



Calling and the Right to Decent Work: The Position of Church Workers from the Perspectives of Labour Law and the Theology of Work

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Keywords:

church workers;
employment
relationship;
decent work;
calling; theology
of work

ABSTRACT

Church ministry is commonly understood as a spiritual calling, yet its organization also involves assigned duties, income, supervision, and occupational risks. Problems arise when vocational language is used to disregard ministers' material rights or when all ministry is classified as employment without examining the actual relationship. This article develops a framework for understanding church workers' position through normative legal research, constructive theological inquiry, and an integrative review. The legal analysis focuses on Indonesian labour law and is limited to provisions in force as of 31 December 2025. The analysis distinguishes calling, ecclesial office, employment, and voluntary service, connecting the examination of work, remuneration, and direction with theological accounts of dignity and communal responsibility. Three propositions emerge. Spiritual ministry does not automatically exclude an employment relationship. Understanding work as calling requires attention to livelihood, rest, social protection, and the freedom to raise concerns. Protection should be differentiated according to actual status and functions, while distinguishing legal duties from ecclesial ethical commitments. The article proposes evidence-based status assessment, clear ministry agreements, workload review, and accessible dispute procedures. It concludes that calling and decent work are compatible when ecclesial distinctiveness is accompanied by accountability for the conditions under which people serve. The proposed framework requires further contextual and empirical evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Church workers perform work that carries both religious meaning and material consequences. Sermons require preparation, pastoral care consumes time and emotional energy, and administration, music, education, and building maintenance demand skill and coordination. Within church organizations, these activities may be carried out by ordained persons, non-ordained employees, contracted providers, or volunteers. This

diversity makes it difficult to define legal status through a single label. The term “church worker” may denote an identity of faith, an organizational function, or different contractual relationships. For this reason, any inquiry into protection must begin with how ministry is actually carried out, who directs the work, and on what basis remuneration is given.

This difficulty is bound up with the use of the concept of calling. The conviction that a person serves God can build commitment, but it can also be used to demand unlimited sacrifice. Blustein et al. distinguish decent work, understood as the basic conditions of employment, from meaningful work, understood as the experience of the value or purpose of work (Blustein et al., 2023, 289–314). This distinction matters for the church: ministry that is experienced as deeply meaningful does not necessarily take place under decent working conditions. Conversely, arrangements for income and rest do not by themselves erode spiritual meaning. The two are dimensions that should be assessed separately before their relationship is explained.

Research on calling does not uniformly support the conclusion that a stronger calling always means better outcomes for workers. Shin et al. identified distinct profiles in the relationships among calling, burnout, exploitation, and work–life imbalance (Shin et al., 2022, 816–830). Molloy et al. discussed how communication about calling can be associated with job idolization, workaholism, and exploitation (Molloy et al., 2019, 428–444). These findings and arguments give reason to examine the use of the language of devotion in the church. However, research conducted outside the church does not prove that every low-paid ministry amounts to exploitation. Voluntariness, the capacity to choose, economic circumstances, and the exercise of authority must be examined concretely.

Research specific to clergy shows that satisfaction in ministry and burnout can coexist. Francis et al. tested the balanced affect model of work-related psychological well-being among Anglican clergy (Francis et al., 2017). A longitudinal study of United Methodist clergy examined the relationships among spiritual struggle, depression, burnout, and congregational support (Upenieks & Eagle, 2024). That study indicates that spiritual experience is not separate from social support and the organization of ministry. This article does not use these data to estimate the level of burnout among church workers in Indonesia. Their relevance lies in the reason they provide for treating the well-being of church workers as an institutional matter, not merely a matter of personal resilience.

Legally, a religious title is not sufficient to answer whether a person is in an employment relationship. Under Law No. 13 of 2003 (the Manpower Law), the definition of an employment relationship comprises the elements of work, wage, and order. The definition of an enterprise also includes social and other undertakings that

have management and employ persons in return for remuneration. This wording provides a basis for testing the activities of non-commercial organizations, but it does not establish that every relationship between a church and its workers is automatically an industrial relationship. The structure of the church body, the nature of the appointment, the agreement, and the reality of how the work is performed must be read together. The appropriate question is whether the elements and the positions of the parties are satisfied, not whether the church seeks profit (Republic of Indonesia, 2003).

In the theology of work, Winarjo links Calvin's view of vocation and service with love, justice, and the humanization of workers (Winarjo, 2023, 105–119). Kristanto et al. defend the relevance of the concept of calling through a dialogue with critiques of an overly static understanding of vocation (Kristanto et al., 2024). Both studies provide a basis for assessing calling as a ground of responsibility, not as a justification for tolerating demeaning working conditions. The question that remains to be developed is how this principle is translated into the assessment of status, income, rest, and dispute resolution in church organizations with different forms of governance.

This article takes into account Constitutional Court Decision No. 168/PUU-XXI/2023 and the changes to wage regulation under Government Regulation (PP) No. 49 of 2025 as part of the legal framework up to 31 December 2025. Legislative developments after that date are treated as context for updating and are discussed separately in the discussion section. This distinction preserves the clarity between the basis for analyzing provisions within the period of study and the relevance of the findings for later application.

