

Personnel administration assures that people who are employed by the church are able to make their most effective contribution while being treated fairly by the church.

Common Practices

People who receive salaries for the contribution they make to the life of the church are a valuable asset to the work and life of the church. It is not unusual for a church to have some board or committee that is responsible for personnel administration, although in some churches relatively little attention is paid until an issue arises or a crisis occurs.

Some people feel that the development of a personnel policy for a church indicates that somehow we can no longer count on verbal agreements and trust. While it is true that verbal agreements are binding for many people, there is a need for a written policy. Regardless of the size of the church or the number of people it employs, every staff member needs to be treated fairly and justly. Having a written policy to which they can refer guarantees this. Likewise, it assures that all parties can review and know what agreements have been made.

Personnel Policies

It can be very helpful to have a written personnel policy that describes your church's intended

behavior. The following items should be covered in the policy:

- **Preamble.** In the preamble, define the relationship to the constitution and bylaws and the relationship to those employed by the church.
- **Administration.** Define who administers the policy, who the policy affects and how the policy can be amended.
- **Classification of employees.** Define all types of employees who work for your church. Those who work under the Fair Labor Standards Act are known as nonexempt employees. Exempt employees are free from the wage and hour provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. It is important to have these issues clear because the federal law affects the obligations of the church related to employment, such as overtime pay. Also define full-time and part-time employment and which category of employee is eligible for each benefit.
- **Compensation.** Define how compensation and wages for each employee will be determined. Describe compensation review procedures and their frequency.
- **Training and development.** Clarify how the church intends to help each person grow and develop in relation to the job. Describe appraisal and review, continuing education and sabbatical provisions. Indicate which, if any, professional memberships will be paid by the church.

- **Employee benefits.** Describe vacation and holidays and sick, family, maternity/paternity or other leave. Outline the church's responsibility for annuity, retirement benefits, Social Security, unemployment and workers' compensation insurance and group health insurance. This section needs to be written carefully in light of state and federal laws and recommendations of the United Church of Christ.
- **Evaluation.** State the policies regarding the frequency of evaluation, who does it and what the consequences are.
- **Position description.** Draw up a position description for each position. Include the title of the position, what is necessary and valued by the church, and describe activities and responsibilities, accountability, reporting relationships, wages guidelines and benefits. Physical activities, which are requirements of the position's essential duties (which can't be reasonably accommodated or modified) should be named in measurable terms.
- **Separations.** State the policy regarding retirement, resignation and death. Describe criteria for separation for unsatisfactory performance, when severance pay will be provided and what happens if there is a reduction in the work force.
- **Complaint and grievance procedures.** Outline procedures to follow to allow an employee to

have a fair hearing in matters over which there is disagreement.

- **Affirmative action.** Indicate your firm commitment to equal opportunity and how you will seek diversity. If you choose to use the term "Affirmative Action", describe whether or not this will be a program which meets federal guidelines. (In most cases, it will be practical to specifically describe your program as distinct from federal guidelines.)

Stages of Administration

There are three stages of administration of personnel:

- **Securing personnel.** When you are seeking an employee or staff member, make certain there is an adequate understanding of what the church expects of the person. Identify tasks, skills needed and time required. Also identify what the employee can expect from the church: wages, benefits, etc. State the hiring policy: who makes the decision, and how the search will be carried out. To reduce risk to the church, a background check (according to the specifically defined policies of the church) should be carried out.
- **Nurturing personnel.** Nurturing begins as people are being oriented to their positions. Help them meet the people with whom they work and get background on "how things work around here," where supplies

are and how to deal with financial aspects of the job. Set aside fairly frequent and scheduled conversations during the first few months. Test for insights. The orientation will be over when people are comfortable with what is expected and with their ability to carry it out. Ongoing nurture includes assessing the task and the person's contribution. Be sensitive to the possible need to redefine the task. Assessing is more than checking up on personnel. It is a time to help set goals that will increase the effectiveness of their contribution, to determine continuing education that would be helpful and to discover how their work overlaps with others' work. An annual review takes personnel seriously and honors them and their contribution to the church. Because church personnel work in a public setting where varied expectations may be held, review procedures (as well as common expectations) should be developed with broad input and shared widely.

Nurturing personnel may include performance counseling toward improvement. Such counseling should be conducted in a positive way and documented to build a common understanding of improvement desired or required.

- **Terminating personnel.** There are times when a person is unable or unwilling to do the expected work. Be prepared to use candor in these situations. You may need to set conditions for continued

employment: "You can continue to work as long as the following changes occur...." Work to enable both parties to learn from the situation. Your policies should specify how terms of continued employment will be documented and under what circumstances. Assure that these regard specific work-related behaviors and not personality characteristics. A church has responsibility for the actions of its volunteers and employees and cannot allow abuse of others to take place. If a violation of another person is suspected or alleged, immediate action must be taken. Include provisions for this action in policies that are set before abuse is alleged.

Making Our Churches Safe for All is a guide for developing these policies. It is available on the web at www.ucc.org/ministries/safe or in print from the Insurance Board at 800 437-8830.

When people resign, try to learn anything about the task that will help others carry it out. Celebrate the contribution the person has made, and if appropriate, their decision to pursue other activities or employment.

Issues Facing the Church

- Determining a personnel policy takes time and some people would rather get on with the church's mission than work on personnel

- policy. How does the way you administer personnel relate to your church's mission?
- Once you have established policies, it is important to be consistent. How will you deal with the desire some members may have to make exceptions for a favored employee?
 - What is the role of the church in setting standards of treatment of staff?
 - Many organizations link performance appraisal with compensation review. This requires well-stated expectations and a well-developed concept of the relationship between appraisal and compensation. What are the practical and the logistical implications for your church?

Questions

- How is the church different from, or the same as, other institutions in the administering of personnel?
- What, if any, are the differences in the administration of personnel when dealing with clergy?
- Which parts of the personnel policy described here are the most important for further development of your current policy?
- If you do not currently have a written personnel policy, how might one be developed?
- How will you work with the church to develop common expectations and understandings?