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connex

IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM PC-MEPS

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Benefits Summary Booklets:

Active Plan and Pensioner Plan

While updating the administrator contact information in the benefits summary booklets, Ministry and Employment staff also clarified some wording and removed ambiguity brought to our attention by members over the past months. The updated booklets may be downloaded from the United Church website: go to www.united-church.ca, search “Health Benefits,” click the link to the page and scroll down to find the file for the booklet that applies to you, either Active or Pensioner. You may also request a booklet from the Benefits Centre.

There are three things that are very important to note about our United Church benefits plans:

- 1. Predetermination of Benefits:** For any treatment or medical expense that exceeds \$300, it's important to get a “predetermination of benefits” from Green Shield, essentially an estimate on the coverage that they will provide for that expense. Many dental office administrators will initiate this process, with your approval, for qualifying dental processes; but for durable medical equipment, such as a walker or wheel chair, it may not be done in advance. Predetermination of benefits helps plan members manage expectations with regard to reimbursement for large expenses and avoid disappointment.
- 2. Pensioner Plan Different from Active Plan:** To keep the benefits plan affordable to the greatest number of pensioner members, there are some differences between the Active and Pensioner plans. Three particular differences can catch members by surprise:
 - Vision care is not included.
 - Out of country travel is not included.
 - Hospital stay in a semi-private room is not included.

Pensioner members are encouraged to claim these additional charges as medical expenses on income tax returns, along with any amounts that were not covered by Green Shield in the normal administration of benefits.

- 3. Benefits during an Unpaid Leave:** When ministry personnel are not in a pastoral relationship (between calls, in search of a call), health and dental coverage is suspended. To keep medical benefits during an unpaid leave period, please contact the Benefits Centre at 1-866-859-5025.

Updating Information: Members & Treasurers

Every effort is made to keep you informed, and having your current contact information on record is a key element to making this possible. A streamlined updating process is in place with the new Benefits Centre.

Active members in paid employment must inform their treasurer or payroll administrator of any address change. Treasurers or payroll administrators working with the payroll service submit the update via the New/Change Employee sheet by faxing it to ADP; treasurers not using the payroll service call the Benefits Centre at 1-866-859-5025.

All other members should contact the Benefits Centre directly.

Please note: Treasurers may be asked to call the Ministry and Employment unit to verify their role with the pastoral charge; this is a security measure to ensure that only authorized persons have access to sensitive records. A list of authorized contacts is kept on file with both ADP, the payroll service administrator, and Aon Hewitt, the benefits administrator. Changes in contact information must be sent to ADP, or directly to the Benefits Centre in cases where ADP is not used.

Clergy Residence Deduction and Clergy Couples

At General Council 39, four proposals regarding ministry compensation were approved for further research, and the Ministry Compensation Task Group was formed. One proposal addresses the long-standing idea that the net income for clergy couples puts them at a disadvantage because, in many cases, one of the two ministers cannot claim the full clergy residence deduction (CRD).

The CRD, when a cash housing allowance is paid, is based on *the lesser of*

- the fair rental value of the home and
- one-third of the total clergy income earned by those claiming the deduction (income includes the cash housing allowance).

If there is only one clergy in the household, the CRD is based on the one income, which often means that the maximum allowable amount is deductible. When there are two clergy, the total income is the sum of the two incomes. When the fair rental value is less than a third of the combined income, one of the two clergy will not be able to claim up to one-third of their income that they may have been able to deduct had they not been part of a clergy couple.

Does this mean that clergy couples are at a disadvantage compared to single clergy households? The task group found that this question does not have any easy answer because of the many variables that influence the final outcome, many of which depend on personal choices. Given that each outcome is different and the personal choice of housing is a factor, many proposed policy changes simply create new inequities. One option might be to effectively guarantee a minimum CRD amount for all ministry personnel, whether part of a clergy couple or not. However, several options are under consideration, including making no change, and the task group continues to work toward a fair and equitable resolution to this complex issue.