The research questions comprise three matters: how the position of church workers is determined in the relationship among calling, office, and employment; how the theology of work explains the right to a livelihood and the limits of sacrifice; and how churches can design protections that correspond to the status and functions of their workers. The contribution offered is a tiered protection framework that brings together the examination of legal status and theological responsibility. The framework neither equates all church workers with employees nor excludes all of them from protection merely because their duties are religious in character. Its focus is the accuracy of classification and the adequacy of protection for those who actually perform ministry.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a normative legal approach combined with constructive theological inquiry and an integrative literature review. Legal materials are read through the statute approach and the conceptual approach. The analysis focuses on the definitions of worker, employer, enterprise, employment agreement, and employment relationship, and then relates them to the limits of church autonomy and the right to a decent livelihood. The theological inquiry interprets the relationships among calling,

dignity, self-giving, rest, and responsibility toward others. Biblical texts are used by citing book, chapter, and verse, without claiming that a single reading represents all denominations.

The principal legal materials comprise the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia; Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, as amended by Law No. 6 of 2023; Law No. 2 of 2004 on Industrial Relations Dispute Settlement; Law No. 40 of 2004 on the National Social Security System; Law No. 24 of 2011 on the Social Security Administering Bodies; Government Regulation No. 35 of 2021 on Fixed-Term Employment Agreements, Outsourcing, Working Time and Rest Time, and Termination of Employment; and Government Regulation No. 36 of 2021 on Wages, as amended by Government Regulation No. 51 of 2023 and Government Regulation No. 49 of 2025. The analysis also considers Constitutional Court Decision No. 168/PUU-XXI/2023. This framework applies a cut-off date of 31 December 2025 in order to separate the analysis of the validity of norms from the discussion of the 2026 legislative changes; application to an actual case still requires examining the law as of the date of the event.

The method of biblical interpretation uses historical-grammatical and, to a limited extent, canonical readings. First, the meaning and function of the text are examined within the context of the covenant, the early church, and communal practice; second, the relationships among texts are used to test the consistency of the themes of dignity, work, and rest; and third, only then are ethical implications drawn for church policy. The Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11, for example, is not treated as a provision of modern labour law, but as an analogical basis for testing the limits of unceasing work. The normative analysis does not equate the results of exegesis with legal obligations, and it does not claim to represent all church traditions.

The analysis proceeds by mapping four dimensions: personal calling, ecclesial office, employment relationship, and voluntary service. The elements of an employment relationship are then compared with factual indicators of ministry, and the theological literature is used to assess the purpose and moral limits of such arrangements. The Indonesian context is strengthened through a study of non-standard employment relationships (Izzati, 2021, 290–303), a study of GMIT pastors in the Kupang Barat Classis (Koli et al., 2024, 158–175), and a limited reading of the Church Order and Implementing Regulations of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) enacted in 2021. The church order is read as the internal regulation of a denomination, not as state regulation or as sole evidence of the status of an employment relationship. No individual ministry contract is used as empirical data. The decisions in disputes involving particular pastors are not used as a basis for conclusions because complete official copies and the history of the legal remedies pursued have not been verified in

this study. Rigor of argument is maintained by distinguishing legal provisions, findings of the referenced studies, theological interpretation, and institutional recommendations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Position of Church Workers and the Test of an Employment Relationship

Calling, office, and employment are categories that may overlap without being identical. Calling explains how a person understands his or her responsibility before God. Ecclesial office describes the authority obtained through church order, for example through ordination or appointment to a church council. An employment relationship describes the legal relationship in which work is performed in return for remuneration and under direction. Volunteering describes the giving of time or energy that is not constructed as an employment relationship. A person may feel called and also hold the status of a worker; another may exercise an office through voluntary service. For this reason, status cannot be determined by inner experience or ministerial title alone.

The need to distinguish categories also arises in research on vocation. The literature shows a diversity of definitions of calling (Dik & Shimizu, 2019). Another study, by Reed et al., proposes work identity as a direction for understanding how calling is formed (Reed et al., 2022, 457–463). The meaning used in psychology is not always the same as the meaning of calling in dogmatics or in the rules of ordination. This article uses calling as a category of meaning and commitment, not as sole evidence of legal status. A person's statement that he or she serves out of calling may explain that person's motivation, but it does not prove that the person has waived rights or that the management does not control the work.

Understanding calling is also not confined to religious professions. White et al. examined the existence of calling experiences in a United States national sample that extends beyond clergy (White et al., 2021, 624–643). Meanwhile, Tervo-Niemelä showed the diversity of work orientations among Finnish Lutheran clergy (Tervo-Niemelä, 2016, 222–241). The conceptual implication is that the spiritual dimension does not form a category that is always separate from the world of work. Yet this diversity also precludes the generalization that all pastors have the same organizational relationship. Synodal appointment, independent congregational leadership, and part-time ministry may have different structures of supervision and different bases of income.

Within the legal regime examined, the starting point is Article 1 point 15 of the Manpower Law, which places work, wage, and order within a relationship based on an employment agreement. The three elements need to be assessed together. Work exists when a person performs an agreed task; a wage exists when payment functions as remuneration for work; and an order exists when there is authority to direct or control the performance of tasks within a subordinate relationship. This explanation is a

construct for examining facts, not a mechanical formula that decides status from a single indicator. The agreement and the positions of the parties must still be examined (Republic of Indonesia, 2003, Article 1 points 14–15).

