

EMPOWERING PEACE ~ ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABILITY



Nicene Network Church Retirement Plan

A Guide to the 403(b)(9)

OCTOBER 2025

WWW.STONEFORD.COM

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Plan Partners



The Nicene Network is an association of churches and plan sponsor. The team is committed to serve churches across the globe. The Network equips leaders with trusted tools, plans, benefits, and services, helping them to launch, grow, and stay focused on what matters most. Each organization pays \$99/year. These include tailored resources, community support, training materials, and more—designed to strengthen your ministry and foster healthy, supportive congregations.



PCS and Aspire provide recordkeeping and participant services for the Stoneford Church Retirement Plan. Their platforms ensure that contributions are processed smoothly, accounts are secure, and participants have 24/7 access to manage their retirement savings. With a focus on clarity, transparency, and participant support, PCS/Aspire make the retirement process simple for both churches and staff.



PERA serves as the Third Party Administrator (TPA) for the Stoneford Church Retirement Plan. Their team manages plan compliance, enrollment, and day-to-day administration, ensuring that churches and participants receive excellent support. With years of experience serving faith-based organizations, PERA provides the structure and expertise that allow Stoneford and its partners to deliver a retirement plan built on trust and sustainability.



Stoneford exists to equip churches, ministries, and faith-based organizations with benefits and financial solutions that bring stability and peace of mind. From retirement and health plans to investment and personal financial support, Stoneford provides high-quality, faith-aligned tools that help churches care for their people and strengthen their ministries. Our vision is simple: to help ministry thrive today and tomorrow.





What Is the Nicene Network?

The Nicene Network is a faith-aligned church partnership network that equips congregations with essential support and resources, including benefits strategy, operational guidance, and group health options designed for ministry. Through Nicene, churches gain access to solutions that honor their mission while strengthening organizational health. Nicene offers:

- **Comprehensive health options** tailored for church employers
- **Life & disability plans** and ancillary benefits
- **HR and enrollment support** aligned with nonprofit ministry needs
- **Operational, financial, and compliance support** to help churches thrive
- **Board and leadership resources** geared toward stewardship and sustainability

By bringing these capabilities together, Nicene creates a unified foundation.

Why Plans Requirement Nicene Network Participation

Churches that are part of Nicene are connected into a community of likeminded ministries with shared governance principles and mutual support systems. This creates:

- **Mission Alignment:** Ensuring participating churches share cover values
- **Network Leverage:** A larger, faith-connected base improves purchasing power and pricing outcomes
- **Administrative Support:** Nicene's tools and guidance help churches engage more effectively
- **Sustainable Growth:** Shared strategy and peers reduce risk and enhance long-term plan stability

Because Nicene-supported plans are **network-based solutions**, their long-term success depends on the shared commitment of participating churches. Nicene membership ensures these programs operate within a **cohesive, values-driven ecosystem**, rather than as disconnected, independent employers.

What This Means for Your Church

To participate in Nicene-supported programs, including the 403(b)(9) Church Retirement Plan, your church:

1. Is a member of the **Nicene Network**
2. Aligns with Nicene's **faith-based principles**
3. Engages collaboratively within the broader ministry network

Nicene Network membership is \$99 per church per year.

This covers access to Nicene's resources, leadership support, and participation in the broader faith-based network that makes these programs possible. <https://nicene.network/join-us>

Being a part of Nicene isn't an add-on, it is the foundation that enables sustainable, church-centered solutions.

stoneford.com



Welcome

Greetings from the Stoneford Advisors team!

Stoneford Advisors (“Stoneford”) exists to equip churches, ministries, and faith-based organizations with solutions that help their people thrive, both today and for generations to come. Over the years, we have built a trusted network that provides retirement, health, payroll, bookkeeping, and investment solutions designed specifically for the unique needs of the Church.

Our mission is not to offer the cheapest options, but to deliver plans that are high quality, cost effective, and sustainable. We believe that when churches are supported with the right tools, pastors and staff can serve with greater confidence, stability, and peace of mind.

