
Guidelines for Developing Church Job Descriptions

EVERY CHURCH, REGARDLESS OF SIZE, HAS JOB descriptions for a number of varied tasks that must be performed regularly or periodically. They may be written, or they may exist only in someone's mind. A staff member may not always be certain of the exact responsibilities assigned to a position. The church may never have arrived at clear-cut decisions regarding expectations for the position. The job may have grown with the person or position over a period of years with assignments added or assumed from time to time. A problem may develop when a former staff member leaves and a new person comes into the assignment. A written job description is an organized summary of the duties, tasks, responsibilities, and accountability involved in a staff position. The job description should be reviewed annually and, when a change in personnel occurs, re-tailored to fit the new situation.

Section of Deacons and Diaconal Ministries

Division of Ordained Ministry
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
The United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202-0871
Phone 615-340-7375
FAX 615-340-7377

Value of Job Descriptions

Job descriptions serve:

- as a way to identify persons by position title,
- as a guide to the staff member,
- as a way of clarifying what the church expects of the staff person,
- as a guide for interviewing and placement, helping relieve the church of pressures to place an unqualified person,
- as a guide for studying salaries and benefits of comparable positions,
- as a tool for evaluation and promotion,
- as an aid in producing a smooth and balanced work flow,
- as a guide to eliminate work duplications,
- as an effective control of job content. Sometimes jobs change so slowly that no one is fully aware of the change.
- as a means to develop and support morale. The writing of job descriptions is an indication to staff members of interest in them and their work, supporting efficient organization and the concept of the staff as a team, and
- as an addendum to an employee's contract.

Preparations for Developing Job Descriptions

1. The pastor-parish (staff-parish) relations committee (PP/SPRC) gives leadership to the project to assure acceptance by the staff members and give it successful implementation (1996 Book of Discipline, ¶262.2b, 262.2f(10) and ¶322.10d).
2. The PP/SPRC should hold conferences with the staff members to explain the purpose of the project. In a large church, it may be desirable to have several separate meetings; one for program staff persons, such as pastor, director of education, director of music, etc.; one for clerical staff persons; and one for maintenance staff persons. The purpose of the separate meetings is to give more freedom in asking questions concerning related areas of responsibility. Discuss fully the method to be used in securing the job information, and give opportunity for comments and questions.
3. The PP/SPRC may choose to name a job description committee composed of persons from the PP/SPRC, the church staff, and those having special skills in the areas to be described.

The purpose of the job description committee is to:

- determine the method of securing job information,
- collect the data,
- study and evaluate the findings,
- make recommendations, and
- write the job descriptions.

Collecting Job Information

The job description committee will need to collect the following information:

- specific facts about responsibilities for each position
- what the person does and/or is expected to do
- how the person carries out each responsibility
- why the person does this
- knowledge and skills involved
- resources and equipment used
- training and/or experience required.

These specific facts are secured from each staff person by a job questionnaire and personal interview:

(1) request each individual to complete a job questionnaire; (2) interview the staff members individually concerning their duties and responsibilities; (3) talk about the church's expectations for this person and his/her work.

Questionnaire

The chairperson of a job description committee, or other responsible person, should provide a copy of the job questionnaire to each staff member with a full explanation of the various items on the form. At least a week should be given for persons to complete the form.

Request each person to list his/her responsibilities in order of importance. It is important that the completed job questionnaires be carefully rechecked with staff persons before the final job descriptions are written.

Interview

The job description committee may assign one or more of its members to interview staff persons individually.

The person interviewing should be familiar with the skills required for acceptable performance of the particular staff position.

Review with the individual the completed information on the job questionnaire. It provides a check to determine if the descriptions of tasks are correctly stated and if any task has been omitted.

Analyze carefully each completed job questionnaire and personal interview.

Sample questionnaire and interview forms are included in this document.

Writing Job Descriptions

The main purpose of writing job descriptions is to distinguish one job from another. In this process, two objectives are accomplished:

1. All information is presented in a specific, accurate, and readable fashion.
2. Information is standardized on each position for purposes of comparison.

The following steps are suggested for writing job descriptions:

1. Summarize the responsibilities of each position. Data appearing on the job questionnaire need to be organized in a consistent form.
2. Summarize skills and other requirements necessary for each job. Establish minimum standards.
3. Use language that is direct and specific. Avoid generalized terms and complicated sentence structures. Use the present tense throughout the job description.

Maintaining Job Descriptions

All job descriptions should be reviewed annually. When changes are approved, the descriptions need to be rewritten.

Each staff person should receive a copy of his/her completed and approved job description.

The job description, along with the supporting job questionnaire data, should be kept with individual staff and personnel records.

When determined that a new position is necessary, a job description should be written before persons are interviewed for employment. The new staff position may require a change in one or more of the other existing job descriptions.

The task of maintaining, reviewing, and revising job descriptions is an important responsibility of the pastor-parish (staff-parish) relations committee [1996 Book of Discipline, ¶262.2.f(4), 262.2f(10)].

Job Questionnaire

Position title _____

Prepared by _____

Date _____

1. Principal function. (Briefly summarize the main purpose of the position.)

2. Regular duties. (List the major duties required by the position.)

3. Occasional duties. (List the duties sometimes required by the position.)

4. Does the position require giving direct supervision of others? List the names of those supervised.

5. What decisions are normally made by you without additional approval?

Nature of decision

Frequency of occurrence

6. In your responsibilities, what contacts are made with people outside the church?

People contacted

Frequency of occurrence

7. What specialized knowledge and skills does this position require?

8. What kind of office equipment does this job require? Note if used continuously, frequently, or occasionally.

9. What continuing education experiences are expected?

10. List professional groups in which you participate.

11. Give any additional comment that will aid in describing your work.

Job Description Form

Position title _____

Prepared by _____ Date _____

Reviewed by _____ Date _____

Principal focus. (Briefly summarize the major purpose of the position).

Regular duties. (List the major duties required by the position).

Occasional duties. (List the duties sometimes required by the position).

Skills and requirements.