

# Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual

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Governing Council

The Plymouth Church in Framingham  
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## Introduction

This Personnel Policies document presents a set of statements established to describe the employment relationship between The Plymouth Church and those employees whose primary work is on behalf of the Church. Although those whose primary work is for Plymouth House Nursery School (PHNS) are also employees of the Church, the nature of the PHNS schedule and practices requires modifications to these policies which are outlined in a separate document. These policies apply to Clergy to the extent that specific provisions included here are not addressed in their Letter of Call. Officers of the church who may receive a stipend are not considered employees.

This document is an outline of current policies and does not constitute a contract of employment. The Governing Council may alter or suspend these personnel policies from time to time, in whole or in part. Policy statements are intended to describe or define commitments that are adhered to on a consistent basis, i.e. what can be expected in a given situation. Other documents that describe protocols, procedures or practices are guidelines for how policies might be implemented.

The staff is employed to provide professional leadership, management, and support to the ministries of The Plymouth Church. According to the Church's Bylaws, the Senior Pastor is elected by the membership of the church and is accountable for the administration of the Church. The Senior Pastor is responsible for the general supervision of the church staff and may delegate on-going supervisory authority to other employees. The hiring of staff rests with the Governing Council on recommendation from the Senior Pastor, except for other pastors who are called according to procedures determined by the Bylaws and/or Governing Council.

Plymouth Church appreciates the substantial contribution of staff to its well-being and in turn seeks to make employment in the Church rewarding both professionally and personally. The Church is committed to a work environment in which relationships are characterized by dignity, courtesy, respect, and equitable treatment. Through the formulation and equitable administration of its personnel policies and practices, the Church seeks to reflect this commitment.

The Church affirms its commitment to support and implement a program of equal employment for all and shall follow relevant federal and Massachusetts laws and guidelines regarding discrimination against any employee or applicant.

# Church-Employee Relationships

## Conditions of Employment

Regular employment with The Plymouth Church is at-will and not for any specific period of time, and, in accordance with Massachusetts law, may be terminated by the employee or the Church at any time and for any reason, with or without cause. (See Section X in *Church-Employee Relationships on Separation*)

The Church issues a letter to all new employees confirming the initial terms of employment and describing the position for which the person is being hired.

Employees may not serve as officers of the Church except where such service is in compliance with the Bylaws. Also, spouses/domestic partners of employees may not be elected as officers.

## Categories of Employees

### Definitions

*Regular Full-time Employee.* An individual who, by the terms of the employment agreement, is hired to work at least 2,080 hours per year (40 hours per week). Such persons are considered to be indefinitely employed until formal separation occurs (See Church-Employee Relationships on Separation)

*Regular Part-time Employee.* An individual who, by the terms of the employment agreement, is hired to work less than 2,080 hours per year (40 hours per week). Such persons are considered to be indefinitely employed until formal separation occurs (See Church-Employee Relationships on Separation)

*Temporary Employee.* An individual who, by the terms of the employment agreement, is hired to work for a previously specified, limited period of time. Such employees may work full or part time and be employed for a specific project.

*Exempt Employee.* Exempt employees include professional, executive and administrative employees as defined by federal and state law who are paid a salary. Exempt employees are not eligible to receive overtime pay for work performed beyond their normal work schedule.

*Non-Exempt Employee.* Non-exempt employees are those who meet the criteria of the minimum and overtime provisions as defined by federal and state law. A non-exempt employee will receive overtime pay at the rate of time and one-half the employee's regular straight-time wage for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in the employee's workweek.

## **Employment Practices**

Plymouth Church provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants without regard to age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, mental and physical ability, spiritual tradition and military status.

Employment is at-will and therefore is not for any specific period of time. In accordance with Massachusetts law, employment may be terminated by the employee or by the Church at any time and for any reason, with or without cause. (See Section X of Church-Employee Relationships on Separation)

Newly hired personnel will receive a letter confirming their employment and a brief description of the nature of the position, as well as a copy of the Church's current Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual.