The Stoneford Church Retirement Plan reflects that commitment. It combines proven investment management with the unique benefits clergy and staff need, including the ministerial housing allowance in retirement. The same values that guide all of Stoneford’s work are at the heart of this plan:

- **Accessibility.** *Keeping our doors open to everyone.*
- **Integrity.** *Acting with honesty, fairness, and transparency at all times.*
- **Collaboration.** *Working together to achieve common goals effectively.*
- **Well-being.** *Prioritizing your interests above any suite of products.*

In the pages that follow, you’ll learn how the Stoneford Church Retirement Plan works, the investment options available, and the unique advantages of the 403(b)(9) structure. Our hope is simple: that this plan will give your church and its leaders confidence to prepare well for the future, while staying faithful to your mission today.

You don’t have to choose between ministry and financial security. With the right plan, you can have both.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Casey S. Hayden".

Casey Hayden

Founder and CEO of Stoneford
Wealth and Investment Manager
Stoneford Advisors



The Stoneford Ecosystem

Comprehensive Solutions, Designed for Churches



RETIREMENT PLANS (403(B)(9))

- Long-term security for clergy & staff
- Ministerial housing allowance in retirement
- Curated investments, including BRI options



HEALTH & INSURANCE SOLUTIONS

- Group health, ICHRA, and individual coverage
- Dental, vision, disability, life insurance
- Property, liability, workers' comp, D&O coverage



INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

- Cash & Cash Flow Management
- Model Portfolios, including BRI & ESG
- Outsourced CIO & Alternative Consulting
- Client Service, Trading, and Monitoring



ADVISORY NETWORK -PREFERRED PARTNERS-

- Business services (bookkeeping, technology, HR, payroll)
- Banking & lending partners
- Legal & compliance support
- Capital campaigns & fundraising consultants
- Wellness & nonprofit resources



CONGREGANT & ALUMNI RESOURCES

- Social Security & Medicare guidance
- Healthcare affordability planning
- Grief, divorce, and elder care support
- BRI education & investing tools



PARTICIPANT SOLUTIONS

- Clergy tax prep (including housing allowance)
- Estate & financial planning
- Debt & cash flow management
- Personal insurance (home, auto, life)


What is a 403(b)(9)?

A Retirement Plan Built for the Church

A 403(b)(9) is a retirement plan created specifically for churches and church-related organizations. While it works much like a traditional 403(b), it has special provisions designed with pastors, clergy, and ministry staff in mind.

How It Differs from a Typical 403(b)

- **Church Plan Status:** A 403(b)(9) is officially recognized by the IRS as a “church plan.” That means it is exempt from many of the ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) rules that apply to commercial retirement plans. This flexibility allows churches and ministries to offer benefits without being weighed down by unnecessary regulation.
- **Housing Allowance Benefit:** Perhaps the most significant difference is that ordained ministers may claim the ministerial housing allowance on distributions in retirement — but only if funds remain in a 403(b)(9). This benefit can reduce taxable income significantly.
- **Governance:** Unlike commercial plans offered by financial institutions, 403(b)(9) plans are typically governed by church boards, denominational agencies, or ministry-focused organizations.

	Typical 403(b) Plan	 403(b)(9) Church Plan
Regulation	Governed by ERISA	Exempt from many ERISA rules
Clergy Benefit	No special provisions	Housing allowance available in retirement
Governance	Run by employers or providers	Overseen by church/denominational bodies
Portability	Follows you between employers	Follows you within ministry & preserves tax benefit
Purpose	General nonprofit employees	Tailored for pastors & church staff

Who Can Participate?

The Stoneford Church Retirement Plan is open to:

- Ordained clergy
- Church staff and lay employees
- Denominations, associations, and eligible ministries
- Certain affiliated nonprofits and schools with a faith-based mission

This inclusivity allows entire ministry teams — not just pastors — to prepare for retirement with the same advantages.

