

It's that time of year again to select a tax preparer. The preparation of a minister's taxes is rather unique because of the housing allowance, being an employee for income tax purposes, and being self-employed for Social Security/Medicare purposes. Not all tax preparers are educated in the filing of minister's taxes, so it essential for you to use wisdom in making your selection of a paid tax preparer.

Some questions you may wish to consider when seeking a paid tax preparer include:

- How many years of experience do you have doing clergy returns?
- How many clergy returns have you prepared?
- How many recent tax update hours have you participated in directly related to clergy returns?

There are several other general issues you need to consider when selecting a paid tax preparer:

- Select tax preparers that are available year round so that you have somewhere to turn if an IRS or state inquiry occurs during the year.
- Beware of tax preparer fees that are based on a percentage of your refund. The IRS states that: *A practitioner may not charge a contingent fee (percentage of your refund) for preparing an original tax return.* [Tips for Choosing a Tax Preparer, <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=133088,00.html>, 1/26/2010]
- Even though you are having a paid tax preparer prepare your return, make sure you understand your return because you are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of your return.
- Do not sign you return until you understand it and are sure it is accurate.
- Never sign a blank return!
- Never sign in pencil!
- Make sure the tax preparer signs the return and includes their identification number (either their social security number or preparer taxpayer identification number – PTIN)
- Make sure your name(s), address, and social security number(s) are correct because incorrect information could cause the return to be rejected by the IRS.

The secret to finding the best paid tax preparer to meet your needs is to ask lots of questions. Your tax return is filled with vital information therefore you want the most educated, skilled tax preparer possible. Always remember you are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of your return so you need to be an active participant in its preparation.