



connex

IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM MINISTRY AND EMPLOYMENT

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✓ Ministry Personnel ✓ Lay Employees ✓ Church Board/Office

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My View from Here:

A Journal Entry for Clergy in Pandemic Times

Photo: Manuel Machado | Dreamstime.com

For me, the energy surrounding the pandemic has some familiar echoes from the floods we experienced here in High River back in 2013. Of course, today's situation is quite different. Back then we were all forced *out* of our homes. Now, we're all forced *into* our homes. It's the virus we're trying to keep homeless.

Here are 12 things I think might be helpful to bring into your awareness during these pandemic times as we work hard to preserve our pastoral connections and stay in the lead with our congregations as they continue to cope with all the health and safety measures that are in

place right now. What follows is in no particular order of importance. I would say they are all of equal value. I know I've missed things, but humour me as I try to give voice to some thoughts based on my past experience of disaster.

- 1 Human beings don't like to be apart. COVID-19 counts on us being together for it to survive. Being apart—facing separation—is very difficult emotionally. Consider concentrating your pastoral care on nurturing contact and closeness by focusing on human relationships. In any disaster, humans yearn for togetherness. It's instinctual.
- 2 Give yourself permission to not have to do everything right now. There is time. After all, we are going to be in this mode of being for quite a while. So...think marathon, not a sprint. At the end of the day, while on your pillow and before you fall asleep, you can simply say, "I did enough today; I don't need to problem solve through the night. I will have time tomorrow." Pace yourself.
- 3 More than likely you will be experiencing some short-term memory issues or having a hard time concentrating or staying focused. For the most part, these are alarm-based symptoms. The brain is preoccupied with survival and safety, which puts higher brain functioning on the back burner for now.
- 4 Therefore, be mindful about how you can bring down the alarm in your life right now. Watch less news, and refrain from alarming movies and especially Facebook posts. Consider scrolling less and strolling more—go outside. Walk. Sit in the sun.

5 Anxiety is a product of alarm. Anxiety can lead to addictions as we try to numb the losses, lacks, and sadness, or any other discomfort we wish would just go away. Anxiety is also often at the root of compulsions, which are just another way of trying to control things. So, what can you control—realistically speaking? Physical distancing is a way to help control the virus spread, right? We can control our preventative measures. In addition, can you establish a daily routine? Can you get dressed up for work, even though you are home? Turf the bathrobe by noon, at least!

6 In four out of four conversations, I heard clergy say they were not sleeping well at night. Or, walking up with a jolt between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. Again, this is alarm-based. Our nerves are jangled. Can you simply acknowledge that this is the case? “I’m feeling alarmed. I am safe right now. I have done all I can do. I will have another swing at things when I wake tomorrow. For now, it’s enough.”

7 It’s OK and valid to recognize you may not be functioning at your normal capacity. You may feel fatigue or have the sense that your resilience or ability to bounce back is not what it usually is. This is also our body’s way of coping with alarm and the frayed energy of disaster. It takes energy to keep our shields up under normal circumstances. But now, we need our shields up all the time! Normally, we need shields up when dealing with difficult parishioners, or when we need to tend our professional boundaries and borders, but not usually during mundane daily routines like going to the grocery store, the pharmacy, or wherever we can usually be without undue energy going to our defences. Living in pandemic times requires us to divert more energy to our shields. This is fatiguing.

8 Pray, meditate, be quiet...every day, even twice a day. We are spiritual leaders. Be spiritual! Stay connected with the Holy.

9 Allow time and space for the safe expression of your tears—for the things you cannot change, fix, or make better. Having our tears for the futilities we face will deliver us to joy and resilience. There is so much grief around the world right now. We need to cry.

10 Slow yourself down. Do what you can, and don’t worry about what you can’t.



Photo: Erin Alexis Randolph | Dreamstime.com

11 We may be clever wordsmiths, great preachers, and feel compelled to get the “word” out there. But honestly, we would do well if we said less and listened more.

12 It is not all up to us. We are not all there is. Working more does not generate better results. Neither does clergy guilt about how we should be doing more. Working more coupled with guilt is a surefire recipe for burnout. Just a reminder: “Normal” work habits and patterns went out the window over a month ago. There is no point trying to replicate what was because it doesn’t exist anymore. More tears...but these tears are what lead us to adaptation.

13 —A baker’s dozen. Bring play into your life. Laugh. We have a 10-year-old in our congregation who created a Coronavirus Board Game! Dress up. Dance. Make music. Remember: Play is not work—it is not outcome-based. It is not for real. It has a beginning and an end. Listen to that amazing child in you, and let them lead you into play.

We are blessed and privileged to be ministers in The United Church of Canada. We are an amazing cohort of diverse leaders who are under a great number of demands right now. It is both challenging and inspiring to be shaped by our faith during these pandemic times. May God’s love be sustaining and surrounding you as we foster and nourish our togetherness while apart.

