, but that the average price of fuel is lower than it was this time last year.

We also reviewed how these allowances have been changed over the past 8 years and found that various methods have been used (from a percentage increase based on economic data to taking the average fuel price at a point in time and applying the same percentage increase across all travelling allowances).

After this review (and acknowledging our commitment to reviewing the methodology for determining all motor vehicle allowances in 2026), the Stipends Committee have determined to recommend to SSC the following:

- **A.12** Set Minimum Retail Petrol Price be set to $1.80 per litre. This is a decrease of 20c/ litre from 2025 but follows the downward trend of average fuel price. Anecdotal evidence suggest that this allowance is rarely used. It is part of a complicated formula explained in the Stipends Handbook as: ‘Where the minimum retail price of petrol varies from that set per litre in the locality, the minimum base rates are to be increased or decreased by 0.12 cents per kilometre for every 1 cent per litre that the local price exceeds or is less than that set per litre.’
- **A.11** Travelling – retired ministers/ part time/ lay preachers/ lay persons be set to 0.88 cents per kilometre. This is an increase of 22.79 cents or 35%. Stipends Committee decided to use the Australian Taxation Office’s cents per kilometre rate. This allowance is used by congregations to reimburse visiting preachers, and for presbyteries and the synod to reimburse those lay or ordained members travelling to meetings from the Travel Equalisation Fund.
- **A.9** Travelling Own vehicle be set to 35.2 cents per kilometre. This is 40% of A.11 which is the historic percentage difference between these two rates.
- **A.10 and b** will be removed from the schedule as leasing is very rarely used.

At the time of writing this report, fuel prices have spiked due to hostilities in the Middle East. Stipends Committee will meet to review travelling fees and commence the review of motor vehicle allowances and recommend any adjustments to Synod Standing Committee in due course.

3.8 Ministers Benefit Fund

There is an annual contribution, paid monthly by the respective body, to the Ministers Benefit Fund for each minister in a Congregation(s), Presbytery, Synod, Assembly or other approved placement. The Ministers Benefit Fund continues to provide assistance to Ministers, congregations and other appointing bodies for Minsters impacted by sickness, work place injury and/or compassionate grounds. The contribution has for the past several years remained constant in the order of 4% of the minimum stipend. This level of contribution is continues for 2026.

3.9 Remote Ministry Allowance

A remote/rural ministry allowance is payable to ministers and Frontier Services patrols residing in a location defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS Review on Remoteness 2001) as ‘moderately accessible’, ‘remote’ or ‘very remote’.

For 2026, it was recommended that remote ministry allowances be increased by 2.6%

3.10 Travel Equalisation

There has been a set payment per annum by the Congregation(s) or other Appointing Body to the Motor Vehicle Travel Equalisation Scheme in respect of each ministry agent. The funds held in the Travel Equalisation Fund have been shared across the three presbyteries and the synod to reimburse ministers and members travelling to presbytery and synod meetings, including JNCs, Placements, PRC, Presbytery or Synod Standing Committee, or other synod or presbytery committees. Due to the high balance in the fund, payments into the fund from congregations were suspended in 2024 and 2025 remain suspended in 2026.

3.11 Beneficiary Fund

This fund has for several years been managed by Mercer Super Trust. Ordained Ministers can elect to be members of this fund or another superannuation fund of their choice. Contributions are based as percentages of the notional stipend. Employing bodies and Minsters both contribute.

As advised at the 2015 annual meeting the Notional Stipend is now declared to align with the fiscal year. The SA Synod meeting approved that the Notional Stipend and accompanying Beneficiary Fund contribution levels declared by 1 July each year not be applied until 1 January the following year.

Based on full time placement the 2026 superannuation contribution by employing bodies is $10,584.00 with a minister's annual contribution being $4,236.00.

Please see:

ATTACHMENT B: 2026 Minimum Stipends & Allowances Schedule A

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4. Summary Remarks

South Australia has adopted a more "flexible" approach to the use of stipend packaging for tax purposes in that persons can elect to have up to **50% of the minimum stipend** plus 100% of allowances to be paid into a Minister's Fringe Benefit Account (FBA). This can mean that Ministers filling placements of up to .5FTE stipend can have the entire stipend they receive plus 100% of all allowances paid into an FBA. This has the capacity for both full and part-time placements, to result in the real difference in "usable" (post-tax) stipend and allowances between the SA Synod and others is much less. It should be noted that this is based upon existing FBT laws and the practices adopted in other Synods. These may change and caution should be exercised in placing longer term reliance upon the FBT arrangements in this context.