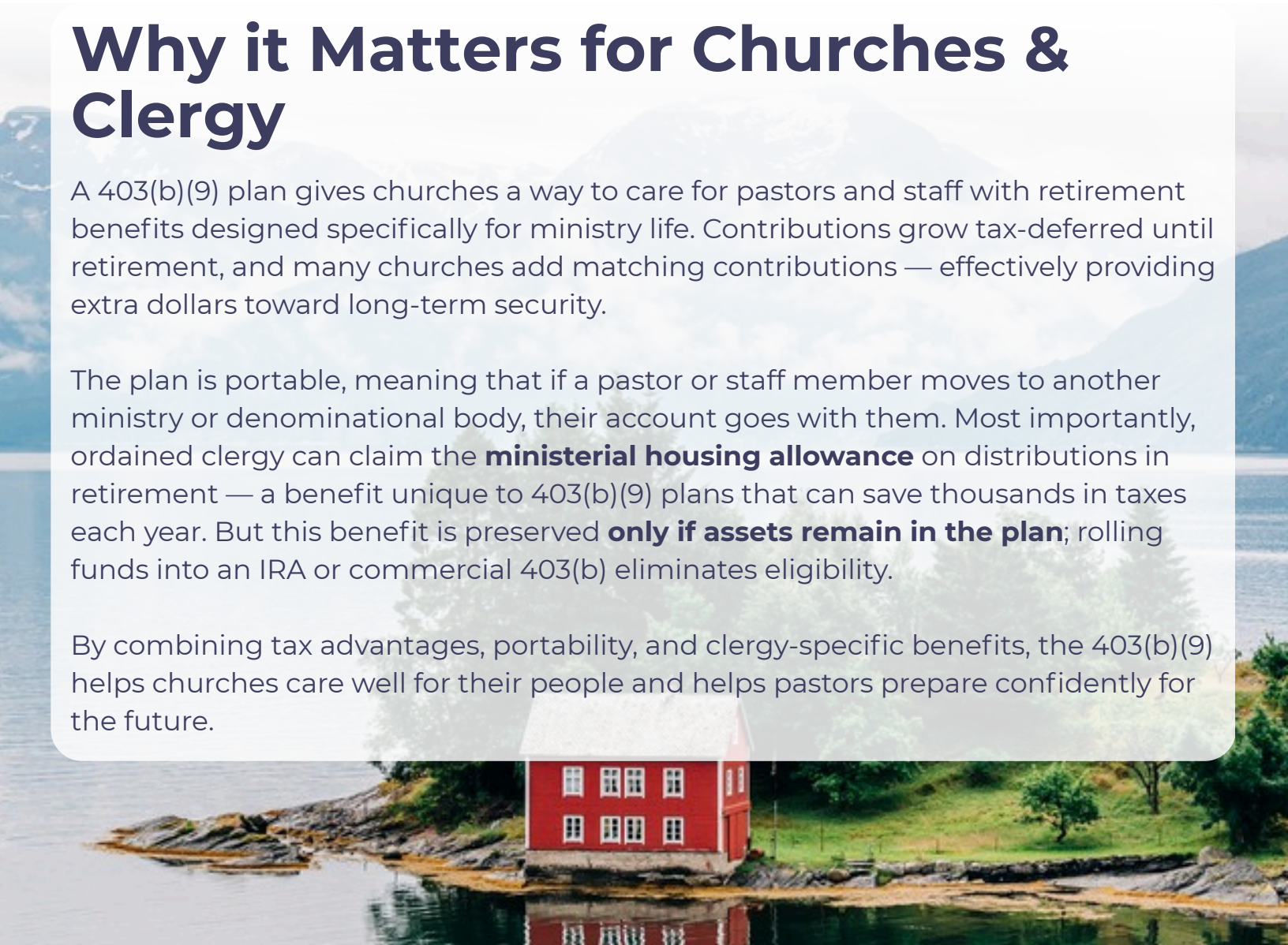
Did You Know? *Rolling funds from a 403(b)(9) into an IRA or commercial 403(b) removes eligibility for the housing allowance. Keeping assets in the church plan preserves this valuable benefit.*

Why it Matters for Churches & Clergy

A 403(b)(9) plan gives churches a way to care for pastors and staff with retirement benefits designed specifically for ministry life. Contributions grow tax-deferred until retirement, and many churches add matching contributions — effectively providing extra dollars toward long-term security.

The plan is portable, meaning that if a pastor or staff member moves to another ministry or denominational body, their account goes with them. Most importantly, ordained clergy can claim the **ministerial housing allowance** on distributions in retirement — a benefit unique to 403(b)(9) plans that can save thousands in taxes each year. But this benefit is preserved **only if assets remain in the plan**; rolling funds into an IRA or commercial 403(b) eliminates eligibility.

By combining tax advantages, portability, and clergy-specific benefits, the 403(b)(9) helps churches care well for their people and helps pastors prepare confidently for the future.