—Rev. David Robertson is a facilitator with the Neufeld Institute, based in Vancouver. He is also in team ministry at High River United Church in High River, AB, and a chaplain for Chinook Winds Region. This article first appeared on the [Chinook Winds Region website](#). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Resources to Help Us Cope with the Pandemic

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is now providing access to a number of free resources for Canadians. You may find their one-page summary, [Coping with Stress, Anxiety, and Substance Use during COVID-19](#), on mentalhealthcommission.ca helpful for yourself or to share with others.

The [Wellness Together Canada](https://ca.portal.gs) portal (<https://ca.portal.gs>), funded by Health Canada, may be helpful for yourself or members of your faith community.

As we do our best to cope with all the changes this pandemic brings, many of us are experiencing a sense of grief and loss. For further insight on this, check out the *Harvard Business Review* article [That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief](https://hbr.org) at <https://hbr.org>.

Our colleague the Rev. Diane Strickland provided vital trauma support to ministry personnel and communities of faith after emergencies in Alberta in the last decade. In the midst of this public health crisis, she continues to provide assistance to all of us through a helpful set of [Pandemic Practicums videos](https://youtube.com/MyDiane1956/videos) (youtube.com/MyDiane1956/videos), which share her wisdom from trauma training and response.



Photo: Ahmad Achy / Pixabay.com

Many of our usual benefit partners are providing resources to help you during this time.

- Green Shield is offering free mental health resources to all Canadians through the [MindBeacon](https://mindbeacon.com/strongerminds) program (mindbeacon.com/strongerminds).
- Our Employee and Family Assistance Program through Morneau Shepell is still available if you need to reach out for counselling or other help. English: 1-800-387-4765
French: 1-800-361-5676
- Morneau Shepell is also offering a free mobile app called [WellCan](https://wellcan.ca) (wellcan.ca) that provides a hub for mental health resources and tools to help all Canadians maintain positive mental, physical, social, and financial health during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is free to download and available in English and French. Find out more at wellcan.ca.

Benefits: Green Shield's Maple Service

We contract with Green Shield Canada to administer health and dental benefits for our members. The terms of the health and dental plans (deductibles, co-payments, eligibility rules) are set by the General Council Executive, with research and input from benefit consultants and staff. Green Shield bills the benefit fund for the total cost of all claims paid.

Green Shield (GSC) offers several generic services to all of their client base, including the United Church, through their Change4Life program. One such service is a physician phone-in service called [Maple](https://getmaple.ca/) (getmaple.ca/

green-shield-learn-more/). It is not a service we added to our plans but rather something GSC as our provider is offering across its list of accounts. In managing and administering the church's benefit plans, we are always wary of services that might undermine, or be perceived to undermine, the principle of universal health care. Member concerns about this service have been raised with Green Shield.



Payroll Services Update

Benilda Raymundo, Payroll Manager, retired from The United Church of Canada in April 2020. We want to thank Benilda for her commitment for the past 30 years and wish her the best years ahead in her new role as a retiree.

In light of her retirement, a new Payroll Client Service Team has been created to support your payroll needs.

The Payroll Client Service Team at the General Council Office is a team of professionals who work in collaboration with ADP Payroll Service provider to ensure your payroll is processed effectively in a timely manner and to meet all CRA requirements.

You can contact the new centralized Payroll Client Service Team at:

- E-mail: payroll@united-church.ca
- Local: 416-231-7680, ext. 2029
- Toll-free: 1-800-268-3781, ext. 2029

You can contact the ADP Client Service Team at:

- E-mail: CanadaSBS@adp.ca (for authorized contact changes only)
- Phone: 1-877-377-4784 (to call changes for payroll)
- Fax: 1-877-701-7329 (to submit changes for payroll)

In response to COVID-19, the Payroll Client Service Team offered the opportunity to all pastoral charge payrolls to add a representative of the team to the pastoral charges' list of authorized contacts. We are pleased to inform you that over two-thirds of pastoral charges have signed up, and at this time we want to thank you all for your prompt response and collaboration. This will permit ADP to process any necessary changes beyond the 10 percent government wage subsidy, it will better support authorized contacts, and in their absence it will better facilitate payroll processing.

If you have not signed up, we encourage you to visit the [Pastoral Charge Payroll Service](#) webpage for further information on how to request that a GCO Payroll Client Service Team member be added as an authorized contact, as well as additional resources to support your payroll needs. If you have signed up and would like to confirm that ADP received your request, visit united-church.ca and search "payroll."

Please also note that the Church CRA Helpdesk Team has recently been established to provide you with support for Canada Revenue Agency or Service Canada issues, such as getting accounts set up or fixed. For assistance please e-mail your questions to CRAhelp@united-church.ca, and one of the team members will try to help you navigate any complexity.



Photo: Renegade | Dreamstime.com

CONTACT US

Connex is the newsletter of the Ministry and Employment Unit at the 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)

Benefits@united-church.ca

Disability@united-church.ca

Pension@united-church.ca

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