Constitutional Court Decision No. 168/PUU-XXI/2023, pronounced on 31 October 2024, partially granted the petition for judicial review of Law No. 6 of 2023 and gave constitutional interpretations of employment provisions, including the clusters on employment agreements, wages, and termination of employment. Its relevance for churches is conditional: the effects of the norms on fixed-term employment agreements (PKWT), minimum wages, and termination of employment (PHK) procedures are discussed only if an employer–worker relationship has first been established. Ordination, appointment to a church council, or removal from a spiritual office is not automatically identical to termination of employment; conversely, the dismissal of an administrative employee does not fall outside labour law merely because it is carried out by a religious organization (Mahkamah Konstitusi Republic of Indonesia, 2024, operative part of Decision No. 168/PUU-XXI/2023).

The element of work must be read through the activities actually performed. Preparing sermons, making pastoral visits, managing congregational records, preparing financial reports, and operating worship equipment can constitute work, even though the result is not a commodity. However, the mere existence of an activity is not sufficient to constitute an employment relationship. A congregant who occasionally helps with the choir also performs work in the general sense. What distinguishes the two is the relationship as a whole: the obligation to attend, the continuity of duties, the basis of payment, the right to refuse, and the consequences if a task is not performed. Churches need to document these functions so that the discussion does not stop at the overly broad term “ministry.”

The element of wage requires an examination of the function of the payment, not merely its name. Terms such as love offering, ministry money, allowance, or honorarium do not automatically determine legal consequences. If a sum of money is promised in return for regular duties, that payment relationship must be assessed within the agreement as a whole. Conversely, a spontaneous gift from the congregation to a guest preacher is not automatically a wage from the church organization. Nor can variation in the amount stand alone as a reason to deny or accept worker status. The assessment must consider who is obliged to pay, how the payment relates to the task, and whether the recipient has a right to claim the payment.

Government Regulation No. 49 of 2025, as the second amendment to Government Regulation No. 36 of 2021 on Wages, updates the mechanism for setting the minimum wage and the wage structure under the regime in force since 17 December 2025. For church workers who are shown to be employees, the church as employer

needs to examine the applicable wage provisions together with any valid special arrangements; for office holders who are not employees, the nominal amount of a stipend or livelihood support is not automatically equated with the legal minimum wage. This distinction does not remove the church's ethical obligation to provide humane support (Republic of Indonesia, 2025, Government Regulation No. 49 of 2025).

The element of order is the area that most often requires contextual reading. Work scheduling, the obligation to report activities, approval of leave, evaluation, and organizational sanctions may indicate control over the performance of work. However, liturgical direction or doctrinal correction may also form part of the ordering of church life without in itself creating an employment subordination. Wouters, in discussing the classification of employment relationships in Belgium, shows the importance of distinguishing employment contracts from service contracts through subordination and the context of dependency (Wouters, 2019, 198–218). The comparative lesson is the need to test the relationship as a whole; Belgian legal indicators are not transplanted as binding provisions in Indonesia.

Comparative discussion of volunteers also shows the limits of classification by label. Hiessl analyzed how courts in several European jurisdictions deal with the possible reclassification of volunteers as employees (Hiessl, 2024, 243–262). Its relevance for churches lies in the question whether voluntariness remains real when people must follow a fixed schedule, face sanctions, or depend on organizational remuneration for their livelihood. Not every disciplinary obligation eliminates voluntariness, but a written consent to serve as a volunteer should not foreclose an examination of the facts either. Legal status is determined by the applicable norms and the circumstances of performance, not by assuming that a document can alter every relationship as its drafter wishes.

The problem of classification is also discussed in the Indonesian labour law literature. Izzati identifies protection gaps in non-standard employment relationships, including part-time or calling-based work and disguised employment relationships (Izzati, 2021, 290–303). That study is not research on churches, but it provides a local foothold for testing whether the label of a relationship corresponds to how it is carried out. In church ministry, this analogy is limited to the method of examining duties, payment, and control. Part-time ministry is not automatically a disguised employment relationship, and economic vulnerability does not in itself establish worker status.

The non-commercial status of a church is not sufficient to rule out all possible employment obligations. The definition of an enterprise in Article 1 point 6 of the Manpower Law includes social or other undertakings that have management and employ persons in return for remuneration. This formulation needs to be distinguished from the understanding of the church as a fellowship of faith. A church may have a

theological dimension that cannot be reduced to an enterprise, while its organizational activities still raise legal questions about employer and worker. Accordingly, the argument that a church does not sell services does not yet answer who recruits administrative staff, pays their income, or arranges their daily activities.

The identification of the employer must be separated from the identification of spiritual leadership. Where duties are performed under an agreement with a foundation, the inquiry begins with the legal entity of the foundation and the management authorized under Law No. 16 of 2001 on Foundations, as amended by Law No. 28 of 2004. For a church constituted as an incorporated association, the authority to represent the association and its organs must be examined against the approval documents and the articles of association. For a local congregation or a synodal ministry, the letter of appointment, the paying party, the authority to direct the work, and the party that bears the contractual obligations must be traced together. The absence of a separate legal-entity status for a local unit cannot be used as a shortcut to avoid responsibility; the relevant employer must be tested according to legal rules and specific facts, not assumed always to be the synod or the pastor.