Plan Features & Benefits

TRANSPARENT & COST-EFFECTIVE

The Stoneford Church Retirement Plan is designed to be both sustainable and accessible. Fees are clearly defined, with no hidden charges, so churches and participants know exactly what they are paying for. Costs are structured to remain competitive while supporting high-quality administration, recordkeeping, and investment oversight. *See fee schedule.*

EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTIONS & FLEXIBILITY

Each church has the freedom to decide how to structure contributions for its staff. Many provide employer matching contributions — effectively adding free dollars toward retirement. This flexibility allows churches to encourage savings in a way that fits their budget while demonstrating care for their team.

EDUCATION & SUPPORT

Participants aren't left to navigate retirement on their own. Stoneford provides access to investment education and financial planning resources so that clergy and staff can make informed decisions. Whether through advisor support, self-directed options, or tools for retirement readiness, the goal is to equip participants with confidence at every stage.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Beyond contributions and investments, the plan offers important extras that simplify and strengthen retirement readiness:

- **Rollovers & Consolidation:**
Participants can roll in accounts from other plans to simplify management.
- **Financial Wellness Resources:**
Practical tools, coaching, and educational sessions to support personal and family financial health.



Investment Options

A Focused Menu: *The Stoneford Church Retirement Plan balances simplicity with choice, giving participants access to high-quality, low-cost funds across all major asset classes, without overwhelming them with unnecessary options.*

TARGET DATE FUNDS

For those who prefer a “set-and-forget” approach, the plan includes **BlackRock LifePath Index Funds (Retirement Income through 2060)**. These funds automatically adjust from growth-oriented investments in early years to more conservative allocations as retirement approaches, making them an easy default option for many participants.

RISK-BASED & INDIVIDUAL FUNDS

Participants who prefer to customize their portfolio can select from a broad range of equity, bond, international, and specialty funds, including:

- **Large Cap, Mid Cap, Small Cap, and Micro Cap** funds from Vanguard, Fidelity, iShares, and Bridgeway.
- **Bond and Fixed Income** options such as Schwab U.S. Aggregate Bond ETF (SCHZ) and DFA Investment Grade (DFAPX).
- **Global/International** exposure through Fidelity International Index (FSPSX) and First Eagle Global (SGIIX).
- **Alternative investments** in commodities and precious metals, such as iShares Silver Trust (SLV) and First Eagle Gold (FEURX).

BIBLICALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING (BRI) OPTIONS

Stoneford is committed to values-aligned investing. The menu includes dedicated faith-based options such as:

- Steward Global Equity (SGISX)
- Steward Values Enhanced Small-Mid Cap (SCECX)
- Praxis Growth Index (MMDEX)
- Praxis Impact Bond (MIIX)

These funds apply Biblically Responsible Investing principles, allowing participants to align their portfolios with Christian convictions without sacrificing quality.

Full Fund Lineup

A complete table of available funds, including ticker symbols and expense ratios, is provided in the appendix.

Housing Allowance in Retirement

A Unique Benefit for Clergy

The IRS recognizes a special tax provision for ordained ministers called the ministerial housing allowance. This allows eligible clergy to exclude a portion of their retirement income used for housing expenses from taxable income. It's a benefit that can save thousands of dollars each year in retirement.

How It Works

The housing allowance can apply whether a retired minister lives in:

- **A parsonage** provided by the church,
- **A rental home**, or
- **A personally owned home** (mortgage, rent, utilities, maintenance, and other eligible housing costs may be included).

The exact amount must be formally designated and cannot exceed the lesser of:

1. The amount actually spent on housing,
2. The fair rental value of the home (furnished, plus utilities), or
3. The officially designated amount by the church or plan administrator.

Keep Funds in a 403(b)(9)

This benefit only applies if retirement distributions come from a qualified 403(b)(9) church plan. Rolling funds into an IRA or a commercial 403(b) will eliminate eligibility for the housing allowance. For most clergy, this makes keeping assets in a 403(b)(9) the wisest choice for maximizing tax efficiency in retirement.



