



# SIBURT INSTITUTE

*for Church Ministry*

## Church Employee Handbook

A church employee handbook offers an overview and summary of the church's employment policies and procedures as they are currently in effect. A handbook is designed with the intention to acquaint employees with the church and provide them with information about working conditions, employee benefits, and other policies that affect their employment. Additionally, a handbook can allow for fair and consistent treatment of all employees within a church.

A handbook is not a contract, yet employees should read, understand, and comply with the provisions of the handbook. Furthermore, a handbook helps to ensure that the church's policies are administered as consistently and fairly as possible. No handbook will be comprehensive or address all the possible applications of, or exceptions to, the general policies and procedures as they are described. A church may decide who within the leadership structure can modify or discontinue any listed procedures, policies, and benefits as they are described in a handbook. Additionally, questions and issues with a church's handbook can be addressed with the leadership as specified in the handbook.

Below are overarching categories that may be included in a church employee handbook. The subcategories provide either language to help inform the writing of a church's employee handbook *or* the decisions necessary for leadership to make as they create and/or edit their employee handbook. Several factors may influence the usefulness of the categories below such as the size of a church staff, leadership structure, current policies, etc.

**\*Disclaimer: The material contained in this guide is provided for informational purposes only, and should not be construed as legal advice on any subject matter. Rather, it is a guide to help you develop your own policy. Please consult an attorney or other Human Resource experts who have expertise in your jurisdiction. We disclaim all liability for actions you take or fail to take based on any content in this document.**

- **Hiring and Retention Policies**
  - **Nature of Employment** - An at-will employer implies the relationship between the staff member and the church is voluntary. A staff member is free to resign

their employment with the church at any time, with or without cause. The church is free to end the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause.

- **Equal Opportunity Employer** - The commitment of a church to equal opportunity employment for all persons qualified to perform the duties of a position, without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, marital status, or disability.
- **Disability Accommodation** - A church's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and commitment to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities. As such, employment practices and activities are conducted in a nondiscriminatory manner. A church's commitment to take necessary actions to ensure equal employment opportunity for persons with disabilities in accordance with the ADA and any other applicable federal, state, or local laws.
- **Proof of U.S. Citizenship and/or Right to Work** - The church's compliance with federal immigration laws to not knowingly hire or continue to employ anyone who does not have the legal right to work in the United States.
- **Immigration Law Compliance** - A church's commitment to employ only people who are United States citizens or persons who are not citizens of the United States but are legally authorized to work in the United States.
- **Outside Employment** - A church's decision regarding staff members' right to have outside employment. If permissible, it is encouraged that outside employment does not interfere with a staff member's duties and responsibilities.
- **Church Attendance, Membership, Volunteer Service** - The expectation of staff members to attend worship services and actively participate in ministries of the church.
- **Introductory Period** - Some churches practice an introductory period of employment. This is a determined amount of time in which the staff person receives informal evaluations to determine if the expectations for the position and adaptation to the work environment are taking place. The introductory period has an impact on benefits, vacation time, review processes, etc. to be determined by leadership.
- **Hiring of Relatives** - Restrictions, if any, to the hiring of relatives to work in the same area of an organization. (See Nepotism Policy for more information)
- **Health Examinations** - Whether physical and mental health examinations are provided before or at any point during employment to ensure a staff person is physically or mentally capable of handling the tasks involved in the job positions without harming themselves or others.

- **Background Checks** - A church's right to perform criminal background checks and credit checks as a condition of hiring and/or at any time during the period of employment.
- **Expectations for Staff Members**
  - **General** - Staff members must always bear in mind that they represent Christ and the church in both their work and private life. Expectations to be sensitive to perceptions of others regarding work habits, personal appearance, conduct, and spirituality. The expectation is to be an example in their relationship with God and commitment to the vision and mission of the church. The staff person's responsibility, dependability, and integrity for making the church an enjoyable work environment and to help fulfill the church's mission.
  - **Demeanor and Performance** - The priority as a staff member is to understand and take ownership of the job and its duties properly, in a timely manner, and with a pleasant attitude. Additionally, the expectation is to cooperate with other staff members with a good team spirit. The importance of staff members to perform each task with a positive attitude and to the best of their ability.
  - **Personal Appearance** - The expectation to be well-groomed and to dress in a neat, clean, and appropriate manner consistent with the standards applicable to persons in the staff person's position and the particular activities being undertaken. Personal appearance should be a matter of concern for each staff member to make a positive impression on all whom a staff member comes into contact with throughout the work day.
  - **Ethics and Conduct** - As a representative of the church, staff members should act competently and deal with people in a kind, courteous, and respectful manner. Additionally, strive to help visitors, all other staff members, and members of the congregation, which at times may require more effort and understanding. Expectations of organization, timeliness, and replies to inquiries, concerns, or requests.
  - **Conduct with the Opposite Sex** - The church's expectations of staff persons as they interact with the opposite sex. These may include parameters in ministering to members of the opposite sex, interactions with fellow staff members, and prohibitions which may include ramifications if guidelines are broken. Special Note: The practice of ministry places ministers in all sorts of situations that require moral wisdom, a clear sense of one's identity, and respect for other persons. Some churches write extensive and explicit policies of behavior. Other churches write more general policies. At the end of the day, a minister or staff

