

## The United Church Membership Roll

### *The Basic Idea*

#### **Church Membership**

Full members have been received into the membership of a congregation by profession of faith (confirmation or adult baptism). Some full members were received into the membership of another congregation and then received into the membership of the current congregation after presenting a certificate of transfer from the former congregation.

Members cease to be members when they request and receive a certificate of transfer, die or are removed by the governing body of the congregation for some other reason.

#### **Membership Rolls**

Every congregation of the United Church must keep a list of its full members which is called the “membership roll of the congregation”.

Members’ names are added to the membership roll when they are received into membership. How and when they were received is recorded with their names. Also, if the member was received by certificate of transfer, the name of the congregation which issued the certificate is recorded.

When the member is removed from the membership of the congregation, information on how and when is recorded.

A person’s membership is in the congregation. Where there is more than one congregation in a pastoral charge, there is a separate membership roll for each congregation.

This is the basic idea. Here are some details about keeping the roll.

### *Keeping the Roll*

#### **Historic Roll**

An historic roll is a list of all the people who have ever been members of the congregation at any time since its beginning or a merger of two or more congregations to form the current congregation. No names are crossed off this list. As the historic roll is intended to be used for many years, it is hand written in a bound book which is much more likely to endure than a sheaf of papers or a computer file.

#### **Current Membership Roll**

To have a roll that is easier to work with, congregations produce a current roll. It is a list of all the members on the historic roll who have not been removed. It is like a snapshot of the membership at a specific time. The information on how members were received is recorded on the current roll as well as on the historic roll. Names of those who are received into membership are added to both the current roll and the historic roll.

Information about how and when members were received and removed is also recorded on both rolls. As stated above, the historic roll must be written in a bound book. The current roll may be kept in the same fashion or by another means such as a computer. Even if there is a roll kept on a computer, it is essential that there be a hand-written roll in a bound book.

A new current roll may be created when it is seen to be needed for ease of use.

### **A Series of Current Rolls**

Few congregations have kept up an historic roll. They have adopted the practice of keeping a series of current rolls. Periodically the roll is rewritten in the bound book with just the names of the current members brought forward. When this is done, the information about how and when members were received is copied into the new roll. When a series of current rolls is used, all of those rolls **must** be hand-written in the bound book.

## ***Addressing Your Practices***

### **What To Do**

While it has been preferred that an historic roll be kept, using a series of current rolls has been regarded as acceptable. Now, the revised Manual, The Manual 2013 (Section 3.6), states that the governing body of the congregation is responsible for keeping both “the historic roll” and “the membership roll” which is a current roll. A way for a congregation to comply is to make the current roll an historic roll (dating back to the time of the most recent rewriting) and creating a current roll which could be kept using whatever medium the congregation prefers. Two practices are essential.

1. The (current) membership roll must be only a membership roll and not a mailing list or some other list.
2. The historic roll must be brought up to date at least once a year.

### **How to do it**

- The keeping of the membership roll is the responsibility of the governing body of the congregation (the Session, Church Board or the Church Council). The person who makes the entries in the roll e.g. the Clerk of Session, office secretary, roll clerk, or minister is accountable to that governing body.
- The membership roll **must** be separate from all other lists such as family lists and mailing lists.
- Keep the roll up to date or bring it up to date at least once a year by making sure all changes in membership are recorded.
- Use consistent codes when recording how members were received and removed.
- Historic rolls should be kept chronologically.
- When a current roll is rewritten, names should be listed alphabetically with no blank lines left. New members should be listed chronologically at the end of the roll. The number given to each member in

the historic roll, should be used consistently in all rolls to aid tracing members and avoiding confusion due to name changes and similarity of names.

- Be very careful to copy names and other information correctly.
- There should be no erasures or obliterating of entries. No names or other information will be crossed out unless entered in error.
- Name changes will be noted at the time of the change to aid in tracing names forward. At the next rewriting of the roll, the new name will be recorded with the former name in brackets to aid in tracing names back.
- Except as stated above, no changes will be made during a rewriting of the roll. This is important to enable the tracing of records and to ensure that changes, and reasons and dates are recorded. For example, during preparation for writing a new current roll, a member could ask for and receive a certificate of transfer. The removal of that member should be recorded in one of the rolls (the old one or the new roll), not just left off the new roll.
- Photocopying of the roll book should be kept to a minimum and letters, certificates of transfer, etc. should be kept in a separate file and not stored in the book to prevent damage to the book.

A helpful article concerning church membership rolls, as well as other resources on Records Management are available through the website, [UCCArchivesWinnipeg.ca](http://UCCArchivesWinnipeg.ca) See Congregational Resources.

This document was prepared by  
John Peach  
Selkirk Presbytery Archives Convener  
Member – Archives and Records Committee  
Adopted by the Archives and Records Committee February, 2014