

Saint Mary's University Faculty Union
Employee Health and Life Trust

To: Dr. Cathy Conrad, SMUFU President
Dr. Bui Petersen, SMUFU President Elect
From: Dr. Robert Konopasky, Chair, Saint Mary's University Faculty Union
Employee Health and Life Trust
Date: April 15, 2026
Subject: TRUST Report to the Saint Mary's University Faculty Union

Trustees:

Chair: Dr. Robert Konopasky
Trustees: Dr. Robert Konopasky, Dr. Nicole Conrad, and Dr. James O'Brien
Alternate Trustee: Ms. Cindy Harrigan

History of our Benefits Plan (PLAN):

Before June 1, 2008, all faculty, librarians, staff and administrators were members of the Saint Mary's University (EMPLOYER) benefits plan. There was a Benefits Committee, but its mandate, and role were no more than advising the EMPLOYER regarding benefits and costs. As the EMPLOYER paid for half of the costs of benefits, for the most part, the Committee's advice to improve benefits was ignored, e.g., the cap for chiropractic visits was maintained at \$7.00 per visit for many years.

The Saint Mary's University Faculty Union (UNION) appreciated that to improve benefits, the UNION had to control benefits, and control meant offering its own benefits plan.

The Saint Mary's University Faculty Union Employee Health and Life Benefits Plan (PLAN) was created in June 2008. Additionally, the UNION formed a Saint Mary's University Faculty Union Health and Life Trust (TRUST), and appointed Trustees.

The Trustees created a Saint Mary's University Faculty Union Health and Life Trust Fund (FUND), which receives revenue from the EMPLOYER and from members' deductions for benefits.

The UNION has negotiated the EMPLOYER's contribution to the FUND in every Collective Agreement since June 2008. On June 1, 2008, the TRUST assumed responsibility for administering our PLAN; we contracted with Great-West Life, whose name is now, "Canada Life", to provide our benefits.

The UNION wanted members to pay for benefits in the most income tax, advantageous way.

As an EMPLOYER's contribution to health and dental benefits is not a taxable benefit, but an EMPLOYER's contribution to any other benefit, e.g., Life Insurance, LTD insurance, etc., is a taxable benefit, the strategy is to use all the EMPLOYER contribution to pay for health and dental benefits and for members to pay for all other benefits.

Members, who have single or family coverage for health and dental benefits, pay for approximately half of the costs of health and dental benefits; the EMPLOYER's contribution pays for the other half. Members, who have single or family coverage for health and dental benefits pay for all their Life Insurance and LTD premiums.

PLAN Solvency:

A preeminent goal of the PLAN is that it be solvent. The PLAN is solvent.

Goals of the TRUST and Trustees:

Additional to administering our PLAN, the goals of the Trustees are to be sensitive to members' needs, to be steady, calm and reliable stewards of your PLAN, and to safeguard benefits during strikes, or lockouts.

Improvements in your benefits:

We have changed and improved *every benefit* of the original PLAN, e.g., offering psychological services, raising the cap for orthotics by 600%.

Over the last 12 months, the Trustees improved the administration of the PLAN:

1. We hired the McAteer Group to be our PLAN administrator.

The services provided by the McAteer Group affords better data on EMPLOYER compliance.

Additionally, this Group provides data helpful to the UNION's Negotiating Team during negotiations.

2. We improved governance of the PLAN and TRUST Fund by reviewing and amending the TRUST agreement with the Union and the EMPLOYER to provide for succession planning.
3. We reviewed and confirmed a prudent investment policy for the TRUST Fund's assets.
4. We approved a formal appeal policy, which is located on the PLAN website, and which describes a clear path for members to bring forward an inquiry or complaint about a benefit being declined or paid differently than the claim for the benefit.

If, after reviewing this policy, you want to initiate a claim, please contact:

- a. Ms. Jaclyn Lyon, at jlyons@mcateer.ca, or call 1-800-263-3564, or
 - b. Ms. Enas Razack, at erazack@mcateer.ca, or call 1-800-273-3564
5. We negotiated a new contract for benefits with Canada Life.
 6. We met several times with Canada Life regarding service to members: The Trustees secured Canada Life's commitment to serving our members on a best-in-class basis.

To improve benefits, we:

1. Ensured that dental benefits were covered at the most current provincial fee guide.
2. Added coverage for specialized equipment including motorized mobility equipment for children with special needs. This benefit, which was effective January 1, 2025, provides a maximum, annual limit of \$5,000 per family, with a \$20,000 lifetime per family, for members with family coverage.
3. Improved access to voluntary post-retirement benefits such as life insurance and emergency travel assistance. There is a personal advisory service for these voluntary benefits. Appointments can be arranged by using this QR code:



4. Ensured reliability of retiree life insurance premiums by putting all retirees on the same renewal cycle. This common renewal cycle avoids inadvertent loss of Life Insurance coverage, by ensuring clear communication of timelines to all retirees, who elect to continue their life insurance through the PLAN.

The TRUST's Role During Negotiations:

As the UNION's prepared to negotiate the 2025-2028 Collective Agreement, the Trustees converted enough of the FUND's assets to cash, and a fluid, low-interest-earning GIC, to pay for 4 months of health and dental benefits premiums, Life Insurance premiums and LTD insurance premiums, or about or about \$750,000, lest there be a strike or lockout.

Recently, we converted the cash and a fluid GIC to higher, interest-earning assets in the FUND's investment portfolio.

The UNION's Decision to Increase the EMPLOYER's Contribution:

If the EMPLOYER's contribution is increased and members' payments are reduced, members pay less in income taxes and, generally, net pay after taxes is increased.

The Trustees are working with the UNION as it chooses the best balance between an increase in salary and an increase in EMPLOYER contributions.

The Trustees' role is to advise a balance that serves PLAN members as part of a group, *and* members as individuals. We provide information to the UNION on the differential benefits costs for older and younger members, for single-covered and family-covered members, and for members with children and those who do not have children.

The Trustees also underscore that some members incur greater costs, e.g., cancer drugs than other members, and that these greater costs are shared by the group.

Work of the Trustees:

Part of one's duties at the University is service. The Trustees are committed to serving you by protecting your benefits.

I am grateful to the Trustees and the Alternate Trustees for their time, their dedication, and their talent in administering our PLAN.

No less, I and the Trustees are grateful for the work of the UNION President, the UNION Executive, and the Negotiating Team for creating a PLAN, which has served us for more than 17 years . Their decisions in negotiating the EMPLOYER's contribution to our health and dental costs have improved our standard of living.

R. Konopasky, Chair,
Saint Mary's University Faculty Union Employee Health and Life Trust