

Voluntary Transition Program—Highlights

Overview

In reviewing the employment systems of The United Methodist Church, the Church Systems Task Force determined that it can be difficult for clergy, who are in a covenantal relationship with the Church, to exit from ordained ministry. When combined with the nature of the covenant, call to ministry, and the impact on one's identity and housing, much of a clergyperson's worldly support may be provided in relationship to his or her ministry—therefore deterring individuals who no longer find ministry life-giving from exiting the ministry.

The Voluntary Transition Program provides eligible clergy with a financially supported method for a grace-filled exit. The program is for eligible clergy who choose to withdraw from the ministry. The program was adopted at General Conference 2012. It is effective **January 1, 2013** and will terminate **December 31, 2020**.

The program provides an eligible participant a career transition package that includes:

- Severance benefit based on current compensation and years of service
- Continuation of health benefits through the conference plan
- Continuation of active participant death benefit through the Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP) if applicable during the Transition Period
- Access to outplacement services
- Moving expenses subject to conference policy

Eligibility

The following criteria are required for program eligibility:

- Clergyperson must be in good standing
- At least five years of service in full connection (i.e., elders or deacons)
- Active participation in CPP for five years immediately preceding separation from service
- Not being within two years of eligibility to retire under *The Book of Discipline* ¶1358.2(b) (30 years of service or age 62)
- Conference approval of participation in the program
- Withdrawal and surrender of credentials

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General Board

Pension and Health Benefits

Caring For Those Who Serve

Benefits

Severance Benefit (Lump Sum)

- Two weeks of participant's Plan Compensation (generally cash salary plus housing) for each full year of continuous service, up to a maximum of six months of pay (i.e., 26 weeks; known as Transition Period)
- Commencement date: first of the month following date of separation from service
- Paid as a lump sum via direct deposit

Examples of Severance Benefit Calculation:

Example 1—Elder Age 45 with 10 Years of Service	Example 2—Deacon Age 55 with 20 Years of Service
Compensation: \$65,000 $\$65,000/26 \text{ weeks} = \$2,500$ per two weeks $\$2,500 \times 10 = \$25,000$ lump sum payment Transition Period: 20 weeks	Compensation: \$75,000 $\$75,000/26 \text{ weeks} = \$2,884.62$ per two weeks $\$2,884.62 \times 13 = \$37,500$ lump sum payment Transition Period: 26 weeks

Health Benefits (Continuation Coverage)—Conference-Paid During Transition Period

- If a participant was covered in the conference health plan immediately preceding separation from service, the participant may remain covered in the conference health plan.
- The conference pays a share of the premium or cost of coverage at the same rate as it pays for actively serving clergy.
 - If no continued or continuation coverage is available, the conference may provide a stipend to the participant for purchasing individual coverage.

Death Benefit from CPP During Transition Period

- Equivalent to benefits for active participants in CPP
- Provided only in the case of death of the program participant and only during the Transition Period

Outplacement Services (through Impact Group)

Includes career counseling, resume writing, interviewing skills and networking assistance

Moving Expenses (if applicable)

Reimbursement of such expenses; subject to conference rules, policies and limitations

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Roles and Responsibilities

Conference

- District superintendent, bishop and conference relations committee of the conference board of ordained ministry determine if the request to participate in the Voluntary Transition Program will be approved.
- Request toolkit containing: *Highlights Sheet, Participation Agreement Form and Electronic Funds Transfer Form* from the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (General Board)
- Execute *Participation Agreement Form* with participant and submit to General Board
- Oversee withdrawal process and surrender of credentials
- Execute necessary forms or processes for continuation of health insurance coverage as well as approval and reimbursement of moving expenses, if applicable, pursuant to conference policies

General Board

- Maintain toolkit for conferences and participants
- Calculate and pay severance benefit from CPP
- Provide necessary tax reporting for severance benefit payment
- Provide general customer service support for conferences and participants
- Maintain relationship with outplacement services vendor and refer participant to vendor

Other Considerations

Return to Ministry: Clergy who return to full-time ministry within the denomination after participating in the Voluntary Transition Program will be required to repay in full any severance benefit payments.

Appeals and Questions: The General Board and conference are responsible for the following appeals and questions:

Topic	Conference	General Board
Severance Benefit	Number of service years used for severance benefit calculation	Calculation of severance benefit
Eligibility	Program eligibility questions regarding conference approvals	Program eligibility in general, under CPP plan rules
Other Program Provisions	Conference policies and other matters, e.g., withdrawal and surrender, health plan coverage and moving expenses	General program provisions

For More Information

Participants – If you have questions or are interested in more detailed information regarding the Voluntary Transition Program, please contact your conference benefits officer or the General Board at **1-800-851-2201**.

Conferences – If you have questions or are interested in more detailed information regarding the Voluntary Transition Program, please contact the Welfare Plans team within the Center for Health department at the General Board at **1-847-866-4050**.