Compensation shall be at the wage or salary determined by mutual agreement at the commencement of employment and shall be subject to subsequent adjustments as may be determined in the sole discretion of the Church.

All employees – full-time and part-time, exempt and non-exempt – are paid bi-weekly (26 pay periods a year).<sup>1</sup>

## **Work Schedule**

Work for non-exempt staff will be performed so that it falls within their regular weekly schedule as defined by their position's job description. Changes in schedule and additional hours must be approved beforehand by the supervisor. When additional hours are approved, non-exempt employees will be paid at their regular hourly rate up to forty (40) hours per week and at time-and one-half for work in excess of forty (40) hours in any given week.

A meal break of at least 30 minutes is provided but not considered part of normal work hours and is unpaid.

## **Safe Church**

Plymouth Church is committed to creating and maintaining a community in which all can work together in a safe and supportive environment. It is the responsibility of employees to protect those at risk of exploitation within the community – for example, children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

All employees are expected to read and abide by the policies and philosophies set forth in the Safe Church Manual. Specifically, all staff are expected to uphold the

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<sup>1</sup> M.G.L. chapter 149, section 148

guidelines with respect to smoking, alcohol and drug-use, and the possession of weapons.

### **Expectations of Conduct**

Plymouth Church recognizes and appreciates that all members of the staff make a substantial contribution to the well-being of the church and its ability to successfully carry out its mission. Church employees are expected to exhibit behavior appropriate for a church environment in all interactions with other staff, with members and with the public.

Employees are expected to act with a high degree of integrity at all times, recognizing that one's individual behavior always reflects on the reputation of the church community. This includes sincere respect for the rights and feelings of others, holding confidences, and observing high professional standards in all they do.

#### Confidentiality

Church employees and volunteers are frequently exposed to confidential information, such as a member's medical or financial situation, staff personnel data, and spiritual struggles. Employees are obligated to protect such privileged information. Confidences are distinct from secrets; if any employee is uncertain, they should discuss it with their direct supervisor and/or the Senior Pastor. The only exceptions are situations in which a person is a danger to themselves or to others. All staff are Mandated Reporters and should become familiar with the expectations set forth in the Safe Church Manual.

#### Conflicts of Interest

Members of the congregation and friends actively participating in the ministry of the church will not be considered as candidates for any staff position. Staff members are not allowed to become worshipping members of the community. While clergy are expected to become members, their ordination sets them apart for a particular ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Employees must not use their position or their relationship with church members for personal gain. Employees are discouraged from establishing dual relationships which may compromise their ability to be fair and objective in their work, or which may exploit the vulnerability of a church member. For example, an employee of the church should not also be a client at a church member's law firm. If any employee is uncertain, they should discuss it with their direct supervisor and/or the Senior Pastor.

### Attendance and Punctuality

Vacation and holidays must be scheduled with one's supervisor in advance. Sick leave may be used in the case of emergency or sudden illness without prior scheduling. Patterns of absenteeism or tardiness may result in discipline even if the employee has not yet exhausted available paid time off. Absences due to illnesses or injuries that qualify under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will not be counted against an employee's attendance record. Medical documentation within the guidelines of the FMLA may be required in these instances.

Not reporting to work and not calling to report the absence is a no call/no show and is a serious matter. The first instance of a no call/no show will result in a written warning. The second separate offense may result in termination of employment with no additional disciplinary steps. A no call/no show lasting three days may be considered job abandonment and may be deemed an employee's voluntary resignation of employment.

### Grievance Process

A process for resolving conflicts within the work environment is detailed in the "Plymouth Church Grievance Process." (Appendix II)

### Safe Church Policies

All employees are expected to read and abide by the policies and philosophies set forth in the Safe Church Manual.