person's conduct rests with that person. The purpose of a written policy is to provide clear boundaries that can be easily recognized.

- **Alcohol and Drug Use** - Decision by the church regarding substances such as tobacco, marijuana in any form, mood-altering drugs, and substances or narcotics not authorized by a physician. Additionally, decisions regarding the use of alcohol by staff members.
  - **Non-Disclosure** - The importance of protecting confidential information such as compensation information, member/attendee information, member preferences, financial/giving information, premature communication regarding changes in events, plans, etc.
  - **Anti-Harassment Policy** - The church does not tolerate any form of harassment, including sexual harassment, or any offensive conduct that affects an employee's work performance or that creates a hostile work, intimidating, or offensive work environment. Reporting structure for employees, methods of investigation of harassment, corrective action, and guidelines. For a more extensive statement on sexual harassment policies, please see our "[Policy Template - Sexual Harassment](#)" on our website's resource page.
  - **Concerns and Suggestions** - The encouragement to voice concerns and opinions as a staff person in a respectful and appropriate manner and to whom staff are to direct their concerns and opinions.
  - **Confidentiality** - Staff members may be privy to confidential information relating to the congregation. Such information must be kept confidential and not shared with any person other than another staff member, elder, or designated person to provide appropriate support.
  - **Appropriate Interactions with Minors** - Staff members assume the full burden of responsibility for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries with minors. The church may adopt a "two-adult" rule which requires two adults present at all times within the company of a minor.
  - **Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect** - The policy of all staff members to report a suspected or actual child victim of abuse or neglect to the appropriate leadership and local law enforcement.
  - **Security; Emergencies** - A safe and secure workplace for the benefit of all employees. No talk of violence or any communication involving threats of violence will be tolerated. Any threats or potential threats must be communicated by employees to the appropriate leadership.
- **Employment Status**

- **Job Description** - At the time of hire, employees are given a job description to review and sign which summarizes the duties and responsibilities of the position. The church may reserve the right to revise or update your job description as it is necessary or appropriate.
- **Employment Classifications**
  - Independent Contractors - certain staff who regularly perform services for the church under a written contract may be independent contractors. Compensation and eligibility for benefits may be outlined in their contracts with the church.
  - Full-Time Employees - regularly scheduled to work a full-time schedule
  - Part-Time Employees - regularly scheduled to work less than 40 hours per week
  - Intern - may be a full or part-time, paid or unpaid employee whose employment is for a specific purpose and with a strict term or duration.
  - Temporary Employees - have an employment relationship with the church but are assigned to work on an irregular or unpredictable basis
- **Exempt or Nonexempt Status** - Depending on the position, a staff member may be classified as either nonexempt or exempt from federal and state wage and hour laws. A nonexempt employee is entitled to overtime pay under the specific provisions of federal and state laws. An exempt employee is excluded from specific provisions of federal and state wage and hour laws.
- **At-Will Employment** - Employment is with the mutual consent of the staff person and the church. “Employment at will” is the relationship that may remain in effect throughout the employment of a staff member until it is expressed in a written agreement between the employee and duly authorized representative of the church.
  - While most staff positions within the church will be at-will, there may be a decision made by leadership to employ the primary minister on a contract basis. This hiring may indicate employment for a certain period of time. If this is the case, the employment relationship would be a contracted relationship, which may contain termination for cause provisions. However, if a minister is terminated without cause, then the minister could be entitled to compensation for the agreed upon term.
- **Resignation** - The policy of the church regarding the decision for a staff person to resign from their position. Who is the required leadership to notify and what does the letter of resignation need to include (reason for leaving, last day of employment, last day of work, mailing address, phone number, and email address)? Consequences for failing to give necessary notice of resignation.

