

The United Church **Observer**

Writers Guidelines

1. What is The Observer all about?

We greatly appreciate your interest in writing for The United Church Observer. This magazine is published 11 times per year by Observer Publications, Inc. Founded in 1829, The Observer is the oldest continuously published magazine in North America and the second oldest in the English speaking world. It has won international acclaim for journalistic excellence and garnered more awards for writing than any other Canadian religious publication.

Since 1986, The Observer has been independently incorporated, which makes it unique among major North American denominational publications. The magazine sets its own editorial policies and program and is overseen by its own board of directors. While it maintains a healthy relationship with The United Church of Canada, it does not speak as the denomination's official voice, receiving only about 7 percent of its funding from the United Church's General Council.

Editor David Wilson says of his mandate for the publication: "We seek to offer the United Church and Canadians generally a church magazine that exceeds people's expectations of church magazines. As we move forward into a new era and style of faith-based publishing, we are constantly mindful of the traditions into which we are anchored."

2. How do I submit an idea?

We accept only stories that are tailored to suit The Observer's readers. We prefer to receive query letters. Due to time limitations, we cannot guarantee that unsolicited manuscripts will be read. We almost never publish poetry or fiction.

All queries should be sent, preferably by e-mail, to David Wilson, Editor

At: dnwilson@ucobserver.org
Or: The United Church Observer
478 Huron St.
Toronto, ON
M5R 2R3

3. What happens after I send in my idea?

The magazine's full-time editorial staff makes decisions on editorial content. We receive about a dozen story pitches each day and regret that we cannot respond to all of them. If we like your idea, you will hear from us within a week or two.

4. What are you looking for?

We are interested in stories about faith, ethics, social justice, living and the United Church. Stories should target the interests and ethos of our readers (see section 5). They can be investigative reports, engaging profiles, first-person narratives, short features or

how-to pieces. We like queries that demonstrate familiarity with the Observer's "architecture" by suggesting specific sections of the magazine. We plan our issues four to six months in advance; please keep this in mind when suggesting time-sensitive pieces.

We rarely cover events because of our long lead times. That means an event that happens in May wouldn't make it into the magazine until September, and loses relevance as time passes.

5. Who are your readers?

Our readers *read*. They are intensely loyal to this magazine. Eighty percent look into every issue, and 60 percent read more than half the magazine. Four out of five look forward to receiving the magazine every month.

Most of our readers have a college education or more. Nearly half have an undergraduate or post-graduate degree.

The typical Observer reader is a woman who is 65 or older living in a community of 100,000 or less. She was raised in the United Church, attends a United church weekly and contributes to the United Church regularly. She helps out at church whenever needed and regularly takes part in a group, such as a Bible study. She believes the Bible is a book that documents our historical relationships with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit — and not the literal word of God. She's comfortable discussing her faith with friends and family and with members of her church.

6. What style guide do you use?

The Observer follows Canadian Press style guidelines and the Canadian Oxford Dictionary. We encourage writers to use gender-neutral language.

Please submit copy in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced. Please include a brief bio-note (1-2 sentences) at the end of your story. It should include where you live, what you do for a living and which United Church you attend (if any).

7. What are my rights?

We assume all articles submitted are original and unpublished, and submitted exclusively to us. If your material is copyrighted, we assume you are authorizing us to publish it.

If we accept your idea and publish the finished piece, The Observer buys first North American rights in English and French to your story, plus the right to archive your story and post it on our website at ucobserver.org.

8. When can I expect to be paid?

Fees are negotiated story by story. Normally we pay by the word. You will be paid only for the words you have been assigned, unless a revised word-length has been agreed upon. We pay within 30 days of receipt of an invoice. You should submit your invoice with the first draft of your assigned story. By cashing your freelancer's cheque, you are affirming the terms of your assignment.

Thank you for your interest in The Observer.