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# connex

IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM PC-MEPS

ISSUE 29 | JANUARY 2012

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## Transition to Aon Hewitt: Thanks from the Rev. Alan Hall, Ministry and Employment

The largest and most important project that I've been involved with since joining the staff of Ministry and Employment is the transition to Aon Hewitt as our pension and benefits administrator. The service provider change was necessary to ensure improved service and administration of our pension and benefits plans for members.

This has been a huge undertaking for our amazingly dedicated and competent staff located in the General Council Office. It has also been a huge undertaking for Aon Hewitt. Though the company is experienced with multi-employer plans—most with dozens or hundreds of employers, each with hundreds or thousands of employees—our plan is unique. We have thousands of employers, but most have fewer than five employees. Our plans are complex and complicated by a number of non-traditional work situations. We are also multi-jurisdictional, with pastoral charges and ministry sites located in

every province and territory of Canada and in Bermuda.

Aon Hewitt has an enormous learning curve. Despite 15 months of our staff working closely with them developing systems, protocols, and practices, and despite a senior Aon Hewitt project person working in the Ministry and Employment Unit at the General Council Office for six months and learning our culture and the needs of our members and pastoral charges first-hand, the truth is that it really isn't until the day the new system "goes live" that the learning really begins.

Since July 1, much of our planning and designing has proven well worth the intensive effort. However, several challenges arose, and no doubt there will be several more. Design has been modified and service models reconfigured. Aon Hewitt continues to commit its full resources to getting things right. I remain confident that their systems can and will meet our needs.

I extend my personal apologies to members who have encountered the rough edge of the learning curve and been frustrated with service inconsistencies, errors, or delays. Your patience is appreciated. Your evaluations have allowed us to address your situations and to get at the underlying systemic issues so that they will not be a problem for others going forward.

Both the Pension Board and the Permanent Committee for Ministry and Employment Policies and Services are providing careful oversight of the transition and, with the staff of the Ministry and Employment Unit and of Aon Hewitt, are committed to the highest service standards and values.

Again, thank you for your patience. We look forward to a long and strong relationship with Aon Hewitt.

The Rev. Alan Hall, Executive Officer  
Ministry and Employment,  
General Council Office

### Invoicing Delays: Direct Billed Members and Participating Employers

We understand how important it is for treasurers, payroll administrators, and members to receive accurate invoices. We have heard from you the challenges and frustration inaccurate billings have caused you in the past.

Most employers and members requiring an invoice would have received one at the end of August, representing three months of premium charges for June, July, and August.

Premium payments have been received, and we are in the process of ensuring that these payments are appropriately allocated (by pastoral charge, by member, and by benefit). Due to the significant testing involved in ensuring payments are appropriately allocated and that all the subsequent invoices being generated are accurate, there was a delay in the production of the invoices.

At the end of 2011, invoices/monthly statements were sent out to those affected by these delays to reconcile the amount owing for the year end. Please read the details of remittance carefully, and direct the payment to the address noted in the communication. Misdirected payments will mean further delay in reconciling accounts.

Please note: the invoice delay did not affect any member's benefits or pension accrual.

# PC-MEPS and Ministry and Employment:

## Pastoral Relations Oversight Proposal Presented

At its November 12–14 meeting, the Executive of the General Council took a first look at proposals that, if adopted by the General Council next summer, would significantly change how we initiate, support, and conclude pastoral relationships, as well as how we support ministry personnel on an ongoing basis. The Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services presented *Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships*, an integrated proposal drawing on the extensive research and study of

- the Isolation in Ministry Steering Group and survey (2005)
- the Working Group on Isolation in Ministry (2008)
- the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel (2008)
- the Oversight and Discipline of Ministry Personnel Steering Group (2008)
- the Pastoral Relations Policy Review Steering Group (2009)

As the Integration Working Group of the Permanent Committee began its work in summer 2011, it brought all the conclusions and recommendations from the independent steering, task, and working groups together in a congruent and complimentary proposal. *Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships* recommended that

- the responsibility for the identification of mission and the requirements for ministry leadership be primarily located with the pastoral charge
- the responsibility for the implementation of pastoral relations policies related to mission, collegiality, and pastoral care of ministers be located with the presbytery
- the responsibility for the implementation of pastoral relations policies related to the credentials of ministry personnel, employment standards, and the initiation or ending of pastoral relationships be located with the Conference
- the processes of pastoral relations and of oversight and discipline of ministry personnel be managed by staff located at the Conference
- the processes for nurturing effective leadership and healthy pastoral relationships be simplified and designed to allow them to respond to the unique geographic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of local ministries

The integrated report and the individual reports from each steering, task, and working group are available for viewing at [http://gc40.united-church.ca/files/gce\\_1111\\_workbook.pdf](http://gc40.united-church.ca/files/gce_1111_workbook.pdf).

The Executive of the General Council received the report and directed the General Secretary to initiate consultation throughout the church on the wisdom and viability of the proposals. This consultation will inform the Executive at its March 2012 meeting as it prepares proposals for the 41st General Council in Ottawa, August 2012.

To contribute your comments and opinions about these proposals and others as we move toward the 41st General Council, visit <http://churchleadership.united-church.ca/page/leadership>.

