

## **A Guide to the Short-Term Disability Benefit**

*For Active Participants in the Clergy Pension Plan*

## Introduction

Imagine this scenario: The rector of St. Swithin's is diagnosed with heart disease; a quadruple bypass is successful and six months of recuperation are prescribed. The parish pitches in with food and other support and prays for his recovery. The doctor is adamant that, for six months, the priest shall have no duties other than focusing on getting well.

Who will celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays, prepare the confirmands, visit the nursing home? A priest is available on a part-time basis to handle many of these items. The short-term disability benefit helps the parish pay their rector and the part-time assistant at the same time.

This brochure can help both the parish and the disabled cleric understand the short-term disability benefit and the claims process.

## Guide to Short-Term Disability Benefits

### *Who is eligible?*

An active participant in the Church Pension Fund Clergy Pension Plan who is actively working or temporarily between cures, is current in his or her pension assessments, and is canonically resident in the United States.

### *What is the effective date of this benefit?*

The short-term disability benefit is effective January 1, 2004 for all eligible clergy. After January 1, 2004, a cleric who begins a new position will be covered as soon as we receive his/her first pension assessment.

### *How are clergy enrolled in this benefit?*

Clergy are automatically enrolled if they meet the eligibility definition. No paperwork is required.

### *What is the definition of disability?*

The cleric can submit a claim for disability benefits if, for 30 days or more,

1. the cleric becomes ill or injured and is unable to perform the material and substantial duties of his/her regular occupation or is not working in any occupation;  
OR
2. the cleric is limited from performing the material and substantial duties of his/her regular occupation due to his/her sickness or injury; and has a 20%-80% loss in weekly earnings due to the same sickness or injury.

### *Is a medical examination required to enroll?*

No. Enrollment in this benefit is provided to the cleric without his/her answering any medical questions or providing evidence of insurability.

### *Who pays for the benefit?*

This benefit is provided by the Church Pension Fund to assist Episcopal employers with costs incurred when an eligible cleric is unable to work because of illness or injury. Further, it ensures that the ailing cleric can continue to receive pay from his/her employer.

### *What is the Elimination Period?*

The 30-day elimination period is the length of time of continuous disability due to an injury or illness that must be satisfied before benefits are paid. Short-term disability benefits begin after 30 consecutive days of total or partial disability.

### *When should the claim be filed?*

As soon as the cleric cannot perform his/her duties, the claim form should be filed. There is no need to wait until the 30-day elimination period is over.

### *What is the weekly benefit amount?*

The benefit is equal to 70% of the cleric's total compensation as reported to the Church Pension Fund, up to \$1,000 per week.

### *What is the duration of the benefit?*

Unless coverage is otherwise terminated as described in Section *When does the coverage terminate*, the benefit may continue up to a maximum period of 52 weeks.

### *Who will receive the disability benefit?*

The Church Pension Fund will pay the employer on a monthly basis. The church will be required to execute a covenant agreement acknowledging its obligation to pay the cleric's full compensation throughout the disability period. The employer must also continue to pay the cleric's pension assessments while he/she is disabled.

If the eligible cleric is paying pension assessments on his or her own behalf as a result of working part-time, extension of ministry, or being temporarily between cures, the disability payment will be paid to the cleric. If a portion of the assessment is also paid by the employer, the disability payment will be paid to both the employer and the cleric in pro rata amounts based on the proportion of the assessments being paid by the employer and the cleric. If the church terminates the cleric's employment on or after the date the cleric becomes disabled, the disability payment will be paid directly to the cleric.

#### ***What if the cleric can work part-time?***

To be eligible for the full benefit of 70% of Total Compensation, the disabled cleric cannot work more than 20%. For example, if the cleric usually works 40 hours a week, he/she cannot work more than 8 hours a week to keep the benefit at 70%. If, however, the disabled cleric works more than 20% (but less than 80%) of his/her normal hours, the cleric will be eligible for a partial benefit.

#### ***Example:***

Total Compensation paid to cleric prior to disability = \$50,000

- The maximum benefit will equal \$35,000 (\$50,000 X 70%).
- If the cleric can work 30%, the plan will pay 70% of the maximum benefit (\$35,000), which equals \$24,500.
- If the cleric can work 40%, the plan will pay 60% of the maximum benefit (\$35,000), which equals \$21,000.
- If the cleric can work 80% or more, no benefit is paid under the plan.

#### ***When does the coverage terminate?***

The coverage will terminate if pension assessments become six or more months in arrears, when the cleric begins receiving retirement benefits under the Clergy Pension Plan, when the cleric is no longer disabled, or when the Plan is terminated.

#### ***What if the disability is expected to be total and continuing?***

If the disability is expected to be total and continuing, disability retirement through the Clergy Pension Plan might be appropriate. Your retirement benefit under the Clergy Pension Plan will be at least equal to the short term disability benefit for the remainder of the 52 weeks. If, however, recovery is expected, the disability benefit payable under the short term disability plan can continue for up to 52 weeks.

## **What to Expect When Filing a Short-Term Disability Claim**

### ***How is a claim filed?***

Either the cleric or the church should call the Church Pension Group's Pension Services Department at (866) 802-6333 to request a claim form as soon as the cleric is unable to perform his/her duties. There is no need to wait until the 30-day elimination period has passed. A notification of a disability must, however, be made within a reasonable time following the cleric's disability, or no benefit will be paid.

### ***How is the claim reviewed?***

CPG will send the claim form to Unum Provident, the disability carrier, who approves or denies the disability claim.

The cleric will be provided direct access to a Disability Benefits Specialist at Unum Provident who will handle the case. This special contact, an individual trained in the specific type of disability, will evaluate the full nature and potential length of time away from work and will begin working with the disabled cleric toward recovery and return-to-work goals, as appropriate.

When appropriate, the Disability Benefit Specialist will call the employer and attending physician to better understand the cleric's condition and potential for recovery.

Unum Provident's physicians, nurses, case managers and vocational rehabilitation consultants support their Disability Benefit Specialists and may also be in touch with the cleric's doctor. These professionals may review the medical, occupational and rehabilitative information for the claim, and they may also offer to assist the cleric in returning to work, if appropriate. CPG may require that the determination of a disability be made by a qualified physician chosen and paid for by CPG.

### ***How long before the claim is approved or denied?***

Within five days of the claim's assignment to a Disability Benefit Specialist, the specialist will contact the disabled cleric. With some conditions, such as standard maternity leave or a recovery following a routine surgery, benefits may begin almost immediately.

If the medical condition is more complicated, Unum may require additional medical information to better understand the claim. Depending on how quickly Unum receives the additional information, the benefits determination could take longer. In such a case, the Disability Benefit Specialist will provide the cleric with a written update on the status of the claim at a minimum of every 30 days until decided. A prompt response to requests for information about the claim will help Unum serve the disabled cleric better.

### ***How long is the claim approved for?***

Depending on the disability, Unum Provident will periodically ask for additional information from the disabled cleric to help in the continued evaluation of the claim.

### ***Who can the employer/cleric call with questions?***

During the first conversation the disabled cleric has with the Unum Provident's Disability Benefit Specialist, he/she will receive a toll-free number that can be used whenever the Specialist needs to be reached with questions or concerns about the claim.

The employer or disabled cleric can also call Pension Services at (866) 802-6333 with questions or concerns.

### **For More Information Contact Us**

Pension Services at (866) 802-6333

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