

The Free Methodist Church in Canada

Treasurers and Church Board Questions & Answers about PAR



The Free Methodist Church in Canada PAR Program administered by the United Church of Canada for Treasurers

1. What is PAR?

PAR or Pre-Authorized Remittance is a "direct debit" program that allows people to support their church through an automatic monthly withdrawal from their bank account. The United Church of Canada administers the program following the donor's wishes. Once a month all PAR givings are debited from donor accounts and then the total, less the service fee, is electronically transferred to their local church accounts.

2. What are the benefits of PAR?

The PAR system was developed to help local churches have regular, dependable contributions during the year. If some members are away for the summer or winter, this helps them to keep their commitment without having to "catch up" on their givings. PAR givers are strong givers!

3. What is the general response to PAR?

Some of the original congregations have been using PAR for almost 25 years now. Very few givers who join the PAR program decide to leave it. It is very convenient and it allows them to give consistently. The program usually grows in local congregations once the word starts to spread. By January 2006 there were over 45,000 PAR givers representing more than 1,600 congregations.

4. What do we need in order to start?

- Completed authorization cards and voided cheques from those in your congregation who wish to use the PAR program.
- Covering letter identifying the name of your congregation, name of the PAR "contact" person in your church and the month you want to start the program.
- Your church's voided cheque(s) for the account(s) to which you want the PAR money credited.

5. How long does it take to start?

If the information mentioned above is received from your congregation by the 10th of the month your congregation will be on PAR for that month. The PAR Program Administrator will contact you to confirm the start date.

6. When are the transactions processed?

The debits from individual accounts and the lump sum credits to the congregational accounts happen on the 20th of each month (or the next business day if the 20th falls on a weekend). This date is not variable. (Please note that any changes need to be reported to us by the 10th of the month.) Credits to the church account are on the 20th (or preceding business day if the 20th falls on a weekend).

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7. Is there a minimum number of people needed to go on PAR?

There is no minimum number of givers required by the United Church for your congregation to start the PAR program, but the more people on the program, the more beneficial to the church.

8. How much does PAR cost the local congregation?

The PAR program costs the local congregation 50¢ per transaction, per month, which is deducted at the time of transfer. This helps to defray administrative costs incurred by the United Church. Individuals pay the normal chequing/debit fees to their local bank or credit union if any.

9. How are we kept up-to-date about the givings?

A monthly print-out is sent to each church participating in the PAR program. These reports are produced by the United Church of Canada on the day the information is sent to the bank (generally the 15th of each month). This report should be compared to the church bank statement to ensure that the amount shown on the print-out is the amount that has been credited to the church account.

10. How are NSF cheques dealt with?

Because the debits and credits happen at the same time, the church will already have received credit for money that may not be in the donor's account. In these instances, the individual donor's record is suspended until the United Church of Canada advised by the contact person as to what is to be done. The records are also marked so that, in the following month, the United Church will deduct the amount from the monies forwarded to the congregation. The congregation then follows up with the individual giver about recovering the money and whether or not they wish to continue using the PAR program to support the congregation.

11. How does a donor change the amount of his/her gift or change to a different bank account?

All changes of this nature go through the contact person in the local church. He or she will have forms to facilitate changes, additions and deletions to the system. When there is a change in banks or account numbers a voided cheque must be provided.

12. Are faxes acceptable for making changes?

They are, especially if a change needs to be made for a particular month and the deadline is looming. You should check to make sure your fax has reached us safely.

How about e-mail?

E-mailing information is acceptable for last minute changes or deletions, but not additions. We would also like to have a hard copy back-up, so that there is a signature authorizing the changes.

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13. What do we do about our members who feel uncomfortable about not putting something in the offering plate?

The PAR program offers small cards for the offering plate. The cards are printed with the words: "My offering has been given by Pre-Authorized Remittance". They can be recycled from the offering plate and kept in a central place for people to pick up when they finish their own supply. About 10 cards per family is usually more than sufficient if cards are recycled. All materials are provided by the United Church free of charge.

14. Who is responsible for tax receipts?

The church still does the tax receipts. The United Church of Canada administers the program for the congregation. A print-out is sent each month for record-keeping purposes. If the envelope secretary is not the contact person this information needs to be shared with them.

15. We have our donors on a database. Do I have to manually input the information from the print-out each month?

The monthly reports from the United Church of Canada (less the monthly charge/NSF information) can also be sent via e-mail if a church maintains its contributions on the Clavis, Genesis, or Church Assistant databases (other databases have adapted themselves to receive this information as well). This file can then be uploaded to your database without having to manually input each month. Please contact the PAR Program Administrator about this option.

16. Now that I have all this information, how do I promote the PAR program in my congregation?

You may be Chair of the Board, the Finance Committee or the Stewardship Committee. Or, you may be another interested church leader who would like to see the PAR program take off in your church. Here's a suggestion. Introduce the idea to the appropriate church committee and/or Church Board depending on your structure. Let it be known that you'd like to promote this optional program to the congregation. Arrange for a minute or two during three or four Sunday services in a row. Explain the concept. Tell people you'll be available after church to hand out PAR information (the best resource here is the "Are You on PAR" brochure). Use the church newsletter, bulletin announcements, etc. to supplement your message. This method was used in one congregation and PAR giving went from three or four families to over 40 within two months. The more the program is promoted, the more likely it is to be successful and the more the congregation will feel the benefits.

For more information on the PAR program please contact:

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Financial Stewardship

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