Congregational Finance Resources, including CRD:

- 1 On the Church Leadership Network: <http://churchleadership.united-church.ca> (see Church Finances under the “Conversations” menu tab at the top of the page)
- 2 On the United Church website: www.united-church.ca/local/congfin
A large number of resources are posted here, including the Financial Handbook for Congregations, 2010; Mission Support forms, and a list of scheduled webinars.
- 3 For more information, contact Erik Mathiesen, Mission through Finance, by phone at 1-800-268-3781, ext. 4022, or by email at emathies@united-church.ca

Ministry Compensation Task Group at Work

As reported in previous issues of *Connex*, another proposal approved for further research at GC39 is whether to pay ministry personnel a comprehensive salary instead of a base salary plus housing/housing allowance. This would not affect entitlement to the clergy residence deduction but does mean further work with regard to the salary structure. The local cost of living is driven largely by housing costs and varies across the country, so how can a comprehensive salary be managed to provide more or less the same standard of living for all those in any given category? One possibility being considered would have different salary scales for different local costs of living or “pay zones.” The task group is working with the Conference Board of Canada to see if this is a workable approach. Is there enough reliable data to determine local costs of living across Canada? How many pay zones would fairly reflect the variances in local costs of living but still be manageable? If this approach is workable then each pastoral charge would be assigned to a pay zone with a set salary schedule.

The Task Group intends to send final recommendations in response to all four proposals about ministry compensation in time for the Executive of the General Council meeting in March 2012.

Fee Update: Pastoral Charge Payroll Service

As was announced in a letter received directly by treasurers using ADP for the pastoral charge payroll service, ADP implemented a fee increase of 3.3% that was reflected on invoices starting in July 2011.

It is part of the United Church's service agreement with ADP that they are able to apply fee increases, no more than once per year, by an amount up to the percentage increase for all-items in the Consumer Price Index as published by Statistics Canada. The fee increase is based on the April 2011 CPI amount (see www.statcan.gc.ca/subjects-sujets/cpi-ipc/cpi-ipc-eng.htm).

Fees for the payroll service depend on options chosen by the pastoral charge, including frequency of salary payment, number of people paid, and the type of reporting selected. For comparison, ADP's annual fee for enrolling three employees with a monthly payroll frequency, using the Reports on Internet option, is \$253.71, plus any applicable taxes (HST/PST/GST/QST), an increase of \$7.92 from the 2010 cost of \$245.79.

Forms Update: Pastoral Charge Payroll Service

A new version of the New/Change Employee sheet came into use September 1. Modified to accommodate the new Benefits Centre information requirements, this form was sent to all pastoral charges and other ministry sites with the welcome packages from Aon Hewitt.

This form can also be obtained by calling the United Church's ADP service line at 1-877-377-4784, or by going to the Church Leadership Network (<http://churchleadership.united-church.ca>) where it may be found in the Church Finances conversation. Because the network site has a membership requirement, we are able to post forms for the payroll service online.

ADP Update: Service Delivery

Earlier this year, ADP sent a letter outlining the possibility that affiliates outside Canada could perform some services. Some pastoral charges expressed concern, and Ministry and Employment staff followed up with ADP executives to evaluate the impact on the payroll service.

We have been assured that for the foreseeable future payroll processing and payroll data will remain resident in Canada, and voice service representatives will continue to be part of a Canadian-based dedicated United Church team. Processes that may be moved off-shore are background services, such as programming to improve the functionality of the payroll service. We are confident that all privacy standards are strictly adhered to and the scope of service provision is not affected.

For further clarification regarding the delivery of pastoral charge payroll services, ADP developed a FAQ sheet which accurately reflects the discussions and addresses the concerns of the United Church's payroll service users. This is posted on the Church Leadership Network, in the Church Finances conversation.