- **Termination** - Upon the termination of a staff person, whether voluntary or involuntary, the expectations of an exit interview along with a discussion surrounding insurance coverage, keys, technology, files, and any other property. What are the reasons for termination as decided by the leadership? (attendance, work performance, conduct, etc.)
- **Reinstatement** - If a staff member's employment is terminated and subsequently rehired by the church, their previous period of employment shall not be considered in determining eligibility for or accrual of benefits.
- **Attendance and Leave Time**
  - **Work Schedule** - An outline of expectations regarding ministry staff and support staff, either having a Sunday-Thursday work week or a Monday-Friday schedule.
  - **Office Hours; Holiday Observances** - Normal operating hours of the office and which holidays are observed on the office calendar.
  - **Lunch Period** - The allowance and expectations for staff to take lunch breaks as it coincides with the office work schedule.
  - **Overtime** - On some occasions, either when emergencies or the volume of work accumulates, an employee may work overtime. The church leadership can communicate expectations for approving overtime and the rate of pay for non-exempt employees.
  - **Time Records** - Nonexempt employees are to accurately record their time of arrival and departure along with the hours they work each day. Submission of their timesheet to the designated person at the designated time.
  - **Absence or Tardiness** - Within the parameters outlined by leadership, consider how staff handle appointments or absences from the office during the workday. When is it necessary to take leave time and when are allowances given for personal apportionments, unexpected events, or late arrivals?
  - **Severe Weather** - If severe weather conditions impede a staff person's ability to travel to work, who makes decisions regarding expectations for staff and whether or not the church office is closed? Some churches may follow the local school system's decisions regarding closures.
  - **Holidays** - The determination to recognize holidays as they may fall on a weekend, thereby being observed on the work day closest to the holiday. Leadership must determine how exempt and nonexempt employees are paid in connection with observed holidays.
  - **Sabbatical Leave** - Sabbatical leaves acknowledge the need for rest and renewal in a minister's life. The intent of a sabbatical is to provide time for relieving fresh

direction from God, spiritual vision, and improved effectiveness for the congregation, the minister, and the Kingdom. After a period of (#) years, a minister is eligible to apply for a sabbatical leave with continued pay and benefits. For more information on sabbatical leave policies, please see Siburt's resource guide for sabbatical policies.

- **Vacation** - The vacation leave benefits of staff, whether full or part-time. When does the staff member begin to accrue vacation, and how much is allotted for staff? At times, leadership may increase vacation hours in conjunction with the number of years served. Additionally, how many vacation days, if any, can be rolled over into the next year? To whom are vacation requests made?
- **Sick Leave** - If sick leave is categorized in addition to vacation time, how many hours are allotted per calendar year for sick leave? Sick leave may be described as time spent away from work for personal illness, well-care, and medical or dental appointments. It may also include time away for an immediate family member's illness or well-care.
- **Funerals; and Bereavement** - Are leaves of absence for the death of a staff member's family allotted on a case-by-case basis or are there outlined days given the relationship of the deceased with the staff member?
- **Jury Duty** - If summoned for jury duty, the church will grant time off and pay. However, jury duty is not to be considered as time worked for purposes of overtime calculation. Employees must notify their supervisor upon receiving a jury summons to ensure scheduling adjustments are made.
- **Time Off to Vote** - Staff are encouraged to vote in all elections. If it is not possible to vote before or after work hours, time will be granted as needed to allow staff members to vote in elections.
- **Maternity/Paternity Leave** - The church allows female staff members up to (#) weeks of maternity leave and male staff members up to (#) weeks of paternity leave at the time of birth or adoption of the staff member's child, beginning on the date of the child's birth or adoption. If the staff member desires additional leave time, he or she may use available vacation time or request a leave of absence without pay.
- **Military Absence** - A staff member who is called to active military service while employed shall be considered to have voluntarily resigned his or her employment as of the last date worked.
- **Leave of Absence Without Pay** - If a staff member needs to be away from work temporarily for any reason other than those for which leave time is allotted, or for any period in excess of allotted leave time, the staff member may request leave without pay. All such requests must be made in writing at least two weeks

prior to the date of the requested absence or as soon as possible after the need for the absence from work arises.

- **Return from Leave** - If requested leave is granted for any reason and the staff member accepts employment elsewhere or does not return to work on the date specified in the original request or any approved extension, the staff member will be considered to have voluntarily resigned from employment.