Brian Hern

Chairperson, on behalf of SA Synod Stipends Committee
10 April 2026

The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

ACCOMMODATION ALLOWANCE UPDATE

Pending an update to the Ministerial Stipends and Related Conditions of Placements Handbook, this update provides information on the Accommodation Allowance that applies to new placements from 1 January 2026.

In 2025, Stipends Committee conducted a review into the basis and calculation of minimum Accommodation Allowance (AA) for ministry placements. The following was approved by Synod Standing Committee to apply to new placements from 1 January 2026. Arrangements for current placements will not change. Except where by agreement of all parties, for placements made prior to 1 January 2026, the new arrangements may be implemented, as long as the Ministry Agent is not disadvantaged.

Four categories are relevant that impact how the AA is determined:

1. Urban congregational placement
2. Urban non-congregational placement
3. Rural congregational placements
4. Rural non-congregational placement

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

For all categories (rural, urban, congregational, or non-congregational),

1. Where a placement has a manse, the expectation is that it will be made available for their Minister.
2. Normally, if a manse is available, the Minister should live in the manse.
3. The AA set by Stipends committee is a minimum – appointing bodies may determine to pay more than the minimum

For congregational placements, whether urban or rural:

1. Manses or rented properties will be located within 10kms or 30 minutes' drive from the congregational placement
2. It is preferable that every placement equal to or greater than 0.6FTE has a manse.

Non-congregational placements, whether urban or rural that are Chaplaincy placements are excluded from the requirement for a manse to be provided. The Accommodation Allowance is to be paid, with the addition of holding costs (10% of AA).

URBAN CONGREGATIONAL PLACEMENTS

If a manse is available, but by agreement between the congregation and the Minister, the Minister lives in their own home, AA will be paid.

If no manse is available and the Minister lives in their own home, the AA will be paid. In addition to the AA, a payment equivalent to 10% of AA will be paid in addition (i.e. 110% of AA) to provide for the holding costs that the Minister bears themselves if in their own home, which would be paid for by the congregation if they were in the manse. These holding costs include: council rates, water rates, building insurance, emergency services levy.

If no manse is available and the Minister does not own their own home, the congregation will rent appropriate accommodation for the Minister. The determination of what is appropriate will be agreed to by the congregation, the Minister, with support by the Presbytery, taking into account the personal circumstances of the Minister, the location of the church, and what the congregation can afford. The rental agreement will be signed by the Property Trust.

If the weekly rent is above the average weekly rent for ‘all houses’ on website SQM Research - Property - Weekly Rents - Adelaide the additional cost normally will be shared by the placement and the Minister, unless otherwise agreed. The Presbytery will be part of the conversation where this is negotiated.

URBAN NON-CONGREGATIONAL

(The current policy does not require a manse to be provided to a Minister in non-congregational placements). New policy - as for urban congregational placements.

Basis of calculation of Accommodation Allowance

For urban congregational and urban non congregational placements, the Accommodation Allowance will be calculated as 60% of average house rent in Adelaide as at September 2025 for the 2026 Stipends Schedule. The average house rent will be sourced from this website: SQM Research - Property - Weekly Rents - Adelaide using the ‘all house’ category.

RURAL CONGREGATIONAL

If a manse is available, but by agreement between the congregation and the Minister, the Minister lives in their own home, the rural AA will be paid.

If no manse is available and the Minister lives in their own home, the rural AA will be paid. In addition to the AA, a payment equivalent to 10% of rural AA will be paid in addition (i.e. 110% of rural AA) to provide for holding costs that the Minister bears themselves if in their own home, which would be paid for by the congregation if they were in the manse. These holding costs include: council rates, water rates, building insurance, emergency services levy.

If no manse is available and the Minister does not own their own home, the congregation will rent appropriate accommodation for the Minister. The determination of what is appropriate will be agreed to by the congregation, the Minister, with support by the Presbytery, taking into account the personal circumstances of the Minister, the location of the church, and what the congregation can afford.

If the weekly rent is above the average weekly rent for 'all houses' on website SQM Research - Property - Weekly Rents - Adelaide the additional cost normally will be shared by the placement and the Minister, unless otherwise agreed. The Presbytery will be part of the conversation where this is negotiated.

