



connex

IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM PC-MEPS

Please circulate to

- ✓ Treasurer
- ✓ M&P Committee
- ✓ Ministry Personnel
- ✓ Lay Employees
- ✓ Presbytery Personnel/E&S Rep.
- ✓ Pension Convenor
- ✓ Church Board/Office

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A Global View

By Taylor Croissant

I have been serving on the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS) since January 2017. My previous role was in South Korea as ordained supply with our global partner, The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. My position was in Kangnam Presbyterian Church, a 2,200-member congregation on the west side of Seoul. There I did a ministry of Christian education in English for children, youth, and adults

wishing to improve their English skills. I was very honoured to be in South Korea at the same time as the Rev. Catherine Christie, who was serving on behalf of The United Church of Canada with The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. It was very helpful to have a United Church colleague there to mentor me in my role of serving a Korean congregation.

My wife, MiYeon, is an ordained minister in that denomination and is

in the final stages of the admissions process into The United Church of Canada. Walking through the admissions process with her has been very valuable to the work I am now doing on PC-MEPS.

Earlier this fall, we experienced an event that also gave me some valuable insights into my work on PC-MEPS. MiYeon developed a terrible toothache, which resulted in a referral to a specialist in Edmonton and a subsequent bill that practically knocked the wind right out of us. We were very thankful to have our Green Shield dental coverage, which helped to mitigate our out-of-pocket costs. The members of PC-MEPS work hard to balance the coverage needs of plan members with the need to keep premiums affordable for members and pastoral charges.

God bless each of your ministries as together we prepare for Advent and Christmas.

—Taylor Croissant is a member of PC-MEPS and an ordained minister serving Kitscoty-Marwayne Pastoral Charge in Alberta & Northwest Conference.



In Panmunjom in the North-South Korea Demilitarized Zone



Shareholder engagement activities through SHARE

The pension plan joined with 100 other investors to question the five largest Canadian banks on how they are managing and disclosing climate-related concerns. A letter was sent noting that Canada's banks are exposed to a range of climate risks. Further information was requested on each bank's governance and risk assessment, strategy and implementation, low-carbon products, and policy engagement and collaboration.

The pension plan also participated in SHARE's engagement with CES Energy Solutions to encourage the company to diversify its board of directors. The company has now adopted a board diversity policy that, unlike many current ones, incorporates our suggestion to include Indigenous heritage as a criterion for board diversity. CES has also added the first woman to its board of directors.

Governance review of the pension plan

The General Council Executive authorized an independent review of the pension plan governing documents and organizational structures.

As part of the review, plan members were surveyed and focus groups were held. This input, plus interviews with current board and committee members, will help to frame recommendations for governance improvements. Watch for future articles in *Connex* that will discuss some of the questions and comments received from participants.



Flourishing in Ministry survey

We are pleased to announce that United Church ministry personnel will soon be invited to participate in the Flourishing in Ministry project, a study on clergy wellness. This study has been designed and implemented by Dr. Matthew Bloom of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana and is funded by the Lilly Endowment (for more information see wellbeing.nd.edu/flourishing-in-ministry).

The main objective of this work is to provide empirical data that will shed light on the conditions most conducive to the well-being of clergy and their families. What distinguishes a flourishing, meaningful, vital vocational life from one that is less fulfilling?

With your participation, we will gain greater insights into clergy well-being. This data will be used to guide the development of policy and programs for flourishing

ministry personnel in our church, so we are hoping for maximum participation from our denomination. Don't miss this opportunity to assist us in learning how best to care for our ministry personnel.

The window for participation begins February 1, 2018, and ends February 10, 2018. Before it begins, ministry personnel will receive an e-mail inviting them to complete the survey. Individual responses will be confidential, and only aggregate results will be analyzed by denominational leaders.

For more information, please contact the Rev. Adam Hanley, Program Coordinator—Ministry Personnel Vitality, at 1-800-268-3781 or 416-231-5931, ext. 3147, or ahanley@united-church.ca.



STRAIGHT TALK about our pension plan

There has been a lot of talk lately about our pension plan. We'd like to provide plan members a clearer picture of how the plan works in three key areas.

Our plan is and remains a defined benefit “career average” pension plan registered under the Ontario Pension Benefits Act.

A multi-employer plan like ours may be amended to reduce benefits for past service under the Act. Without this ability, there are few options available to address a deficit if it occurs. **Past service benefits have never been reduced** even though our plan has faced extremely challenging circumstances in recent years. Instead, several strategies have been used to keep the plan sustainable during a period when many other Canadian defined benefit plans accumulated significant deficits.

Volunteer members of the Pension Board and its committees work very hard on behalf of all members of the plan to keep the pension promise. Pension assets are invested to include a reasonable amount of risk to allow for the possibility of future benefit improvements, while trying to minimize the risk of a deficit that employers and members have little or no capacity to fund.

The other strategies that are available include increasing contributions and reducing the benefit earned on future service. These were used in 2013. The good news is that as of the end of 2016, when a formal valuation was done, the plan was fully funded. This means there are sufficient funds to meet our current pension commitments. There are no plans to reduce benefits.



Photo: © Ocskay Bence | Dreamstime.com

Why haven't there been any pension increases since 2009?