To get e-mail notification when a new issue of *Connex* is online (instead of a print copy), contact us at 1-800-268-3781 ext. 3161 or MinistryandEmployment@united-church.ca.

Benefits Centre Open after Transition to Aon Hewitt

Administration of the United Church's pension and benefits plans transferred to Aon Hewitt July 1, and the call centre opened July 4. Operations have been going smoothly for the most part.

Welcome packages containing all the new contact information and details about how to navigate the website for both members and treasurers or payroll administrator, have mostly been delivered.

If you have not yet received a welcome package from Aon Hewitt, please contact the Benefits Centre at 1-866-859-5025.

Several issues unique to the United Church's organizational structure have proved challenging, but generally speaking, these have been resolved with a phone call to the Ministry and Employment unit at 1-800-268-3781, ext. 3161.



Where Do You Go to Find What You Need?

Welcome to “September Start-up,” as many optimistically call it. It’s time for shiny new programs, big plans, renewed energy—or is it? In my corner of the church, people are tired, and needy. It occurred to me recently how many of our lay folk have a real need for good news, but not much energy, time, or money to offer to the church. We are a burdened people, taking care of elderly parents, small children, and vulnerable neighbours. We face illnesses, mental and physical, often not yet diagnosed, not to mention breakdown of relationships, of job security, of stability in general. It is easy to see how just showing up on a Sunday morning is a triumph! Yet, congregations cannot sustain themselves without resources.

Leaders, where do you go for support? Do you use social media, such as Wondercafe or Facebook, for ideas and strategies, or do you find inspiration in other places? How do you meet the needs of pastoral care for your flock with only a few loaves and fishes worth of energy and time?

Join this conversation on Church Leadership Network and share some of your ideas! (<http://churchleadership.united-church.ca>)

And may you feel the presence of Christ among you, in times of challenge and of joy. Shalom!

Erin

■ Erin Sterling, Communications, PC-MEPS ■

Police Record Checks: Policy Update

Police record checks processes for the United Church have been reviewed in light of changes made by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 2010. Because the new directive requires a more rigorous process for confirming the identity of the applicant, the cost to pastoral charges or other ministry units has increased significantly, as has the time to receive the information. In order to respond to these changes without changing the intent or end result of the original United Church policy, the Vulnerable Sector Verification (Level 2) is required for ministry personnel and candidates when

- the applicant is over the age of 25 and a Vulnerable Sector Verification (Level 2) has never been provided, or
- the applicant is over the age of 25 and three years or more have elapsed since either a Vulnerable Sector Verification (Level 2) or a Criminal Records Check (Level 1) has been provided.

Otherwise, a Criminal Records Check (Level 1) satisfies the requirement for Police Record Checks for ministry personnel and candidates.

Manual Simplification: FEEDBACK REQUEST

The May 2010 General Council Executive initiated a project to significantly reduce the complexity and size of *The Manual* and make it more user-friendly. A staff team was appointed by the General Secretary to work with this feedback and to undertake a draft of a proposed new *Manual*.

The full report to the Executive and each of the draft *Manual* sections are online: www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/110705

To provide feedback, there are two Survey Monkey online surveys. You are also welcome to send letters and meeting reports, either by email or by post: General Council Office, Re: Manual Feedback, 3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4.

1 www.surveymonkey.com/s/manual_simplification

Collects feedback on the draft *Manual*. It has no policy or process changes; just “plain language” in a reorganized format to our existing *Manual* content. Comment on any or all sections.

2 www.surveymonkey.com/s/ucc_policy_changes

Collects feedback on areas proposed for changes to policy and processes

Responses are requested to be submitted **as soon as possible** (before Thanksgiving).



Need
connex
help?

Connex is the newsletter of the General Council Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS) and of the Ministry and Employment Unit.

For additional copies to circulate to your M&P committee, church board, congregation members, or presbytery representatives, or to comment on **Connex** or suggest topics for future issues, please contact the editor:

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