## **Information Technology**

Plymouth Church values the availability of information technology for use in carrying out the ministry of the church. Employees are encouraged to use these resources to their fullest extent in connection with the duties and responsibilities of their employment.

E-mail and Internet access may not be used for transmitting, receiving, downloading, forwarding, printing, storing or otherwise disseminating any communications of a discriminatory or harassing nature, nor of pornographic materials. No electronic media may be used for any illegal purpose.

E-mail and other social media, like other forms of written communication, reflect upon the church. Employees are expected to communicate in a professional manner and to identify themselves as the sender of any communication. Employees are responsible for the content of all materials that they communicate. Individuals should not transmit any form of communication that they would not be comfortable addressing to the recipient in person. No communication shall disclose confidential information of the church.

Computer programs, attachments and files that are downloaded, imported or received from other sites must be treated carefully.

All information resources and equipment are the property of Plymouth Church and must be used in conformance with this policy. Employees are advised that they should have no expectation or guarantee of privacy when using them. Plymouth Church reserves the right to monitor digital files and communications. Inappropriate or illegal use or communications may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

### **Anti-Harassment Policy**

Plymouth Church is committed to maintaining a work environment free of discrimination and harassment. Such discrimination or harassment includes verbal or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility toward an individual because of their age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, mental and physical ability, spiritual tradition, military status or other protected categories.

Employees are responsible for creating and maintaining an atmosphere characterized by dignity, courtesy, respect and equitable treatment for all – other employees and church members.

Bullying, intimidation, and disrespect will not be tolerated.

Bullying may be intentional or unintentional. However, it must be noted that where an allegation of bullying is made, the intention of the alleged bully is irrelevant and will not be given consideration when meting out discipline.

Sexual harassment is behavior directed at an individual on the basis of their gender which is not welcome, is offensive, affects morale and, as a result, interferes with the work effectiveness of the victim. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature will not be tolerated. This can include, but is not limited to, verbal abuse or insults, gestures or physical contact, and display or circulation of degrading pictures or materials.

In particular, conduct is considered sexual harassment when:

- submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment
- submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment

An individual who feels that they are being sexually harassed is encouraged to report the complaint to the immediate supervisor, or if not appropriate, to that person's supervisor or another appropriate person.

The Church will conduct a thorough and confidential investigation to determine whether harassment has occurred and to determine what action(s) to take.

### **Evaluation of Performance**

Each employee will be accorded an annual review of job performance in an attempt to assess strengths and weaknesses, to establish goals for the coming year, and to plan for the employee's development. A written summary of each evaluation will be placed in the employee's confidential personnel file.

The Senior Pastor and/or supervisor will meet with each direct report in order to establish goals and tasks for the year. The goals for staff need to be consistent with the mission and overall goals of the church.

Governing Council is responsible for seeing that employee evaluations are completed on a regular basis.

The evaluation process is outlined in greater detail in "Supervision of Non-Ordained Staff." (Appendix I)

### **Discipline**

In an attempt to treat each employee with fairness the church will make good-faith efforts to help an employee improve unsatisfactory performance or inappropriate behavior. It is understood that in very grievous circumstances the church reserves the right to terminate an employee immediately, without the usual warnings and remediation outlined below.

Except for grievous circumstances, employees may be terminated by the church only if the following requirements have been satisfied:

1. At least one written warning has been given which includes a description of the expected improvement(s) in the employee's work or behavior and specific supports the supervisor will provide to help achieve that improvement.
2. The employee has been given a reasonable amount of time to correct the deficiency.
3. The Senior Pastor and the Governing Council have approved the termination.

## Separation

### Resignation or Retirement

Exempt lay staff are expected to give notice at least thirty (30) days in advance of leaving. Non-exempt lay staff are expected to give notice at least fourteen (14) days in advance of leaving.

