

EMPLOYMENT HANDBOOK DO'S AND DON'TS FOR YOUR CHURCH

DO!

- Implement an employment handbook for your church, regardless of its size.
- Make certain you include an “at will” disclaimer in your handbook in order to ensure that employees understand that the church may terminate their employment at any time and bypass disciplinary procedures as deemed necessary.
- Adapt your handbook to accommodate your state’s specific employment laws, as they may be stricter than federal law.
- Carefully review your handbook in conjunction with other church documents, such as internet/computer policies, benefits documentation and vacation or disciplinary procedures, to ensure that they are consistent.
- Set realistic policies so that supervisors can enforce them correctly. You do not want to create a situation in which an employee or supervisor is unable to meet the standards created, simply because they are unclear or unrealistic.

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DON'T!

- Simply adopt a “form” handbook, which may include rules that do not apply to your church (including specific exemptions allowed for religious organizations under the First Amendment to the Constitution).
- Include a lot of detail on specific procedures, especially disciplinary procedures. Stick to your church policies and implement a separate procedures manual for managers.
- Employee probationary periods should not be included in an employment handbook. This gives the impression that once the probationary period has ended, an employee may stay at the job indefinitely and could void the employee’s “at will” status.
- Forget to review and update the handbook on an annual basis. Employment law is a quickly changing arena and, unfortunately, even for churches, a quickly growing focus for litigation by disgruntled employees. It is incumbent upon the church leadership to ensure that the employment handbook is up to date.
- Forget to add language ensuring that your church, while it does not discriminate against applicants or employees for all other reasons protected under federal, state and local laws, it DOES have the right to discriminate on the basis of RELIGION as protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The addition of this language to your handbook, as well as any employment applications, is critical to protect your church in the instance of a claim of religious discrimination.