The test must also identify the responsible subject. Local congregations, synods, educational foundations, and social service units may have different legal standing. A person ordained by a synod may perform administrative work under an agreement with another body. Determining the party that makes an ecclesial appointment is not necessarily the same as determining the party that is bound to pay remuneration. Appointment documents, agreements, payment accounts, the source of instructions, and the authority to terminate need to be examined together. The accuracy of identifying the subject affects whom to negotiate with and which forum applies if a dispute arises.

Church autonomy continues to carry meaning. The state should not take over the determination of doctrine or the meaning of ordination through the assessment of wages. However, autonomy need not be understood as a choice between total interference and total immunity. Billingham develops a distinction among types of judicial examination of the employment decisions of religious organizations (Billingham, 2019, 244–271). This article draws the implication that freedom to choose spiritual leaders needs to be distinguished from the question whether agreed remuneration has been paid. The ministerial exception doctrine of the United States is not regarded as an exception that automatically applies in Indonesian law, because its constitutional basis and jurisprudential development differ.

Distinguishing between these domains makes it possible to understand that removal from office does not always end all material issues. A church may have ecclesial grounds for revoking a mandate to preach, but rights arising from a contractual or employment relationship need to be assessed separately. Conversely, the existence of

a right to payment does not automatically give a person a right to an office or a pulpit. In a concrete case, the competence of the forum must be determined according to the nature of the relationship, the claims, and the applicable law. This article does not claim that all disputes involving church workers fall within the Industrial Relations Court, nor that this forum is always closed to those who hold religious office.

The literature on extending protection beyond the standard employment relationship helps assess the weakness of a binary approach. Menegatti shows the development of the concept of worker in European Union law, which may extend beyond national contractual categories (Menegatti, 2020, 26–47). Atkinson criticizes the weakness of protection under zero-hours arrangements in the United Kingdom (Atkinson, 2022, 347–374). Both contexts differ from the Indonesian church, but they serve as a reminder that the absence of one form of employment relationship does not mean the absence of vulnerability. Economic dependence, continuous availability, and unclear hours of ministry remain ethical and policy concerns. The response to vulnerability should not be confined to a debate over labels to the point that the needs of the people who serve drop out of view.

The outcome of this subsection is a principle of staged examination. First, map the tasks and the parties that regulate them. Second, test the basis of the agreement, payment, and control cumulatively. Third, distinguish the consequences for ecclesial office, contract, and employment relationship. Fourth, determine the protection that must or should be provided on the basis of the status established. Economic dependence functions as important contextual information, not as an additional element that automatically replaces the statutory formulation. This framework safeguards two things at once: the distinctiveness of the ministry relationship and the possibility of legal accountability for the organization of work.

3.2. Theology of Work and the Limits of Sacrifice in Ministry

The theological position of this article is Protestant and ecumenical, taking as its starting point human dignity as the image of God and work as responsibility toward others, without equating all church orders. In the Reformation tradition, the concept of vocation rejects the notion that only spiritual offices have value before God; on the other hand, episcopal structures place the authority of assignment in the hierarchy, presbyterial structures in the council and synod, and congregational structures in the local community of believers. These differences determine who establishes the office, pays the livelihood, and hears objections, but they do not remove the need to examine the elements of an employment relationship under state law.

The theology of work provides a basis for assessing the quality of ministry relationships, but it does not directly yield a labour law classification. The recognition of human beings as the image of God in Genesis 1:26–28 and the commission to till and

keep the garden in Genesis 2:15 place human beings as responsible subjects. On this constructive reading, the worth of the church worker precedes his or her usefulness to church programs. The success of an event or the growth of a congregation cannot be the sole measure if it is achieved under conditions that damage the life of the church worker. The theological framework demands an assessment of how ministry is organized, not merely the sanctity of the stated purpose.

In developing public theology, Hermans emphasizes the need to discuss dignity using criteria that can be tested and are open to criticism (Hermans, 2025, 129–147). This principle is important when a church declares that it respects its workers but does not explain what form that respect takes. Respect needs to be verifiable through clarity of income, access to rest, treatment during illness, and mechanisms for raising objections. This article does not reduce dignity to a set of administrative indicators. Indicators merely help show whether theological recognition produces real responsibility or stops at the language of appreciation in worship and organizational documents.

Winarjo reads work as vocation and, at the same time, as service to others in love and justice (Winarjo, 2023, 105–119). Zeze likewise rejects confining calling to ecclesial functions, through a reading of Calvin (Zeze, 2019, 595–619). On the basis of both, working to provide for one's family is not spiritually lower than working in the pulpit. The implication for church workers is that material needs should not be regarded as a disturbance to the purity of calling. Asking for clarity of payment or considering additional work can be an act of responsibility toward one's family. The assessment of such choices needs to take real circumstances into account, not assume that a church worker who needs income has less faith.

A dynamic understanding of calling is also important for explaining possible changes in duties. Kristanto et al. discuss the critique of an overly rigid identification of calling with a particular occupation (Kristanto et al., 2024). Lovell offers a pneumatological reading that makes room for surprise and gift in calling (Lovell, 2024, 91–110). In the construction of this article, calling does not bind a person forever to a single institution or pattern of work. Resigning because of demeaning circumstances cannot immediately be interpreted as abandoning God. Faithfulness needs to be tested through broader moral responsibilities, including health, family, and the integrity of ministry.