### Unsatisfactory Performance

While the Church may elect to remedy an employee's unsatisfactory performance through a variety of cooperative and/or disciplinary processes, at its sole discretion it may terminate at any time the employment of an employee whose performance it deems to be unsatisfactory. Termination must be approved by the Senior Pastor and the Governing Council.

### Reduction in Staff

Payment in lieu of Unemployment Insurance will be granted to regular staff members when separation is initiated by the Church due to no fault of the employee, for reasons such as budgetary cuts, reduction in workforce, or restructuring of job functions. Payment in lieu of Unemployment Insurance will be given in the amount of one (1) week's salary or wage for each full year of service, up to eight (8) weeks.

The separation of exempt lay staff shall take effect after the Church provides at least 30 days notice, or payment of equivalent salary in lieu of notice.

The separation of non-exempt staff shall take effect after the Church provides at least 14 days notice, or payment of equivalent wages in lieu of such notice.

The separation of ordained staff shall take effect according to the terms of the Call Letter for that clergy person.

# Employee Benefits

## Time Off

### Holidays

The Plymouth Church observes twelve (12) holidays each year, as follows:

New Year's Day	Labor Day
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Columbus Day
Presidents' Day	Veterans' Day
Patriots' Day	Thanksgiving Day
Memorial Day	Day after Thanksgiving
Independence Day	Christmas Day

Any holiday which falls on a Saturday will be observed on the preceding Friday, and any holiday which falls on a Sunday will be observed on the following Monday, or on another work day as determined by the Senior Pastor.

Regular Full-time Employees are paid for these holidays. Further, if a holiday falls within vacation time, it will be credited as an additional day of leave.

Regular Part-time Employees whose normal work day coincides with a holiday will receive holiday time without pay according to their normally scheduled hours. Regular Part-time Employees whose normal work day does not coincide with a holiday are not eligible for pay for that holiday. There are two exceptions: all part-time, non-exempt employees will receive Christmas Day and Memorial Day off *with pay*.

### Vacation Leave

The Church provides vacation on an annual basis. Such vacation must be planned in advance and approved by an employee's supervisor and the Senior Pastor to assure adequate coverage. A record of vacation time earned and taken will be maintained by the supervisor and the Senior Pastor.

In a given calendar year, employees may use their vacation at any time, with the approval of the Senior Pastor. The total amount of vacation days in a year corresponds to the number of full years served.

Calendar Years	Days per Year	Accrual Rate
0-4	10	0.83 days/month
5-6	11	0.91 days/month
7-8	13	1.08 days/month
9-10	16	1.33 days/month
11+	20	1.67 days/month

Full-time employees who work at least 2080 hours per year receive prorated vacation with pay according to calendar years. Part-time employees who work more than 1040 hours per year receive prorated vacation with pay according to the time worked if it is stipulated in their letter of employment. Part-time employees who work 1040 hours per year or less are not eligible for paid vacation unless otherwise stipulated in their letter of employment.

Employees must use vacation during the calendar year in which it is offered. Unused vacation days do not accrue beyond the year. In special circumstances, and by approval of the Senior Pastor, unused vacation may be used before March 31 of the following year.

Employees who do not work a full year – those beginning or ending the employment relationship mid-year – will be afforded a prorated number of vacation days according to the accrual rate for their years of employment. New employees are eligible to use vacation only after three months of employment.

## Other Leaves

### Sick Leave

The Church provides sick leave on an annual basis. When it is necessary for an employee to be absent for reasons of illness or injury, the employee's supervisor should be notified immediately. A record of sick leave available and taken will be maintained by the supervisor and the Senior Pastor.

Regular Full-time Employees receive up to eighty (80) hours paid sick leave per calendar year. Regular Part-time Employees receive up to forty (40) hours of paid sick leave per calendar year.<sup>2</sup> Special consideration may be recommended in cases of protracted illness.

