

Church Financial Hot Topic

Interviewing Applicants for Church Support Staff Positions

Rarely do courts interfere in the relationship between a church and its clergy because of the First Amendment. This relationship allows the church to ask more job interview questions than normally allowed by various employment laws. Thus, there is little risk of a church asking a potential minister a wrong question based on federal law. However, larger churches with fifteen or more employees generally do not have the same flexibility in hiring support (non-ministerial) staff members. Julie Blossin in her book, *The Church Guide to Employment Law*, outlines some good questions and bad questions for any size church to ask applicants for non-ministerial staff positions. (Her book is currently out of print, but the book is a great resource if you can find a copy.)

Acceptable Questions

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I see you used to work at Second Church. Tell me what you did there. ✓ Describe what you did in your last job. Tell me about a typical day. What was your favorite and least favorite task? ✓ Why are you interested in this job? ✓ Tell me about your biggest challenges in your last two jobs and how you handled those challenges. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What special skills do you have for this job? ✓ After hearing what I have told you about this job, tell me why you think you can do it. ✓ After hearing about our working hours and attendance policies, do you think you could meet them? ✓ What are the strengths you would bring to this job? What are your weaknesses? |
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(Goal: You can ask anything that is job-related and that does not show an intent to single out a protected class of individuals. As always, churches have the right to ask religious questions of non-ministerial staff applicants.)

Unacceptable Questions

<p>Discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin: Do you own your own home or rent? What does it feel like being a minority? How can you stand living in such a high crime area?</p>	<p>Discrimination on the basis of sex: Are you married? Do you have children? Number & age(s) of children? Do you plan to have any children? Who takes care of your children when you work? What are you going to do if your children get sick?</p>
<p>Discrimination on the basis of pregnancy: How long do you plan to keep working? What are you going to do about childcare? When is the baby due?</p>	<p>Discrimination on the basis of national origin: Is your last name Spanish? Are you Japanese or Chinese? Birthplace? Native Tongue? Maiden name?</p>
<p>Discrimination on the basis of a disability: How many sick days did you use last year? Do you have or have you ever had any health problems? Is your disability permanent?</p>	<p>Discrimination on the basis of age: How old are you? Why would someone your age want this job? Are you drawing Social Security benefits yet? Are you trying to start a second career at your age?</p>

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