Practical Tips for Ministers

- **Annual Designation:** Your church board (or appropriate body) should pass a formal housing allowance resolution each year in retirement.
- **Keep Records:** Maintain receipts, utility bills, and mortgage or rent statements to document expenses.
- **Plan Ahead:** Estimate your annual housing costs when planning retirement income withdrawals.
- **Consult a Professional:** Tax rules can be complex — always work with a qualified tax advisor familiar with clergy housing allowance regulations.

Housing Allowance in Retirement

Example: How the Housing Allowance Works

Pastor John retires and takes a \$30,000 distribution from his 403(b)(9) plan this year. He spends money on the following:

- \$12,000 mortgage payments
- \$3,000 utilities (electric, gas, water, internet)
- \$3,000 home maintenance and repairs

Total housing expenses = \$18,000

The church board designates a housing allowance of **\$20,000**. The fair rental value of Pastor John's home (furnished, plus utilities) is estimated at **\$19,000**.

The IRS rules state that the allowable housing allowance exclusion is the **lowest** of:

1. Actual housing expenses (\$18,000)
2. Fair rental value (\$19,000)
3. Official designation (\$20,000)

✓ In this case, Pastor John can exclude \$18,000 from taxable income. The remaining \$12,000 of his distribution is subject to normal income tax.



Fees and Transparency

Management Fees		
Fee	Asset Based Feed	Per Employee Per Year (PEPY) (\$)*
Stoneford Advisors	.65%	\$9
Recordkeeper (PCS/Aspire)	.20%	\$35
Third Party Administrator (PERA)	0%	\$36
Custodian (Matrix)	.04%	\$0
TOTAL	.89%	\$80

**Clear, simple, transparent.
You'll always know what you're paying.**

How to get started.



1 **Decision-Maker Approves the Stoneford 403(b)(9) Retirement Plan.**

Use our online tool to calculate the church plan annual cost.

2 **Church Administrator Completes Enrollment Paperwork.**

All enrollment paperwork can be completed digitally on DocuSign through our website.

3 **Participant Enrollment.**

Once the church is enrolled, participants can complete their paperwork.



Get started at
stoneford.com/churchretirementplan



Appendix



Investment Menu

Category	Fund Name	Ticker	Expense Ratio	Fund Family
Money Market	Vanguard Federal Money Market	VMFXX	0.11%	Vanguard
Faith-Based / Biblically Responsible	Steward Global Equity	SGIGX	0.90%	Crossmark
Faith-Based / Biblically Responsible	Steward Values Enhanced Small-Mid	SSMOX	0.53%	Crossmark
Faith-Based / Biblically Responsible	Praxis Growth Index Fund	MMDEX	0.35%	Praxis
Faith-Based / Biblically Responsible	Praxis Impact Bond Fund	MIIIX	0.47%	Praxis
Large Cap	iShares Core S&P 500 ETF	IVV	0.03%	iShares
Large Cap	Vanguard Value Index Admiral	VVIAX	0.05%	Vanguard
Mid Cap	Fidelity Mid Cap Index	FSDMX	0.03%	Fidelity
Mid Cap	Vanguard Mid Cap Growth ETF	VOT	0.07%	Vanguard
Small Cap	Fidelity Small Cap Index	FSSNX	0.03%	Fidelity
Small Cap	iShares Core S&P Small-Cap ETF	IJR	0.06%	iShares
Micro Cap	Bridgeway Ultra-Small Company	BRSIX	0.75%	Bridgeway
Bond	Schwab US Aggregate Bond ETF	SCHZ	0.04%	Schwab
Bond	DFA Investment Grade	DFAPX	0.12%	Dimensional
Blended	Schwab U.S. Dividend Equity ETF	SCHD	0.06%	Schwab
Global/International	Fidelity International Index Fund	FSPSX	0.04%	Fidelity
Global/International	First Eagle Global Fund	FEGRX	0.79%	First Eagle
Commodities & Precious Metals	iShares Silver Trust	SLV	0.50%	iShares
Commodities & Precious Metals	First Eagle Gold Fund	FEURX	0.83%	First Eagle
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index Retirement Income Fund	LIRKX	0.07%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2030 Fund	LINKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2035 Fund	LIJKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2040 Fund	LIKKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2045 Fund	LIHKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2050 Fund	LIPKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2055 Fund	LIVKX	0.09%	Blackrock
Target Date Funds	LifePath Index 2060 Fund	LIZKX	0.09%	Blackrock

Please note that this menu can change





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