

Guidance to Communities of Faith on Managing Lay Employees during COVID-19 crisis

Prepared by Shining Waters Regional Council staff

Slightly revised on March 24, 2020

As churches have closed across the region, lay leaders are grappling with the question of how to manage employment relationships, including lay employees.

How can employees continue to work from home? What should be done with employees who can not work from home or whose work is contingent on the normal routines of church? (e.g., custodians, paid musicians, etc.)? How can a Community of Faith continue to pay employees when revenue is impacted by falling donations and/or loss of rental income? These are some of the questions arising as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Recognizing that the circumstances of every Community of Faith are different, the following is some guidance for M&P Committees and governing bodies.

1. In this time of anxiety, including job security, if at all possible financially, continue to keep your employees on the payroll and avoid lay-offs. In the early days of a crisis is not the time to make hasty decisions! This is the time to draw on reserves if needed. If you have a line of credit, consider using that, rather than investments, which have significantly diminished in value in this crisis.

For employees who are able to work from home, work with them to set up arrangements, including modified work assignments.

For employees such as custodians and others who cannot work from home, consider the following options:

a) use up any lieu time they may have accrued

b) provide a paid leave of absence for a specified period, to be reviewed at the end of the period

c) if you must lay off employees, we anticipate that a template letter which will help in complying with Ontario employment law will be provided soon. Note that laying off of employees must be approved by your governing body. No single person, or even the M&P Committee can make this decision (for directions on how to continue to make decisions as a governing body, see <https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/emergency-plan/#governance> .

Please note that for lay employees, no permission is needed from the Regional Council to make changes to the employment relationship, including laying off staff. We always advise seeking the counsel of an employment lawyer, but especially in times of tight finances, for straight forward situations, the minimum you must do is comply with Ontario employment law.

In this time of crisis, ministry personnel are busier now than ever. They can continue to do much of their work via the phone and electronic means. Your congregants, community members and others need the leadership that your minister is able to provide. Prioritize your ministry personnel!

If you are considering the reduction of hours for ministry personnel, please speak to your Pastoral Relations Minister before doing anything (see contacts at the bottom)

d) The UCC General Council Office is determining the feasibility of keeping employees who are laid off on the UCC benefits plan. Stay tuned for more information about this, hopefully later this week (week of March 23).

e) The UCC General Council Office will also provide some guidance on ensuring that laid off employees can transition to Employment Insurance. Again please stay tuned for this.

f) If you have staff who are independent contractors, and whose work is not needed at this time (e.g. a cleaning service) you can temporarily suspend their services. Please check the written contract you have with such contractors for any agreements around notification period, etc.

g) If you cannot continue to pay all or some of your staff due to financial difficulties, there may be some support available from Shining Waters Regional Council. Please contact Jody Maltby (jmaltby@united-church.ca) 416-231-7680 or toll free: 1-800-268-3781, ext 6226 if your church is in a precarious financial situation. One time use of restricted manse funds or other externally restricted funds will be possible. Please speak to Jody. Criteria for loans and grants from the Regional Council will also hopefully be available shortly. All such information will be posted on our web site.

h) If any staff become sick, they can apply for the Restorative Care Program (if accepted, based on medical evidence, the Community of Faith will be reimbursed 85% of their salary after a two week waiting period). This again applies to staff who work 14 hrs/week or more. Contact Dale Hildebrand or Todd McDonald for an application.

i) Morneau – Shepell's Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available for all employees working 14hrs/week or more (number to call: 1.844.880.9142)

They provide a variety of counselling and other support services. They also have created a short video for those experiencing high levels of emotional anxiety as a result of COVID-19.

Emotional Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Learning objectives:

- Why do outbreaks affect our emotional health?
- Practical skills to cope with the anxiety
- Talking to your children
- Tips for you and your family

<https://vimeo.com/user65099910/emotional-well-being-covid-19>

For any questions related to employment issues of your staff, please call your Pastoral Relations Minister:

Pastoral Relations Ministers

North of the 407 highway

Todd McDonald – tmcdonald@united-church.ca (416-231-7680 or toll free: 1-800-268-3781, ext 6235)

South of the 407 highway

Dale Hildebrand – dhildebrand@united-church.ca (416.231.7680 ext. 6261)