RURAL NON CONGREGATIONAL

(The current policy does not require a manse to be provided to a Minister in non-congregational placements). New policy - as for rural congregational placements

Basis of calculation of Rural Accommodation Allowance

The Rural Accommodation Allowance for rural congregational and rural non - congregational placements, the Accommodation Allowance will be calculated as **50%** of average house rent in Adelaide as at September 2025 for the 2026 Stipends Schedule. The average house rent will be sourced from this website: SQM Research - Property - Weekly Rents - Adelaide using the 'all house' category.

The lower percentage used is to recognize that rents in rural areas are generally lower than in urban areas.

PART TIME PLACEMENTS

If a Minister is in a part time placement (regardless of FTE) normally:

- If a manse is provided, the Minister shall contribute an amount equivalent to the remaining percentage FTE of Accommodation Allowance.
- If the Minister is in their own home, the congregation will pay the pro rata FTE of AA, plus a pro rata of the 10% holding costs.

- If the placement rents accommodation for the Minister, the Minister contributes an amount equivalent to the remaining percentage FTE of the rental amount.

Unless otherwise agreed by the placement.

Important: Congregations and non-congregational placements are encouraged to be generous when discussing accommodation allowance/ manse provision for part time placements.

For further guidance, or if you have any questions about this new methodology for calculating the Accommodation Allowance, please contact Sue Page, Associate General Secretary, Governance & Operations via email spage@sa.uca.org.au or phone 8236 4217

Ministers Stipend, Allowances & Charges

SCHEDULE A commencing 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026

	Item	$ per year	$ per quarter	$ per month	$ per f/night	$ per week
	Contributions					
A.1	Minimum Stipend	$70,024.50	$17,506.13	$5,835.38	$2,693.25	$1,346.63
A.2 U	Accommodation Allowance Urban*	$20,875.00	$5,218.75	$1,739.58	$802.88	$401.44
A.2 R	Accommodation Allowance Rural*	$17,396.00	$4,349.00	$1,449.67	$669.08	$334.54
A.3	Professional Development	$2,312.00	$578.00	$192.67	$88.92	$44.46
A.4	Candidates Resources Allowance	$2,683.00	$670.75	$223.58	$103.19	$51.60
A.5	Beneficiary Fund or Superannuation	$10,584.00	$2,646.00	$882.00	$407.08	$203.54
A.6	MV Depreciation	$7,179.00	$1,794.75	$598.25	$276.12	$138.06
A.7	MV Standing Charges	$4,003.00	$1,000.75	$333.58	$153.96	$76.98
A.8	MV Leasing Charges	to be removed - negotiated as required				
A.9	Travelling Own vehicle	35.2 cents per kilometre				
A.10	Travelling Leased Vehicle	to be removed - negotiated as required				
A.11	Travelling Retired Ministers / Part Time / Lay Persons / Lay Preachers	88 cents per kilometre				
A.12	Set Minimum Retail Petrol Price	$1.80 per litre				
A.13	Preaching Fees One Service	$100.00				
A.14	Preaching Fees two or more services	$150.00				
A.15	MV Travel Equalisation	suspended	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
A.16	Ministers Benefit Fund	$2,801.00	$700.25	$233.42	$107.73	$53.87
A.17	Long Service Leave	$2,293.00	$573.25	$191.08	$88.19	$44.10
A.18	Remote Allowance / Moderately Accessible	$1,930.00	$482.50	$160.83	$74.23	$37.12
A.19	Remote Allowance/Remote	$2,893.00	$723.25	$241.08	$111.27	$55.63
A.20	Remote Allowance/Very Remote	$3,862.00	$965.50	$321.83	$148.54	$74.27
	Ministers Contributions					
A.21	MV Leasing Charges	As specified - depending on vehicle choice etc.				
A.22	Beneficiary Fund / Superannuation	$4,236.00	$1,059.00	$353.00	$162.92	$81.46

??Travel adjustment of 0.12 cents per km for every 1 cent variation in fuel price.

The fortnightly rates are based on 26 pays per year. If there are 27 pays in the year, revised pay rates will need to be calculated.

*A.2U &A.2R If no manse is available and the Minister lives in their own home, an addition 10% of the AA is paid - this is for new placements from 1 January 2026