This understanding can be deepened through the concept of plural responsibilities. Holleyman develops the *orders of vocation* to read family, economic, political, cultural, and ecclesial responsibilities in concrete life (Holleyman, 2023, 114–133). Calling can be understood as an ongoing journey of discernment (Stevens & Harris, 2026, 194–201). The process of discovering the self and calling also has a

dimension of vulnerability (James & Stevens, 2026, 100–106). The three arguments support rejecting the narrowing of a church worker's identity to a single organizational function. Church workers retain a bodily life, a family, and citizenship that do not disappear because they accept an ecclesial assignment.

The texts on material support for church workers need to be read together with the freedom of self-giving. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul explains the right to support and then explains the choice not to use that right in certain circumstances. The distinction between having a right and choosing not to exercise it is ethically important. Paul's choice cannot be turned into a general obligation that every church worker must finance himself or herself. Likewise, Luke 10:7 and 1 Timothy 5:17–18 make room for the propriety of receiving support for ministry. This article uses these texts as principles of communal responsibility, not as a formula for setting a minimum wage or a type of modern contract.

Sacrifice ceases to be a gift when an institution turns it into a one-sided demand that may not be questioned. Rooney, through a reading of Aquinas, distinguishes the praiseworthy value of the religious life from the obligations that everyone must bear (Rooney, 2022, 156–172). Although the context is not the labour law of churches, that distinction helps assess devotion that goes beyond duty. An organization should not convert one person's voluntary act into a mandatory standard for all church workers. If a pastor once chose to forgo income for a period, that act does not automatically justify cutting the income of other church workers or disregarding obligations that cannot be waived under the law.

The limits of sacrifice also concern the freedom to leave and to raise objections. Posadas criticizes assumptions in the theology of work from the perspective of the refusal of work that dominates life (Posadas, 2017, 330–361). This article does not follow the entire anti-work agenda, but it accepts the critique as a test of the sanctification of every form of work. Not every activity becomes good merely because it is called ministry. Demands for continuous availability without respite, burdens that cannot be negotiated, or spiritual threats against those who complain must be assessed by their effects and the power relations involved. Calling does not give an institution a claim to all of a person's time, energy, and life.

At the same time, commitment to ministry may indeed require presence in difficult circumstances. Nahnfeldt shows an uncomfortable form of loving calling in parish practice confronting racism (Nahnfeldt, 2021, 65–71). That finding is a reminder that personal comfort is not the only measure of good work. The difference lies in purpose, the distribution of responsibility, and the support available. A burden that arises from an emergency is not the same as a routine demand that is never limited. Responsibility for facing the suffering of others should be organized collectively, so that

a church worker's sincerity is not used as a reason to leave him or her to bear all the needs of the community.

The Sabbath principle provides a critique of unlimited availability. Exodus 20:8–11 extends rest to members of the household and to those who work within it, while Mark 2:27 places the Sabbath in relation to human need. The theological reading proposed here does not equate the Sabbath with a single modern work schedule. The principle is that the human body and human life have limits that must be respected. For church workers who serve on Sundays, rest policies need to provide recovery time on another day. Describing ministry as a lifestyle does not remove the need for sleep, leave, or recovery after a demanding series of tasks.

An example of internal regulation in Indonesia can be seen in the Church Order and Implementing Regulations of the GKPS, enacted through Synod Leadership Decree No. 104/SK-1-PS/2021. Article 98 distinguishes emeritus status from the continuation of the ordained office, Article 100 provides for study leave for pastors once every seven years, and Article 101 leaves the regulation of pensions to a separate regulation (GKPS, 2021). This example shows that a spiritual office can be accompanied by arrangements for terms of service, development, and support after active ministry. Such study leave cannot simply be equated with annual leave under labour law. This document from a single denomination also does not prove the uniformity of rules or compliance with them in Indonesian churches.

Psychological research reinforces the need to distinguish meaning from objective conditions. Sawhney et al. found that the relationship between calling and work attitudes depends on the experience of meaning and on the outcomes examined, and therefore does not support a claim of uniform benefits (Sawhney et al., 2020, 187–201). Zammitti et al. linked career adaptability, decent work, meaningful work, and life satisfaction among Italian adults (Zammitti et al., 2025, 130–141). That study is not direct proof of a theological norm. However, it helps explain that personal resources and working conditions are interrelated. It is not sufficient for churches to ask church workers to improve their attitudes if the division of labour and material support are not assessed.

Attention to the family is also not an optional addition. Aybas et al. linked decent work and work outcomes to the role of work–family conflict (Aybas et al., 2022). Zhang et al. showed diverse profiles in the relationship between living a calling and the work–family interface (Zhang et al., 2022, 23–40). This literature does not claim that ministry always harms families; mutual enrichment is also possible. The ethical implication is the need to assess evening schedules, weekend activities, travel, and unwritten obligations placed on spouses. Family support cannot be assumed to be available without limit merely because one member has accepted a spiritual office.

The theology of calling must also reject the notion that an always-strong body is a condition of a person's worth. Swinton develops an understanding of vocation that includes people with disabilities within the whole body of Christ (Swinton, 2020, 186–197). Conner shows how the experience of disability challenges institutional assumptions about the calling to ministry (Conner, 2020, 138–153). The implication is not that everyone is entitled to hold every office, but that criteria must be examined responsibly. Adjustments to duties and accessibility need to be considered before a person's limitations are taken as evidence of spiritual unfitness. The appreciation of contributions must not be determined entirely by the intensity of physical presence.

