

PR Temporary Amendment Resource

The context

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed the way the entire world conducts its affairs, and the communities of Faith of The United Church of Canada are not exempt. Communities of faith are not able to gather, and this has made it difficult for decisions which need to be made by the communities of faith, to be taken.

In this highly technological age, the possibility of having electronic meetings exists, and is permitted (teleconferencing, zoom). However, there are some communities of faith which lack adequate capacity to hold meetings in this way, and all communities of faith are striving to continue the work of the Church as best they can.

What has changed

The governing body, or its equivalent, in each pastoral charge may temporarily make decisions in regards to pastoral relations which normally require a vote of the congregation at a duly called congregational meeting. The governing board is usually small enough to met by telephone conference call or video conference to fulfill the responsibilities of the communities of faith for making pastoral decisions.

It is in this context that a temporary amendment was made to The Manual, to help to facilitate the work of the Church when decisions must be made at this time:

- Acting on the Search Committee's recommendation to call or appoint a member of the order of ministry
- Requesting appointment of a designated lay minister
- Approving new terms of a call or appointment
- Temporarily amending the terms of a call or appointment because of the pandemic
- Ending a pastoral relationship.

All such decisions must be made in consultation with and the concurrence of the appropriate regional council body.

Funding Resources

Compliance with emergency measures enacted by the governmental authorities has meant that some communities of faith are in dire financial straits. Dealing with this reality has meant that some communities of faith must give serious consideration to temporary changes of terms of call or appointment of ministry personnel. Even as these measures are being considered, the Regional Council must be consulted. The Regional Council has information which may lead to another plan being adopted.

Material produced by the Finance and Philanthropy Units of our Church point to sources of funding from the government, and from the Church, as well as strategies to continue to receive financial support during this time of crisis. These resources are highlighted below.

- Planning as a community of faith
<https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/make-plan>
- Staying financially viable during this time
<https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/congregational-finances-and-covid-19>
- Government Funding
<https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/government-emergency-programs>
- United Church emergency support
<https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/united-church-emergency-support>

How it affects pastoral relationships

It is hoped that with the use of the wage subsidy option and emergency loan funds, in addition to some of the other strategies, that a plan can be made to sustain the work of

the community of faith and the ministry which can still be offered, and which is most critically needed at this time.

To lose ministry personnel at this time, means a community of faith will lose the person who would provide pastoral care in a time when many persons are in critical need of care. Ministry personnel have been taking advantage of online training resources and information surrounding support of persons during these crises. This care and support is being offered in very unique ways by ministry personnel, to persons who are members of their communities of faith, and to persons in our communities who would not ordinarily have been in contact with ministry personnel.

The reality is that if a person is laid off, they cannot offer these services.

Health and Vitality of Ministry Personnel

With ministry personnel doing incredible work during unprecedented circumstances, there is the risk that they may feel overwhelmed. Resources are also available to help ministry personnel in the areas of information provision, support and training.

- Regional Councils have all implemented various strategies to support the health and vitality of ministry personnel. Networks have been established, and access has been made to helpful links and programs which would maintain mental wellness during these times. Please see the web page of the specific Regional Council for details of these programs.
- The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available to ministry personnel who are members of the Benefit plan and their families. Immediate and confidential support to help resolve work, health, and life challenges will be provided. <https://www.workhealthlife.com>
- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers
 - 24/7 confidential access to professional support to help employees manage stress, anxiety, grief, financial concerns, and much more Connect to support by phone, video, or chat anytime, anywhere

- Vast library of online resources for coping with trauma, building resiliency, self-care, managing change, along with others.
<https://www.lifeworks.com/ca/solution/employee-assistance-program-eap/>
- Workplace Learning Solutions (WLS) offers
 - Two 60 minute bilingual webinars that address the reality of the present situation and strategies to boost resilience through thought and daily habits:
 - [Building Resilience while under Quarantine](#)
 - [Building Resilience in Uncertain Times](#)
- First Access offers:
 - Counselling and traumatic event support to address unique prospect and customer needs worldwide
 - Allows support of situations outside the presence of a formal contract to access support services as needed to ensure timely and effective issue resolution. Contact the [First Access team for more information](#)

Procedures for Change in Pastoral Relations

The decision to temporarily lay-off ministry personnel, to change the number of hours in a call or appointment, or to end a pastoral relationship due to COVID-19, is a monumental decision. As these decisions are being contemplated, the Regional Council must be consulted. Every effort will be made to give communities of faith the support which is needed.

Temporary Layoffs

Each province has very specific legislation with respect to temporary layoffs as a result of COVID-19. The Regional Council has these details and are available to guide you through this process. The Regional Council will ensure that there is a declared intention to recall the minister upon cessation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the community of faith has exhausted all funding sources.

Amending terms of Call/Appointment.

The Regional Council must be contacted to determine if the proposed changes meet the criteria of being urgent and cannot be dealt with under any other bylaw or policy.

Consultation

1. The governing body must consult with the community of faith before making a decision about a pastoral relationship, to the extent reasonable and practicable in the circumstances to the satisfaction of the Regional Council. Here are some considerations as communities of faith seek to consult and make decisions in a time when gathering is not possible.
 - Consultation can be via email or phone.
 - As many members can be notified as possible. If the members of the community of faith have the practice of giving adherents voting rights, adherents should be notified as well. Otherwise, adherents don't need to be notified.
 - Everyone notified needs to be given the same options: respond via phone/email.
 - When the governing body is making a pastoral relations decision, the ministry personnel in the pastoral charge will have the same right to notice of the virtual meeting and an opportunity to respond. In this case section B.5.4.2 of The Manual shall be interpreted as 9 days where it is not practicable to read during public worship on 2 Sundays.
2. The Regional Council must ask the ministry personnel affected if they support the request. If the ministry personnel do not support the request, the requirement that the minister is given 90 days notice or salary and benefits in lieu of notice (Manual I.3.1.6) will continue to apply. The only exception to this is a temporary layoff related to COVID-19

Finally

It is important to remember that this is a temporary amendment, with a scheduled end-date of August 31, 2020, or earlier cancellation or extension by decision of the Executive or Sub-Executive of the General Council.

We pray for safety for all as we navigate this unprecedented crisis and we affirm that we are not alone.