

# 10 VITAL CONVERSATIONS FOR SUPPORTING CHURCH WORKERS



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## HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY WITH YOUR LAY LEADERS

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The asterisk (\*) preceding each question or statement denotes the **Short Study** (20 minutes) and all other questions the **Long Study** (45 minutes).

The *italicized* words after each question or statement are leader's notes/answers.

Each Bible study is outlined by the following sections:

### **GOD'S WORD**

Understanding that God's Word is the final authority for these discussions, this section will introduce the topic from a general context.

### **ENGAGE GOD'S WORD**

Understanding the general context from Scripture, now the participant(s) will examine more deeply specific texts in relation to the topic.

### **APPLICATION**

Understanding how God's Word reveals key insights on this topic to the participants to apply this portion of God's Word to their lives.

### **STRATEGIC RESPONSE**

This is a plan of action to help and encourage your church workers in this particular area of their ministry. By the time you reach this section in the Bible study, the ideas will be flowing regarding how you can help your church workers. You may also use this part of the Bible study, as time permits, to brainstorm with your group new strategies that are not mentioned in the study.

# CONVERSATION #1

## Pay and Benefits

*1 Corinthians 9:7-14*

For Discussion

### FOR THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP GROUP:

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1. How does your congregation go about setting a budget? How are salaries and benefits determined?
2. At what point in the budget process are salaries and benefits determined? Are they ever determined apart from the congregation's budget discussions?

### FOR THE LAY LEADER:

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1. Since your church workers express a desire to serve, is there some temptation to keep their salaries and benefits at a "servant's" level? Why is that?
2. What profession is comparable to a church worker? How do they stack up to the church worker in terms of salary and benefits?
3. What things can you do to increase the financial care for your church workers?

## FOR THE **PROFESSIONAL WORKER**:

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1. How do you bring up discussions of your financial needs with your congregation?
2. In what ways can a church worker help a congregation explore options to fund its mission without cutting salaries?

**GOD'S WORD**

What topic is mentioned more than anything else in the Bible?

*Money! The Bible either directly or indirectly mentions the topic of finances 2,350 times.*

\*Why is the topic of money (including pay and benefits) such a “touchy” subject in many churches today?

*Many churches are struggling to achieve and/or maintain a balanced budget, for any number of reasons, including people's lack of consistent giving to the ministry of the church.*

Should church workers be paid comparably to their secular counterparts (i.e., comparing type of work, level of education, number of hours each week, etc.)?

*Open discussion; listen to opinions.*

\*What does God's Word say about taking care of church workers? Read Luke 10:1–7 and 1 Timothy 5:17–18. Briefly discuss how both texts address this topic.

*Lead participants to understand that God's Word is consistent in mandating the need to take care of those who serve God professionally in the church.*

Read Leviticus 7:28–38. How did God see to it that the priests were taken care of in the Old Testament (and “for the generations to come”)? How might this Levitical law guide (or differ from) our understanding of the church's provision for its workers today?

*A portion of what the people were to bring for sacrifice was shared with Aaron and the priests.*

## ENGAGE GOD'S WORD

\*Read 1 Corinthians 9:7–14

\*What is the implied answer to the three questions in verse 7?

*“No one.”*

\*Why?

*It would be fully expected that the soldier would receive supplies from the commander or those above him, and the vineyard owner and herdsman would partake of the fruits of their labors.*

Where is Paul trying to direct our attention in verse 8?

*Paul uses his previously obvious examples in order to make the point that the next questions should be just as obvious to the reader. “Doesn’t the Law say the same thing?” These words reveal his understanding of the Old Testament Law to substantiate his point in verse 9. In other words, Paul is saying that God’s Word is consistent on this issue.*

How does Paul interpret the phrase, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deut. 25:4)?

*The muzzle would prevent the ox from eating while working. Humane treatment of the oxen would allow them to keep well-fed while working the mill.*

Who is to benefit from this saying? Why?

*Those working to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ are meant to benefit from this metaphor. It’s difficult and sometimes frustrating work bringing God’s perfect love into an imperfect world of sin. Instead of making the*

*work even harder by “muzzling” (note the double-meaning!) the workers, they should be encouraged and provided for appropriately.*

\*Paul uses the examples of a plowman and a thresher as people who work hard and also share in the harvest that is reaped. How does this tie in with 1 Corinthians 9:11-12?

*Paul paints a complete picture of the harvest — from plowing the fields to separating the wheat from the chaff (threshing). He then likens this to sowing the seeds of the Gospel. Whether someone is at the initial stages of sowing the Gospel, cultivating it or reaping the harvest, that worker should be provided for as he or she works in the harvest fields.*

What is the significance of Paul’s last question in 1 Corinthians 9:12?

*He is making the point that it should be considered a right of the worker to be provided for by those whom he or she serves. Paul goes on to say that because of his love for them, he did not demand this right of the Corinthians not wanting to hinder the Gospel of Christ. The heart of church workers is not (and should not be) on demanding material possessions or pay for their work. As Paul says, the joy of ministry is being able to boast in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and preaching His Word (verses 15-18). However, the people of God should not neglect their workers. Their compensation is an earned wage. Congregations should provide for them and their families so that the joy of the Gospel of Christ continues among them.*

#### **APPLICATION**

\*Jesus teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” How has God provided for your daily needs?

*Read the explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer in Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (2017 edition) on pages 258–263 and talk briefly about it in relation to how God provides for your daily needs.*

\*We are to be good stewards of all God's blessings, including our bodies, material possessions, spiritual gifts, etc. How are you being a good steward of the blessings God has given you?

*How does your place of business make sure you and your family are taken care of? (Or, in some cases, how do you wish you and your family would be taken care of?) How should this affect your decisions when it comes to pay and benefits for your church workers?*

#### **STRATEGIC RESPONSE**

\*How can you be an advocate for your church worker(s) as the budget is being set?

\*How does the compensation of your church workers compare to your current district guidelines for pay and benefits? (If you are not aware of the district guidelines, contact your district office to request a copy.)

\*Does your church offer a continuing education fund for church workers to continue growing spiritually and intellectually (i.e., a book fund, conference fund, etc., in addition to regular pastors' conferences, classes, etc.)?

What other blessings could be shared to help show support in this area (e.g. family membership to a gym and/or recreation facility, more vacation days, retreats, Christmas gift [financial], etc.)?