## Compensation Directions Considered

The Ministry Compensation Task Group is making much progress and gaining clear direction for compensation proposals. At its November 2011 meeting, the Executive of the General Council provided further input on the following proposals that are being developed:

- that we move from six to three minimum salary schedules: 1) Order of Ministry 2) Recognized Designated Lay Ministry 3) Not Yet Recognized, Ordered, or Commissioned
- that the existing salary differential of 3.3 percent between Order of Ministry and Recognized Designated Lay Ministry be maintained
- that ministry personnel begin to accumulate service credits for moving through the A–F salary increment categories only when recognized, commissioned, or ordained
- that no maximum salary be stipulated for any of the categories

The issue of housing allowances and the Clergy Residence Deduction continues to be part of the work of the task group. A final report with recommendations will go to the Permanent Committee in January 2012, with proposals following to the March meeting of the Executive of the General Council.



## 2012 Ministry and Employment Policy Updates

The Permanent Committee for Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS) had a packed agenda to consider at its most recent meeting. From the benefits plans perspective, the committee made three major decisions.

### No Plan Design Changes to the Pensioner Health and Dental Plan

A proposal submitted to the General Council Office requested that additional benefits be added under the Pensioner Health and Dental Plan. The decision was made to maintain the existing plan design due to the significant deficit position of the pensioner plan—it is expected the Pensioner Health and Dental Plan will generate a deficit of approximately \$900,000 in 2012 alone. This deficit is currently paid for by the reserves and the Pensioner Premium Support payments. While improving the benefits available to pensioners is important, this has to be weighed against fiscal responsibility.



### 2012 Rate Adjustments: Limited Premium Increases for Employers and Pensioners

Of all the benefits offered by the United Church, the highest increases in utilization have been under the Short-Term Disability and Pensioner Health and Dental Plans. Because of this, PC-MEPS approved the following:

- **A 5 percent increase to the Short-Term Disability (STD) rate:** This program provides sick leave benefits to qualifying lay members of the benefits plan. For a member whose pensionable earnings are \$30,000, the annual deduction moved from \$138 per year, to \$144.90, a difference of \$6.90 per year.
- **A 2 percent increase to the Pensioner Health and Dental rates:** The increase changes the monthly rates as follows:
  - For Single Coverage, from \$58.50 to \$59.67, an increase of \$1.17 per month
  - For Family Coverage, from \$118.00 to \$120.36, an increase of \$2.36 per month

In Ontario and Quebec, premiums are subject to taxes. Once taxes are added, the premiums there are as follows:

- Single: Quebec \$65.04 (9 percent tax)  
Ontario \$64.44 (8 percent tax)
- Family: Quebec \$131.19 (9 percent tax)  
Ontario \$129.99 (8 percent tax)



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### Long-Term Disability Benefit to Increase

Ministry and Employment recommended, and PC-MEPS approved, a 1.8 percent benefit increase for Long-Term Disability (LTD) claimants, to coincide with the salary adjustments at January 1, 2012.

A complete list of the deductions for employers and employees of the United Church plans can be viewed online at the Church Leadership Network (see “Keep in Touch” in the Xtra for the web address).





To all God's beloved...who are called to be saints:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
(Romans 1:7)

As I write this, it is almost the second Sunday of Advent, when we focus on the gift of peace. By the time you read this, the day of Epiphany will have just passed, with its story of God sending a star to lure outsiders to hear the good news of Jesus. I wonder about the state of "peace" in your souls at this moment. Are you open to the new ways God may be luring those outside our church walls, whispering words of love and courage? Or are you exhausted from the demands of Advent and Christmas, having used your last vestiges of energy trying to create that perfect pageant, Christmas Eve service, present, or family get-together? I hope that the season of anticipation and celebration has not left you breathless, but has fed you, reminding you that the good news is also for you, not just for those you serve.

A new calendar year has begun, bringing with it many new demands: a remit to vote on, a General Council meeting to prepare for, transitions in the wider church and, no doubt, in your own life. The themes of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany continue to resonate for me as we live in the tension between the promises of God and the realities of a broken world.

As saints of the church, we are called to be agents of this God, sharing Christ's peace and embodying it through simple acts to feed the hungry, stand up for the powerless, and offer love to the outcast. Grace and peace to you, beloved—may your efforts to seek God's peace be rewarded, and may we continue to pray for the well-being of our church.

Shalom,  
Erin

■ Erin Sterling, Communications, PC-MEPS ■

## Shepell.fgi: Employee Assistance Programs Can Help

All active members of the United Church benefits plans have Employee Assistance Program access. This confidential service can be accessed any time: [www.shepellfgi.com](http://www.shepellfgi.com) or 1-800-387-4765.

Shepell.fgi has a variety of services for members, including management of stress, nutrition consultation and weight management, and caregiver assistance.

## Get an Estimate! Predetermine the Benefit

Costs expected to exceed \$300 should have the coverage predetermined by Green Shield. The remuneration for a large medical expense can vary; call 1-888-711-1111 for more information on coverage to avoid unexpected costs.



## Treasurers: 2012 Salary and Allowances Schedule

The 2012 minimum salary schedule is available here:

- United Church website: [www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pastoral/salary/schedule](http://www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pastoral/salary/schedule)
- Church Leadership Network: <http://churchleadership.united-church.ca/forum/topics/2012-salary-and-allowances-schedule-for-ministry-personnel>

On either site, you can also search "salary and allowances."

Contact Ministry and Employment to request a print copy.



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