



March 26, 2020

RE: Help for Congregations and Church Workers in response to COVID -19

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
- Jeremiah 29:11*

These words were written to the people of God when they were in the Babylonian exile - a time, I am sure, of great discouragement, fear and hopelessness. Yet in the midst of their despair, God was assuring people of His love and giving them the promise of a bright future. Today with the Coronavirus we have similar feelings and more than ever need to be comforted by God’s word and by the great love He has shown us through His son Jesus.

We at Worker Benefit Services (WBS) take comfort in this scripture passage but also know that for some of our congregations and church workers that this will be a difficult time, which includes not only emotional stress but also financial hardship – particularly if congregational donations decline because of suspension of public worship services and/or some of their members being laid off work. Because of the improvements in WBS’s financial condition and its Plans over the last several years, we have a bit of flexibility to help. We would like to outline some options that will be available to congregations and members to get through the next three months.

HOW WE CAN HELP

1. If an employer is struggling financially due to a temporary decline in Donations:

- a. **Temporary Deferral of Pension and Benefits Premiums** - For those employers who would have difficulty making their pension and benefit premium payments, over the next three months. WBS will consider deferring those payments for the months of May and June, on a case by case basis. If approved, the employer would pay off the debt over a period of time, after the two month deferral period, without any interest being charged. If you require this accommodation, please contact Dwayne Cleave at administratorlcc@lutheranchurch.ca or Nancy Swerhun at nswerhun@telus.net, and they will be happy to discuss this option with you further.



- b. **Employers in temporary but serious financial hardship** - If an employer is in a temporary but very serious financial situation, WBS will consider waiving the employer's premiums for health, dental and the EAP (Employee and Family Assistance Plan) for the months of May and June, on a case by case basis. Please contact Dwayne Cleave administratorlcc@lutheranchurch.ca, if you require this accommodation.

2. If an employee is being temporarily laid off - The employee is still eligible to participate in the LCC Worker Benefit programs for a period of up to 6 months (if the province in which the employee works requires a longer eligibility period, then the period will be extended to the amount required by law). The employee's share of the required premiums for health, dental and EAP will be waived during the period of temporary layoff. Subject to provincial employment standards legislation, other pension and benefits programs may be required to continue on layoff. Please contact Nancy Swerhun nswerhun@telus.net for assistance.

ADDITIONAL HELP

3. Government wage subsidy program to help Businesses (including Registered Charities) maintain their Workers - The Government of Canada is taking immediate, significant and decisive action to help Canadians facing hardship as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. To support businesses that are facing revenue losses and to help prevent lay-offs, the government is providing to eligible small employers a temporary wage subsidy for a period of three months.

The subsidy will be equal to 10% of remuneration paid during that period, up to a maximum subsidy of \$1,375 per employee and \$25,000 per employer. Businesses will be able to benefit immediately from this support by reducing their remittances of income tax withheld on their employees' remuneration.

Employers benefiting from this measure will include corporations eligible for the small business deduction, as well as non-profit organizations and charities.

Legislation enabling this subsidy was passed March 25, 2020. If you use a payroll company, they will assist you in implementing the subsidy.

Canada Revenue has created a frequently asked questions document that walks you through how to calculate and claim the wage subsidy: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/campaigns/covid-19-update/frequently-asked-questions-wage-subsidy-small-businesses.html>



Please contact Iris Barta at officemanager@lutheranchurch.ca if you require more information or assistance.

4. If an employee becomes ill, is quarantined, or is temporarily laid off due to COVID-19, the employee can apply for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits.

Employers who have a Supplemental Unemployment Benefit Plan (SUB) may be able to use it to supplement EI benefits.

Congregations that have an SUB will need to check their Notice of Registration received from Service Canada to confirm which types of unemployment are covered under their plan.

For further information about an SUB plan please see:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/ei-employers-supplemental-unemployment-benefit.html>.

If you require information or assistance contact Christine Bradley at accounting@lutheranchurch.ca.

We hope that the accommodations we are making will be helpful to our hardest hit congregations and members. We will be continuing to monitor and evaluate the needs and our ability to assist as we move through this crisis. Know that we are here to help. We thank you for the confidence you have shown to the Board and our staff. We continue to trust that God, who made the ultimate sacrifice through His Son Jesus Christ, will give us the strength and wisdom to get through this difficult time and draw us ever closer to Himself through this event. We will keep you in our prayers,

In His Service

Dr. Dieter Kays

Chair, LCC WBS

Dwayne Cleave

Executive Director, LCC WBS