Myers shows the limits of the language of vocation and ministry in readings and experiences of vocational discernment in the Church of England (Myers, 2019, 172–179). That finding is relevant for examining the formation of prospective church workers: language that is too idealistic can overlook everyday negotiations about income, the division of tasks, or exhaustion. Churches and theological schools can teach devotion together with the ability to understand agreements, read budgets, manage boundaries, and seek help. Such education is not intended to turn all ministry into a transaction. Its purpose is to ensure that people who give of themselves understand the responsibilities and the limits agreed upon, and are not forced to bear conditions that were previously concealed.

The theological synthesis places decent work as part of stewardship toward human beings. Calling can give strong reasons to persevere through hardship, but it does not legitimize arrangements that shift all risk onto church workers. Income, rest, protection, and the opportunity to speak are ways in which a community accounts for its use of authority. This principle applies more broadly than the legal category of worker. Even if a church worker is genuinely a volunteer or is self-employed, the church still bears an ethical responsibility for the safety and clarity of ministry. The scope of legal obligations needs to be assessed separately, while the theological reason to treat human beings with dignity remains.

3.3. Tiered Protection and Fair Governance of Ministry

The tiered model starts from the theological distinction between equal dignity and different bases of rights. The dignity of every church worker derives from personal worth, not from the type of contract, whereas specific legal obligations arise from status and the rules that govern it. Distributive justice requires that resources be allocated by considering tasks, needs, institutional capacity, and risk; stewardship calls for budget transparency and oversight; and love rejects exploitation disguised as sacrifice. Accordingly, the tier of employees requires the fulfilment of enforceable normative rights; the tier of office holders who are not employees requires written, reviewable provisions for livelihood support; and the tier of volunteers requires freedom of consent,

time limits, safety protection, and agreed reimbursement of costs. The principle of equal dignity does not justify the automatic equalization of the entire package of benefits.

The proposed model differentiates protection according to the status of the relationship and then sets common ethical standards for all church workers. In the first tier, persons who satisfy the conditions of an employment relationship receive the protection provided by the labour provisions applicable to that relationship. In the second tier, office holders or service providers who do not fall into that category retain rights under their agreements and other relevant rules. In the third tier, volunteers require clarity of duties, safety, and the freedom to decline or to stop. These tiers are not a hierarchy of dignity: volunteers are not lower than employees. The differences lie in the basis of rights, the form of responsibility, and the mechanism of fulfilment.

The first step in implementation is a status review based on documents and practice. The church records who performs routine functions, how people are recruited, what tasks are required, who gives instructions, and how payment is made. It is not enough for the review to collect letters of appointment; it must compare whether the content of the letters matches reality. Church workers must also have an opportunity to correct the description of their duties. If uncertainty is found, the organization needs to seek a competent assessment and revise its arrangements. A status review should not be designed to find the cheapest form of document that can avoid obligations.

Once status has been assessed, a written agreement sets out the function, authority, remuneration, reimbursement of costs, ministry hours, and termination procedures. Ecclesial office and mandate may be set out in a separate document or in a section clearly distinguished from the employment terms. This separation helps when a person performs more than one function, for example as both pastor and school administrator. However, separating documents does not in itself separate the legal relationships if performance remains a single whole. The content must follow the facts and the relevant provisions. A ministry clause should not state that all rights lapse because a person has accepted a calling.

As an operational proposal, a ministry agreement may contain the identity of the responsible body, the basis of the ecclesial appointment, a description of duties, the party that gives direction, ministry and rest time, and the separation of remuneration from reimbursement of costs. The document should also explain social security participation according to status, and the procedures for changing duties, termination, and raising objections. For volunteers, the freedom to accept, decline, or discontinue a task should be stated clearly. This structure is a normative design proposed in this article, not a model contract that any particular denomination has used. The validity and consequences of each clause remain subject to the applicable law and the actual conduct of the relationship.

Under the labour regime of the period of study, the form of the agreement and the arrangements for termination need to be read together with the amended Manpower Law, Government Regulation No. 35 of 2021, and the relevant constitutional interpretations. Lifelong ordination does not automatically mean a lifelong employment contract; an appointment for a fixed term likewise does not automatically satisfy all the requirements of a fixed-term employment agreement. The classification of the work and its legal basis must be examined. This article does not prescribe a single form of contract for all church workers, because differences in the nature of duties, organizational position, and the status of the relationship determine the consequences. This rigor prevents church orders from being used as a substitute for examining legal requirements.

Income arrangements need to distinguish payment for work, reimbursement of activity costs, voluntary gifts, and ministry facilities. Clarity helps church workers plan their livelihoods and helps managers account for the budget. If an employment relationship is established, the applicable wage obligations do not become mere generosity. If the relationship is not an employment relationship, the amount of support can still be agreed upon by considering ethical responsibility and the organization's real capacity. The wage framework in the period of study includes Government Regulation No. 36 of 2021 and its amendments, including Government Regulation No. 49 of 2025; this article does not set a minimum nominal amount without a clear location, period, and status.