As has been communicated in *Connex* and the *Annual Report of the Pension Plan*, this is due to challenging economic conditions and our relatively low contribution rates. Although increases have been granted in the past, **our plan is not, and never has been, indexed to inflation**. To index plan benefits to inflation would require substantially higher contribution rates, which would not be sustainable for plan members or churches. Why doesn't the church put more money into the plan, maybe from property sales? With changes to registered pension rules several years ago, large lump sum contributions are not allowed.

Who is responsible for pension plan policies and investment strategies?

The Executive of the General Council (GCE) is the legal administrator of the plan. In this role its first responsibility is to act always in the best interests of the plan members. This is the GCE's fiduciary duty. Recognizing that most GCE members (indeed, most people generally) don't have specialized pension expertise, the GCE delegates much of its plan-related responsibility to experts—namely, the Pension Board and its committees. This delegation is prudent, consistent with the GCE's legal obligations, and ensures proper plan oversight. While it is important to consider the values of the church, the GCE and the Pension Board must have sufficient discretion and independence to make decisions in plan members' best interests without direction from General Council.

Managing a pension fund is a complex balance of many interests, of which first and foremost is protecting the plan's ability to pay the pension.

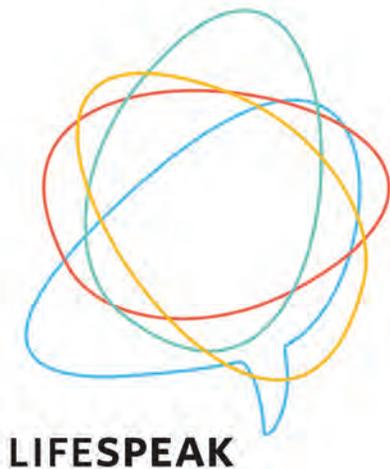
Watch for more Straight Talk in future issues of *Connex*.

New LifeSpeak service launching January 1, 2018

LifeSpeak is a new service to augment our Employee and Family Assistance Plan (EFAP).

LifeSpeak is a health, wellness, and professional development platform that gives you and your family members instant access to expert advice on all kinds of topics. It can also be used by members of the Ministry and Personnel Committee to support wellness or other human resource matters. Ministry personnel can even use this platform as a source of support material to share with members of their congregation as the ministers provide pastoral care.

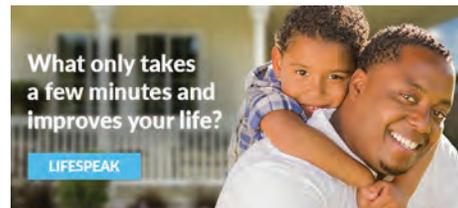
From physical and mental health to finance and relationships to professional development—it's all here. You and your family members can watch videos, download action plans, and interact with world-class experts in real time.



LifeSpeak is available anywhere and anytime and is 100 percent confidential. You'll find what you need to know so you can do what you want to do. The LifeSpeak library contains over 100 videos on topics that affect your life every day, including

- Retirement
- Couples Relationships
- Finance for Everyone
- Having Difficult Conversations with Confidence
- Thriving through Change
- Heart Disease
- Weight Management
- Addressing Anxiety Head-On
- Conflict Management
- Healthy Eating for Children and Families
- Key Communication Skills for Managers
- Shifting Your Mindset to Wealth

Visit united-church.lifespeak.com and enter the corporate ID: **wellness**.



CONTACT US

Connex is the newsletter of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS), the Ministry and Employment unit at General Council Office, and The Pension Plan of The United Church of Canada.

United Church Benefits Centre: 1-855-647-8222
(update personal information; start pension)

Green Shield Canada: 1-888-711-1119 greenshield.ca
(questions on coverage for health and dental; online tools; reminders)

Pastoral Charge Payroll Service: 1-800-268-3781,
ext. 3132 or 2757 payroll@united-church.ca

Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP): Confidential, 24/7
1-800-387-4765 (English), 1-800-361-5676 (français) shepell.com

Ministry and Employment unit at GCO: 1-800-268-3781
MinistryandEmployment@united-church.ca



2018 BENEFITS PREMIUMS

Because of careful management of our benefits costs, we were able to draw on reserves to reduce premiums by 20 percent for the last three years. However, we now need to begin moving back to actual plan costs.

In 2018, rates for all coverage except optional life and optional AD&D will increase by 6.5 percent.

Benefit Category	Rate for 2017	New Rate for 2018
Restorative Care Plan (employer paid): EN22	0.89%	0.95%
Employer Indemnity (employer paid): EN23	0.096%	0.10%
Pension Contributions (employer paid): EN26	9.0%	Unchanged
BASIC Benefits, incl. health and dental, life ins. (employer paid): EN27	4.30%	4.59%
Pension Contributions (employee paid): DN02	6.0%	Unchanged
Long Term Disability (employee paid): DN19	2.503%	2.666%
Optional Life (employee paid): DN22	As per the Rate Table	Unchanged
Optional Spousal Life (employee paid): DN23	As per the Rate Table	Unchanged
Optional AD&D (employee paid): DN24		
Single: for each \$10,000 of volume	\$0.30	Unchanged
Family: for each \$10,000 of volume	\$0.50	Unchanged
Optional Health and Dental (employee paid): DN25	Monthly	Monthly
Single	\$36.02	\$38.36
Family	\$102.59	\$109.26
Pensioner Health and Dental (pensioner paid via pension benefit)		
Single	\$47.74	\$50.84
Family	\$96.29	\$102.55