



Return-to-Work Programs

The best way to manage workers' compensation claims is to prevent injury. An effective safety program will help you to identify hazards within your church that could lead to injuries and also prevent claims from happening.

Workers' compensation claims, involving time off of work, can drive up claim costs. However, for the majority of workers' compensation claims, steps can be taken early to help expedite an employee's recovery and reduce claim costs. It is good business to use a return-to-work option when a claim happens.

A return-to-work program simply means helping an employee get back to work as soon as possible after a job-related injury or illness. As an example, an employee could work shorter hours, complete a different job temporarily, or perform light-duty until fully recovered.

Keeping an injured employee engaged and connected with the workplace is good medicine and good business. Research has shown that effective return-to-work strategies promote a faster recovery and prevent a downward trend into disability. Returning an injured employee to work will also help them emotionally and spiritually.

COMMITMENT AND COMMUNICATION

A successful return-to-work strategy begins with commitment from the church and the Board of Trustees. This commitment means:

- the church believes in the benefits of a return-to-work program,
- the church develops a written procedure for returning an injured employee to work, and
- there is an internal point of contact within the church, established for this program. This internal point of contact may be the Staff Parish

Relations Chair, church business administrator, parish nurse, or other designee. The internal contact will work closely on the employee's return-to-work program; with the injured employee and their claim adjuster.

A return-to-work program will be successful if:

- you have good communication with the injured employee,
- you have an understanding with the injured employee, that the injured employee understands they will be
- performing modified duty tasks or temporarily working in another position, for a temporary period of time, and the injured employee is willing to work in a return-to-work program or modified duty assignment after an injury.

SAMPLE MODIFIED DUTY RETURN-TO-WORK POLICY STATEMENTS

Below are two sample statements, which can be revised to meet the needs of your church:

Sample 1

(Church name) will make every reasonable effort to provide suitable modified duty, return-to-work opportunities for every employee who is unable to perform their regular duties following a work-related injury. This may include modifying the employee's regular job or, if available, providing temporary alternate work, depending on the employees physical abilities.

Only work that is considered productive and meaningful to the church will be considered. Injured workers who are participating in the modified duty, return-to-work programs are expected to provide reflection in order to improve the program's future development.

Signature of the Staff Parish Relations Chair or the Chairman of the Trustees, and date.

Sample 2

(Church name) is committed to providing a safe workplace for our employees. Preventing work-related illness and injury is a primary concern.

Our modified duty, return-to-work program provides opportunities for an employee who is injured on the job, to return to work at full duty. If the injured employee is not physically capable of returning to full-duty, the program provides opportunities to perform

their regular job with modifications or, when available, to perform alternate temporary work that meets the injured employee's physical capabilities.

Signature of the Staff Parish Relations Chair or the Chairman of the Trustees, and date.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

It is important for the church contact to work with the claim adjuster and the injured employee. It needs to be determined if physical restrictions will keep the injured employee from performing regular duties. Depending upon the answer to the previous statement, the injured employee's job may need to be modified. If you cannot modify the existing job, you may need to consider placing the injured employee in an alternative job during recovery. Always talk with the claim adjuster if you have questions regarding restrictions.

The church should maintain written job descriptions, with documented physical demands. These job descriptions will prove useful when working with the claims adjuster in developing a modified-duty job for the injured employee. It is important to remember that work assignments within the context of modified duty, are not necessarily "light duty." Modified duty simply excludes the specific physical activities indicated by the injured employee's treating physician. The church should review jobs and tasks in order to identify the individual tasks from various jobs, which conform to the physician imposed restrictions. If an injured employee can perform several tasks from different jobs, it would assist other staff members with their workload, so both the injured employee and healthy staff are more productive.

Even with concentrated efforts to identify modified duty assignments, the church may still not be able to think of enough work for an employee to perform a 40-hour work week. In the event a modified-duty assignment is available for only a portion of the injured employee's normal weekly hours, it is still beneficial to implement modified duty. It is possible that the injured employee will be compensated, through workers' compensation benefits, for the difference between the amount earned and the amount of workers' compensation benefits that would have been paid in the complete absence of a modified-duty assignment.

Some are concerned that, if they bring an injured employee back to work on a modified duty work assignment, they risk being sued if the injured

employee is re-injured. Because workers' compensation is the sole remedy for work-related injury compensation, this is an unrealistic fear. Besides, it is much easier when the injured employee is at work, to observe and ensure that they are not doing anything to prolong the recovery period.

HEALTHY ATTITUDES

Return-to-work programs demonstrate an attitudinal component. Return-to-work programs demonstrate to the injured employee, that the church cares about their well being and wants them to remain active during their recovery period. Return-to-work programs also demonstrate to other employees, that the church takes an employee's limitations seriously and that the church wants to get an injured employee back to work as quickly as possible; instead of the injured employee sitting on the couch day in and day out, watching television.

Please remember that ongoing support of the injured employee is necessary, once the injured employee is returned to work. It is important to follow-up with the injured employee and the claim adjuster; see how the injured employee is recovering, follow through on any of the employee's concerns, and work with the claim adjuster to revise a modified duty job as the injured employee is recovering and transitioning

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For additional information please contact

Rev. Joy T. Melton, J.D., Chief Resource Officer
 United Methodist Insurance
 400 Perimeter Center Terrace, Suite 900
 Atlanta, GA 30346
www.UnitedMethodistInsurance.org
 Email: joymelton@bellsouth.net
 Phone: 770-512-8383
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