Church budget constraints are a real problem that must be addressed through planning. Promising full-time ministry without a reasonable source of funding can shift all uncertainty onto church workers. Alternatives may include adjusting the scope of duties, genuine part-time ministry, inter-church support, or open bivocational ministry agreements. A historical study of the United Free Church of Scotland shows the use of cross-subsidy of ministerial stipends (Sawkins & Bailey, 2021). That historical study does not prove a financing model that is directly suitable for Indonesian churches, but it shows that livelihood support can be organized collectively and need not always be borne by the local congregation alone.

Bivocational arrangements require particular attention to the combined workload. A person who has a primary job outside the church cannot automatically be burdened with evening and weekend ministry without calculation. Churches need to agree on the time available, the limits of responsibility, reimbursement of costs, and who substitutes when the primary job or the family requires attention. Navajas-Romero et al. show the relevance of working conditions in discussing dependent self-employed workers (Navajas-Romero et al., 2019). That context does not determine the status of a

bivocational pastor, but it helps avoid the assumption that the label “self-employed” always means a person has substantial control over time and income.

Social protection should be designed on the basis of actual status. The wage-earner scheme must not be avoided by simply registering a person as a non-wage earner when the factual relationship satisfies the employer’s obligations. Conversely, ministry that is genuinely outside an employment relationship can still explore access to social security according to the requirements of the relevant programs. The BPJS Law forms part of the accountability framework, while official information from BPJS Ketenagakerjaan explains the protection available to non-wage-earner participants. Administrative participation alone is not sole evidence of the status of an employment relationship. The program, the party responsible for contributions, and the continuity of payments need to be verified according to each person’s circumstances (Republic of Indonesia, 2011; BPJS Ketenagakerjaan, n.d.).

From a normative perspective, Law No. 40 of 2004 on the National Social Security System and Law No. 24 of 2011 on the Social Security Administering Bodies form the framework for administering participation. The work accident and death benefit programs are further regulated in Government Regulation No. 44 of 2015 and its amendments; old-age benefits are regulated in Government Regulation No. 46 of 2015 and its amendments. Wage-earning workers are registered through the wage-earner participant mechanism in accordance with the employer’s obligations; independent ministers who do not satisfy the conditions of an employment relationship may evaluate participation as non-wage earners according to the program requirements. The consequences for contributions, benefits, and coverage must not be generalized, while the BPJS website is used as supplementary administrative information, not as a substitute for normative provisions.

Protection of time requires more than setting days off on a calendar. Churches need to count sermon preparation, travel, counseling, meetings, digital communication, and administrative tasks as relevant parts of the ministry workload. On-call time and emergency contacts need to be defined so that not every congregational need is treated as an emergency. Substitute schedules and a division of responsibilities can help safeguard rest. This recommendation does not establish that all on-call time necessarily has the same wage consequences; the legal consequences follow the rules and the circumstances of the relationship. Ethically, invisible work must still be counted in the distribution of the workload.

Psychological well-being also needs to be assessed without using a diagnosis as a tool for removing church workers. The typology of clergy well-being attends to the interaction of emotional exhaustion and satisfaction in ministry (Village & Francis, 2026). The relevant lesson is that satisfaction does not automatically eliminate burnout.

Churches can provide supervision, peer support, professional referral, and adjustments to duties, with confidentiality of health information. Well-being measurement must not be used to conclude that organizational problems stem solely from the personality of the church worker. Psychological instruments require appropriate interpretation and do not replace an examination of schedules, role conflict, or inadequate support.

Families need to be treated as subjects with limits, not as an automatic source of additional labour. The appointment of a pastor does not in itself amount to the spouse's consent to lead activities, open the home, or provide catering without compensation. Such tasks need to be agreed upon separately if they are in fact desired. In the context of knowledge workers, the relationship among decent work, meaning, work engagement, and family life enrichment has become a subject of research (Kashyap & Arora, 2022). The normative implication is the need for conditions that enable ministry to enrich the family, not merely draw on its support. Church housing policy also needs to attend to a humane transition when the period of ministry ends, in accordance with the legal basis and the agreement.

Opportunity to speak is an element that keeps protection from remaining a mere promise. Schlachter highlights the imbalance of bargaining power in discussing collective representation for new forms of work (Schlachter, 2019, 229–239). In the church, the form of the forum can be adapted to status and organizational order, but not all complaints should be addressed solely to the persons who control the complainant's income and spiritual evaluation. Church workers need access to information, accompaniment, and a forum capable of assessing objections independently. The right to organize and the forms of bargaining for those who fall within the relevant category must be read according to the applicable law; internal forums must not be used to replace or negate them.

Protection must take into account that bargaining power is not the same for everyone. Allan et al. showed the relationship among economic barriers, workplace climate, and access to decent work in research on a sexual minority population (Allan et al., 2019, 408–421). This article does not transfer all the conclusions of that context to the rules of church office. Its limited relevance is the recognition that income, social acceptance, and the capacity to choose may be interrelated. In ministry, vulnerability may arise from health conditions, age, remote location, or dependence on housing provided by the church. Such an examination helps churches avoid policies that appear the same for everyone but impose very different burdens.

Dispute resolution requires the separation of claims. Questions of doctrine or ordination mandate may follow church order, while disputes over payment rights or the termination of an employment relationship are assessed through the competent basis and forum. Law No. 2 of 2004 is the reference in the period of study if the relationship and

the type of dispute fall within the scope of industrial relations law. The internal negotiation stage needs to be recorded, reasonably limited, and not used to delay resolution indefinitely. If the relationship is not an employment relationship, contractual rights and other forums still need to be examined. This article does not assume that a single judicial route applies to everyone who serves the church.

