

## **Creating Pastoral Job Descriptions**

A pastor's job description is a written outline of ministry responsibilities assigned to the pastor. It is negotiated between the pastor and the governing council or board. In the writing of the associate pastor's job description, the lead pastor is also involved. The pastor's job description is reviewed annually.

### **Why Does a Pastor Need a Job Description?**

**A. To provide clarity of vision, a comprehensive set of goals and a clear set of priorities for pastoral ministry.**

**B. To ensure that the pastor and congregation have common expectations.**

Approaches to ministry vary with every pastor and expectations of pastors are as many and as varied as members of a congregation. Every such expectation, whether written, verbalized or carried silently, are implicit job descriptions. A good job description serves as the authoritative arbiter between varying expectations.

**C. To reduce conflict.**

Conflict sometimes arises from different expectations. If those expectations can be clarified in advance and all parties agree to them, the potential for conflict is reduced. Should such conflict arise, the written job description can often be used to determine whether the expectation is appropriate.

In rare situations a congregation determines that a pastor is incompetent, immoral or simply not suited for that particular appointment. Unless there is a written job description against which to measure such assertions the congregation may be liable to accusations of unfairness, conflict between disagreeing parties in the church, and perhaps even a suit for wrongful dismissal if it tries to fire the pastor.

**D. To reduce complications in team ministry.**

In a team ministry there are added possibilities for conflict. One pastor may feel that another does not carry enough of the load. One may intrude into the other's area of perceived responsibility. Important duties may get missed because both pastors assume or hope that the other is doing it. Each pastor should have a unique job description, but all the job descriptions for the team should be coordinated to reduce overlap or gaps.

**E. To provide the basis for evaluation.**

The pastoral review is a check-point for asking whether the pastor is doing what ought to be done according to this congregation's expectations. If the job description does not state how often the pastor is expected to preach, it is not appropriate to be critical for not preaching often enough (or too often). Evaluative comments about the pastor's relationship with youth are inappropriate if that is not included in the job description. Of course, if the review identifies that the pastor is not fulfilling the expectations of the job description, there are several options. The congregation could dismiss the pastor and find another. The pastor could leave to find a congregation with more reasonable expectations.

The pastor can (perhaps with help from the congregation) change the behavior that is contrary to the job description. Or the job description can be adjusted to make it more realistic—perhaps some tasks can be assigned to another person with appropriate gifts.

## **THE PASTOR’S JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **What Should Be Included in a Pastor’s Job Description?**

#### **A. Qualifications for the job.**

What spiritual, educational, theological, physical and other qualifications are essential or desirable of the pastor? These are especially useful when a new pastor is being called, but they can also help to check the pastor’s character and performance. Often a job description will specify future goals, such as continuing education and spiritual disciplines, as well as essential threshold qualifications. Avoid specifying qualifications that are not allowed by human rights legislation or that are not necessary to the pastoral vocation.

#### **B. Expected ethical standards.**

A reference to this statement and/or a list of ethical criteria important to the congregation should be included in the job description. In several cases that have been litigated in court it has been shown that implicit assumptions that certain behavior is immoral, even if shared by almost all members of the congregation and community, may not be allowable grounds for dismissing a pastor who contravenes those expectations. Put it in writing if it is important. Likewise, failure to uphold particular theological views cannot be grounds for dismissal unless they were stated in the job description at the time of hiring. It is wise to include the expectation that the pastor will adhere to the principles of the denomination’s confession of faith or list of doctrines important to this congregation.

#### **C. Accountability and Support.**

The job description should say to whom the pastor is accountable—by office, not by name; and usually a committee/board, not an individual. It should also describe the relationship of the pastor to the Pastor Congregation Relations Committee and any other support or accountability relationship that is formally in place. Specific accountability expectations such as regular staff meetings in a multiple-staff team or annual reports to the congregation or written reports to the church board should be named. And be sure to identify the pastor’s responsibilities to the area conference (which holds the pastor’s ministerial credentials) and the area conference minister, bishop or overseer.

#### **D. Tasks.**

The description of what the pastor is expected to do should include both general areas of responsibility (e.g., preach and teach the scriptures and convictions of the church) and also specific tasks (e.g., conduct catechism classes annually; preach three Sundays each month). If the assignment is part-time, the job description should reflect that. If there is a ministry team the different expectations of each member should be reflected in their own job descriptions. If a task is shared, either with other persons (another minister, deacons or the church secretary) or a committee (such as a worship committee), that should be named. In listing the tasks of the pastor there is a risk of being too specific and not allowing for the movement of the Spirit as new opportunities and needs arise. On the other hand, there is also a risk of being too vague or overlooking some things that are important to the congregation. Job descriptions sometimes focus on the public tasks like preaching and committee work. While these are important, they are not the whole of the pastor's responsibility. It is valuable for both congregation and pastor to name expectations of time spent in prayer and study, continuing education and spiritual retreats. Specific mention might also be made of expectations of the pastor's involvement in conference or denominational ministry, community or para-church volunteer work.

#### **E. Work load.**

Defining work load expectations requires the balancing of the congregation's right to expect full service and the pastor's right, indeed obligation, to attend to personal well-being, family responsibilities and non-church volunteer work. It is reasonable to expect a full-time pastor to work an average of 40 to 50 hours a week. It is reasonable to insist that the pastor (except in case of dire emergency) take one full day a week off. Some churches prefer to measure work time in blocks of morning, afternoon and evening. A regular workweek consists of 10 such blocks (Monday to Friday, morning and afternoon). In addition, a pastor is expected to work on Sunday, and probably a bit more than a day laborer. Many churches define the expectation as 12 to 14 blocks per week. This system recognizes that a two-hour evening meeting may take the pastor away from the family as much as a four-hour block of sermon writing in the afternoon. But it may not add up to the same number of hours or productivity. If a pastor works part-time, appropriate adjustments must be made.

#### **F. Other items.**

The job description may include other items that are important to either the pastor or the congregation. It should also specify when and by whom it will be reviewed, and what processes may be used for modifying the job description by either the pastor or the congregation.

#### **G. Signatures and dates**

The job description must be acceptable both to (the designated representatives of) the congregation and the pastor. It should be signed by both parties (with witnesses, if you are inclined to be legalistic) and dated.

**What about other issues?**

The job description does not define every part of the relationship between a pastor and the congregation. It does not address issues around salary or performance reviews and other details of the congregation's responsibility to the pastor. These items should also be put on paper and reviewed every year. Salary issues should be negotiated annually.

**If we don't have a job description, how might we write one?**

A common way to write new job descriptions is to ask the person holding office to describe what he/she is presently doing; this allows for weighing the priority of the pastoral activities. A working committee of the governing council or board then works with the pastor in finalizing the job description. The Pastor Congregation Relations Committee can serve in a consulting role in this process of designing of a good working job description. The conference minister (superintendent) might also be consulted or another pastor might be invited to comment as the job description is developed. The job description should be shared with the congregation so that members hold appropriate expectations of the pastor's availability. The process of writing a job description, the discussion it stimulates and the understanding that is gained by and about both pastor and congregation may be as important as the resulting document.

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Revised by Sven Eriksson, January 2005.

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