- **Performance and Conduct**

- **Performance Reviews** - At a time frame determined by the leadership, performance reviews are conducted for each staff member and their direct report, either senior staff or the eldership. The review is aimed at making staff aware of how one's performance compares to the job description and goals set for the position. Additionally, the review intends to identify strengths and weaknesses and encourage the discussion of interests and concerns to assist the staff member to grow personally and professionally.
- **Unacceptable Conduct** - Staff members are expected to act in a mature and responsible way at all times and to obey all laws. Leadership must determine what conduct is unacceptable and may result in immediate dismissal without warning. (See the Code of Conduct section for more information)
- **Driver's License and Driving Record** - Staff members whose responsibilities require the operation of a motor vehicle must present and maintain a valid driver's license and a driving record acceptable to the church and its insurer. Staff may be asked to submit a copy of their driving record and staff must report any changes to their driving record to leadership immediately.
- **Employee Purchases on Church Accounts** - Staff members shall not purchase merchandise or services for personal use through the church's accounts or using the church's credit card accounts.
- **Personal Matters** - Staff members are expected to focus on their job responsibilities and do their best to minimize and avoid distractions and interruptions of dealing with personal matters during work hours.
- **Personnel File** - The church may choose to maintain a personnel file on all staff members which is the property of the church and not to be copied, borrowed, removed, or its contents modified without prior approval from leadership. It is important that information in the personal file is kept up to date.
- **Security Check** - The church may reserve the right to inspect all mail, packages, and suspicious items delivered to, brought onto, stored on, or removed from the premises, regardless of how they are addressed, packaged, or stored.



- **Code of Conduct** - Staff members must behave professionally and in a manner consistent with a Christ follower as defined in the Bible. A staff member's behavior in public must be consistent with that of a church staff member at all times. A church may decide on "work rules" that ensure the best interest and safety of all staff members and congregants which must be followed at all times. Those who break work rules may be subject to corrective action up to and including termination of employment. They may include but not be limited to the following:
  - Theft or inappropriate removal or possession of church property
  - Falsification of church records
  - Working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
  - Possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the workplace or while operating church-owned vehicles or equipment
  - Fighting or threatening violence in the workplace
  - Negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of church property
  - Inappropriate use of technology for personal use or improper conduct
  - Insubordination or other disrespectful conduct
  - Violation of health or safety rules
  - Sexual or other unlawful or unwelcome harassment
  - Marital affairs
  - Possession of dangerous or unauthorized materials in the workplace without proper authorization
  - Excessive absenteeism or absence without notice
  - Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information
  - Unsatisfactory performance or conduct
  
- **Compensation and Benefits**
  - **Determination of Compensation** - Staff member's compensation is established at the time of hiring and reviewed at least annually afterward. Leadership must determine parameters around pay raises, performance-based compensation, the church's financial condition, cost of living, etc.
  - **Pay Periods** - The determined number of pay periods per calendar year, with the date of pay each month, and consideration to pay dates as they fall on weekends or holidays.
  - **Direct Deposit** - If the church offers direct deposit, the steps of getting the paycheck deposited directly to an account are specified with the staff person's financial institution.

- **Health Benefits** - While some churches may carry group health insurance for staff, others may not. Some churches may address health insurance through a health insurance stipend, as opposed to group health coverage, which would be additional compensation for staff. The handbook is a place for your church to address their specific health benefits as they are available to staff and which leadership personnel an employee may contact with questions regarding health benefits.
- **Mandatory Deductions from Pay** - Qualified “clergy” under the Internal Revenue Code are treated as self-employed for purposes of federal withholding tax, Medicare tax, and Social Security tax and are responsible for reporting their own earnings and paying a self-employment tax on their compensation. Therefore, the church will not withhold these taxes from ministers’ paychecks or contribute to the payment of such taxes. For all other employees, the church is required by law to make certain deductions from the employees’ pay each pay period, including federal and state withholding of income tax, Medicare tax, and Social Security tax.
- **Other Deductions from Pay** - Staff members who are eligible for and elect to participate in the church’s retirement plan may have contributions to such a plan deducted from their pay each pay period.
- **Reimbursement of Expenses** - Reimbursements should be made based on the guidelines of the accounting policy in place at the church. Travel for staff must be authorized in advance. A staff member who travels must obtain proper documentation for reimbursement of expenses or to support church credit card charges.
- **Garnishment** - All staff members are encouraged to manage their financial affairs so that the church will not be required to execute any court-ordered assignment of or garnishment against wages.
- **Workers’ Compensations** - The decision of the church to carry workers’ compensation insurance on employees for on-the-job accidents. Additionally, the decision to comply with applicable workers’ compensation laws and regulations. If a work-related illness or injury occurs, the staff members must immediately report it to their supervisor. It may be the decision of the church to have staff file incident reports for any job-related accidents.
- **Workplace Safety** - A safe, secure workplace ought to be maintained for the benefit of all employees. Any actual or potential threat to safety should be promptly addressed. No talk of violence or any communication involving threats of violence will be tolerated. If there is a suspicious person or activity on the premises, the identified leadership should be contacted immediately.

