

What to Include in a Policy Manual for Congregational Staff

by Betsey Heavner

The staff-parish committee in a congregation is charged with managing employee relations. A good employee policy manual can be a great aid over time for dealing with employees fairly, and it can protect a church in court if a former employee decides to file a legal complaint. It takes time and careful attention to develop the policy handbook appropriate to your setting, and it is important to review it annually for revisions.

An employee policy manual should outline expectations clearly for staff while allowing for individual working styles and levels of experience. It needs to align with federal and state employment laws regarding discrimination, sexual harassment, and employee hiring, discipline, and termination. Your congregational policy needs to align to the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church. Here is an outline of elements to consider as you create policies for your congregation:

Introduction

- Describe the ministry's mission.
- State that the manual is not an employee contract.
- State that the church has the right to modify the handbook at any time.
- Include the date of the creation or revision of the handbook and a statement that the policies supersede all previous policies.

Hours

- Outline normal working hours for full-time employees.
- Provide rules for part-time employees and volunteers.
- Describe your policy about compensation for overtime work.

Pay

- State the pay schedule (weekly, biweekly, monthly).
- State deductions and when they are reflected in pay (each pay period, annually).

Conduct Expected

- State general expectations of all employees; specific expectations should be in a job description.
- Include specific prohibitions, such as those against smoking or drinking alcohol on the job.
- Establish expectations about employee use of the telephone and electronic tools (Internet, e-mail) for personal use.
- Note situations, such as viewing pornography or drug abuse, which may lead to discipline or dismissal.

Benefits

- State rules about vacation pay, sick pay, and unpaid leave.
- Describe health insurance, retirement, and other benefits you offer.

Harassment

- Provide information about what the harassment policy is and how harassment is defined.
- State that harassment of any form will not be tolerated.
- Describe at least two ways employees can report perceived harassment; explain that employees won't face retaliation for reporting.

Workplace Safety

- Establish procedures for visitors to check in and be escorted through the building.
- Describe the process for making a claim if the employee is injured on the job, and describe reportable circumstances.
- Provide information about Safe Sanctuaries (safety issues for minors and vulnerable adults) and how often mandatory training is expected.
- State your policy about who will have keys to the building and when employees should lock entrances.
- Include a statement prohibiting weapons and inform employees that violence or threatened violence will not be tolerated.