

EPISCOPAL RESIDENCE/HOUSING ALLOWANCE

Questions related to the episcopal residence and housing allowance can be a very sensitive subject for all persons concerned. Attached is a document which summarizes all of the references to an episcopal residence in the Book of Discipline and in the Episcopal Fund Report No. 5. There is no “episcopal residence protocol” that has been written. It is recommended that each jurisdiction’s Committee on Episcopacy prepare a document that would guide each of the episcopal areas/annual conferences related to guidelines and standards. It is left to each annual conference to establish its own guidelines and standards. What we typically say to those asking is that the standards for an episcopal residence should be no less than an annual conference’s guidelines for parsonages for pastors and District Superintendents, while at the same time taking into consideration the needs of a residence to assist the bishop in his/her responsibilities as the episcopal leader of the area.

Providing an Episcopal Residence

GCFA does not have guidelines related to the selling/purchasing of property for the episcopal residence beyond the fact that the annual conference owns the property and the Episcopal Fund currently provides \$10,000 per year to assist with the purchase and/or maintenance of the episcopal residence that the bishop shall live in. This amount will be reviewed annually by the GCFA Board.

In most cases, we do not see annual conferences making a new purchase with every change of episcopal leadership. Usually, new purchases are related to: 1) the cost to repair or renovate is not considered the most economical way to proceed ; or 2) it is time to improve the property to meet basic needs for a bishop with the responsibilities that they carry for that episcopal area.

Some of the basics that you might want to use as an evaluation tool might be:

- 1) Does the episcopal residence have both adequate living space that is adaptable for families with teens or aging parents (family room separate from living room and study/office space)?
- 2) Is the episcopal residence in an area with good schools, safety services, and utility services?
- 3) How accessible is the episcopal residence to a major airport and main highways?
- 4) Is the episcopal residence constructed so that there will be minimum maintenance and basic care (lawn, snow removal, etc)
- 5) Is it possible to readily adapt the episcopal residence for accessibility needs?
- 6) Is the episcopal residence large enough to host up to 30-40 people for small group gatherings?
- 7) Does the episcopal residence have a kitchen that is adequate for hosting small groups?
- 8) Does the episcopal residence have adequate office space for study and small meetings (4-6 persons) with built in book shelves, and outside entrance if possible?
- 9) Does the episcopal residence have a laundry room that is easily accessible (main level or level with bedrooms considered best)?
- 10) Does the episcopal residence have an attached two-car garage?
- 11) Does the episcopal residence have a minimum of three bedrooms, one of which is a master bedroom - along with at least three bathrooms?
- 12) Does the episcopal residence have adequate storage areas, taking into account that clergy tend to move more than the norm and carry a lot of things from place to place?

Probably the most important question is, can the episcopal residence be flexible enough to accommodate comfortably a at least two bishops covering a period of 16 years?

Providing a Housing Allowance in lieu of an Episcopal Residence

GCFA does not have guidelines related to the setting of an amount to provide for a housing allowance. The Episcopal Fund does currently provide \$10,000 annually to assist in defraying the cost of a housing allowance to assist with the housing needs of a bishop. This amount will be reviewed annually by the GCFA Board.

The cost of living and geographical area where the bishop will live are factors in determining the amount to be provided for a housing allowance. There are many other considerations to factor in as well. The following are some things to consider as you determine an amount.

There are several methods to consider when determining a housing allowance amount, each area will need to make decisions on how they wish to do this. One method outlined below is the recommendation from GBHEM when asked for guidelines for determining housing allowance amounts for local church clergy:

- 1) Go to a local realtor to obtain rental and/or mortgage cost (exclusive of down payment) for housing with the same attributes as the criteria for the episcopal residence (see list of criteria and characteristics above) within no more than a 10-mile radius of the episcopal office.
- 2) Add monthly cost of all utilities that the annual conference believes should be supplied for the episcopal residence (such as cable; electric; gas; sewer; garbage removal; water; and lawn care).

Additional items to consider when choosing a housing allowance option to include in any written guidelines:

- 1) GCFA has agreed to distribute the housing allowance as determined by the Annual Conference with the bishop's monthly salary payment. This is the practice recommended by GCFA. This will allow those amounts to be included on the bishop's W2 form for tax purposes.
- 2) In the event of a transition and difficulty selling an episcopal residence, will the Annual Conference provide any assistance to the bishop for relocation services?
- 3) Will the amount set allow the bishop to purchase/rent a home that has the criteria and characteristics listed above for an episcopal residence?