- **Advances** - The church does not advance pay or loan money to staff members.
  - **Employee Termination** - If a staff member is terminated, an exit interview will be scheduled. Upon termination, the staff member will receive their final pay along with instructions related to benefit continuation options.
  - **Resignation** - If a staff member decides to resign for whatever reason, it should be done in writing and at least two weeks prior to the staff member's last day of work. Upon receipt of a staff member's resignation, an exit interview will be scheduled.
- **Other Policies**
    - **Children at Work** - As a general rule, employees may not bring their children to work with them except during regular services or other activities in which the congregation is invited to participate. Situations otherwise must be approved by leadership and staff members are to use discretion in required accommodations.
    - **Phones, Computers, Software, and other Equipment** - Equipment, services, and technology provided for the staff are the property of the church and may be subject to monitoring and oversight by the church's leadership.
    - **Social Media, Blogs, and Other Online Forums** - Care must be taken to ensure that the content of communication through these forums is carefully considered by the staff members as it relates to the perceptions of others. Churches may require staff who have individual platforms to add a disclaimer as it connects to their church. In addition to a social media policy for staff members, it is wise to have a policy for the church's social media pages.
      - **Church Social Media Policy** - A church's social media policy may include who has access to the church's social media account, what is appropriate to post, how various groups are managed, what information is shared, are minors shared in photo posts, etc. More thorough resources are [here](#) and [here](#).
    - **Personal Property** - All staff members should take adequate precautions for the safety of their personal property while on church property or engaged in activities elsewhere on behalf of the church. The church may choose not to be responsible for any loss or damage to staff member's personal property.
    - **Rights to Creative Efforts; Ownership of Work Product** - The creation of properties unrelated to the individual's employment responsibility that is developed on an individual's own time and without church support or use of the church's copyrighted works facilities, or equipment is the exclusive property of the creator and the church has no interest in any such property and no claim to any resulting profits. Intellectual property either related to the individual's

employment responsibility, or resulting from activities performed on the church's time, with support of the church's funds, or from using the church's facilities and equipment is subject to the ownership of the church. All work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment will be owned by the church.

- **Workplace Security, Safety, and Injuries** - Every staff member is expected to assist in maintaining the safety and security of the church property. Help ensure entrances are properly locked, secured, and the alarm system is engaged (if applicable). Report the need for repair or replacement or that otherwise pose a safety hazard, please report them to the leadership or other responsible persons immediately.
- **Civil or Criminal Disobedience** - Employees are expected to uphold the law. If an employee violates the law in a way that has a deterrent impact on their ministry or that of the church, the employee must report the violation or potential violation to leadership.
- **Outside Inquiries** - If a representative of the media contacts an employee regarding a ministry issue, no employee may give interviews without prior approval from leadership. All inquiries should be directed to leadership.
- **Continuing Education** - The church's requirements for ministry staff members to continue their formal education training through conferences, seminars, and further schooling.
- **Nepotism policy** - The church wants to ensure that employment practices do not create situations such as conflict of interest or favoritism. This extends to practices that involve staffing. To protect the church in this regard, it is the discretion of leadership to not employ an Elder nor an immediate family member of an Elder in a ministry staff position. Immediate family includes: spouse, son, daughter, son-in-law, or daughter-in-law including relationships created by adoption or marriage. A family member of a minister may not be employed in the same department as the ministry. The church may not employ a person in a position that is directly supervised by or directly supervises a family member of that position.
  - Under no circumstance is the employment of a relative of an elder or staff member allowed in the Accounting Office.
  - Present employees who marry or who become related by marriage to another employee may continue their employment provided that their positions and relationship do not conflict with other aspects of the policy.
  - If, in the opinion of leadership, family members who are employees create an unfavorable or non-productive workplace environment, the leadership will

determine which employee may be transferred to another position, or be terminated from employment with the church.

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