Adams-Prassl, in the context of European Union law, emphasizes the importance of effective remedies for social rights (Adams-Prassl, 2020, 391–402). The comparative principle is that rights are weakened if people cannot use them without losing their livelihood or the support of their community. Churches should prohibit retaliation for complaints made in good faith and provide examiners who are free from the interests of the party complained against. Raising an objection about payment should not immediately be labelled rebellion or spiritual disobedience. At the same time, a fair examination still gives the organization room to explain its decisions and to test the basis of the claim.

Changes in organizational circumstances also need to be managed openly. Cohen et al. describe how calling can erode when work and the institutional context change in the public sector (Cohen et al., 2019, 326–335). Although this is not church research, the study is a reminder that the disillusionment of church workers does not always stem from a loss of personal commitment. Restructuring, the closure of units, or a change of leadership can fundamentally alter the content of ministry. Explaining the reasons, providing an opportunity for dialogue, and fulfilling outstanding obligations help preserve organizational accountability. Spiritual accompaniment may accompany this process, but it is not a substitute for accountability for material decisions.

The application of the model can be clarified through an analytical illustration. An administrative staff member works regularly, receives the payment promised, asks the church board for leave, and also leads prayer in worship. The spiritual function does not in itself remove the need to examine the administrative employment relationship. Conversely, a congregant who is free to accept or decline an occasional invitation to preach, with no scheduling obligation and no agreed payment, does not automatically become a worker. This illustration is neither a judicial decision nor field data. The contrast shows that religious duties can exist within different legal relationships and that conclusions require a thorough examination of the evidence.

Objections to this model may arise from the concern that formalization damages the sincerity of ministry. The answer lies in the purpose of the document: to clarify responsibilities so that sincerity does not become a space for misunderstanding or abuse. Another objection concerns the capacity of small churches. In such circumstances, adjusting the scope of ministry and cooperating on funding are more defensible than making promises that cannot be kept. Tiered protection does not promise that all church

workers receive the same material package. It asks for consistency among status, responsibility, promises, and the living conditions that result from the arrangements for ministry.

3.4. Legislative Developments after the Cut-Off Date

Official documents of the House of Representatives (DPR) state that Commission IX and the government agreed on 5 October 2026 to bring the Bill on Employment Protection to second-level deliberation, while the plenary agenda of 6 October 2026 included the report on deliberations and the taking of a decision. The stage of legislative approval must be distinguished from promulgation and the date on which a law enters into force; accordingly, this article does not treat the Bill as positive law replacing the norms studied as of 31 December 2025. Updates on validity must still be checked before application to a concrete case (DPR RI, 2026a; DPR RI, 2026b).

If a new law has been promulgated and has entered into force, application of the model will need to reassess the scope of protected subjects, the elements of an employment relationship, wages, rest time, social security, termination, and the forum for dispute resolution, to the extent amended by the new provisions. The examination must include repeal and transitional clauses to determine the rules for relationships already in progress; approval of a bill alone is not sufficient to establish that all former provisions have been replaced. The distinction among calling, office, employment relationship, and volunteering continues to be offered as a conceptual framework, while the legal consequences of each category need to be adjusted to the norms in force when it is applied. The church's ethical commitment to the livelihood and recovery of church workers also needs to be distinguished from legal obligations determined by concrete status.

This model has limitations. The addition of Indonesian literature and the example of the GKPS church order strengthens the contextual foundation, but it does not yet amount to a cross-denominational mapping. The GMIT research cited is limited to the Kupang Barat Classis, while the GKPS church order provides internal normative data and not evidence of how rights are implemented. This study has not analyzed complete official copies of decisions of the Industrial Relations Court or the Supreme Court on disputes involving church workers, individual ministry contracts, or the direct experience of the parties. For this reason, the article does not conclude that there is a national jurisprudential trend or a level of fulfilment of church workers' rights in Indonesia. The analysis of provisions is also limited to 31 December 2025. Future research should examine decisions together with the history of the legal remedies pursued, compare church orders and agreements across denominations, and test practices of income, ministry workload, and access to complaint mechanisms with the consent of the parties and protection of their confidentiality.

4. CONCLUSION

The position of church workers cannot be determined solely by the label of calling, ordination, or the non-commercial nature of the organization. Under the legal regime examined, testing for an employment relationship requires an assessment of the agreement, the positions of the parties, and the elements of work, wage, and order on the basis of concrete performance. Spiritual identity and legal status may overlap without negating each other. Therefore, protection of church autonomy needs to be distinguished from accountability for income, working conditions, and contractual obligations. Revocation of an ecclesial office does not in itself resolve all material rights, while the fulfilment of material rights does not automatically give a right to hold religious office.

The theology of work strengthens the reasons for treating livelihood, rest, safety, and the opportunity to speak as part of the community's responsibility. Free devotion cannot be turned into a demand for unlimited sacrifice. The proposed tiered protection model differentiates the bases of rights of employees, office holders or service providers, and volunteers, while maintaining equal dignity. Churches are advised to examine status on the basis of evidence, clarify agreements, assess ministry workload, arrange social protection according to the actual category, and provide dispute resolution that does not silence. This framework is normative and requires empirical testing and adjustment to regulatory developments after the temporal limit of the analysis.

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