Employees can use sick leave to:

- care for their child, spouse, parent, parent of a spouse, or themselves;
- attend a routine medical appointment for their child, spouse, parent, parent of a spouse, or themselves;
- address the effects of domestic violence; or
- travel to and from the location related to the purpose for which the time was taken.

*[www.mass.gov/ago/docs/workplace/earned-sick-time/est-presentation.ppt](http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/workplace/earned-sick-time/est-presentation.ppt)*

For absences longer than three (3) days, written documentation from a health care provider may be required.

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<sup>2</sup> The Plymouth Church currently employs more than the minimum threshold of 11 full-time employees.

No accrued sick leave shall be paid upon termination of employment whether with or without cause. No sick leave will be accrued during leave without pay.

### Personal Leave

Regular Full-time Employees and Regular Part-time Employees who, by the terms of the employment agreement, work at least 1040 hours per year will receive up to 3 days per calendar year to be used for personal business that cannot be attended to outside the normal work hours. Personal days must be scheduled as much in advance as possible with the employee's supervisor.

Employees may not carry over personal days into the following calendar year and will not be paid for unused personal days.

### Parental Leave

Employees with three months of service will be entitled to eight (8) weeks of unpaid parental leave for the purpose of giving birth or adopting a child under the age of 18, or under the age of 23 if the child is mentally or physically disabled.

Parental leave is gender neutral, available to all. After eight (8) weeks, the employee will be reinstated to their position or one substantially similar. Extensions beyond eight (8) weeks should be requested and approved prior to taking leave. The employee shall give at least two weeks notice of the anticipated date of departure and the employee's intention to return. In special circumstances, exceptions can be made with the approval of the Governing Council.

If two employees of the church have a child together, they are entitled to an aggregate of 8 weeks of leave.

Vacation and/or sick leave may be applied as paid days within, or to extend, the absence beyond eight weeks. Insurance benefits provided by the employer will be continued during the leave period.

The Church is not subject to the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act because it employs fewer than 50 people.

### Bereavement Leave

Up to 3 days of paid bereavement leave shall be granted to all employees in consultation with the Senior Pastor. Additional time may be granted at the discretion of the Senior Pastor with consideration given to appropriate use of vacation, sick leave, personal days and/or leave without pay.

### Jury Duty

If called for jury duty, the employee will alert his/her supervisor so that work assignments can be planned. Eligible employees will receive the difference in pay between their normal pay and that provided for jurors, if any, exclusive of mileage.

### Leave for Education, Professional Meetings and Conferences

The Church will grant paid time off and will pay the expense of training which is deemed necessary for the performance of an employee's job and is approved by the supervisor and Senior Pastor.

### Military Leave

If an employee requires a leave of absence for military service, both the Church and the employee will follow the applicable requirements set forth in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

### Leave Without Pay

Personal leave without pay for a period of up to 42 calendar days will be considered for all Regular Full-time and Part-time Employees on a case by case basis by the Senior Pastor in consultation with the employee's supervisor and relevant council(s). No other types of paid leave are accrued during personal leave without pay. To be eligible for such unpaid leave an employee must have been employed at least twelve months.

## **Taxes, Insurances, and Retirement**

Eligible employees are regular, full-time employees who work at least 2,080 hours per year (40 hours per week).

### Payroll and Withholding Taxes

All employees will participate in all Federal or State mandated programs, such as FICA (Social Security and Medicare) and Federal and State payroll withholding taxes. The Church pays the employer's share of the Social Security and Medicare taxes for all employees as required by law.

### Workers' Compensation

The Church provides Worker's Compensation Insurance for all employees as mandated by state law. Absences for which Worker's Compensation benefits are

provided are not charged against sick leave. If employees are injured on the job, time off will not be deducted from the sick leave benefit.

### Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment Insurance benefits are NOT available to Church employees because of the Church's exemption as a religious organization. (See Section X in *Church-Employee Relationships on Separation/Reduction in Staff*)

### Retirement Annuity

Regular Full-time Employees will be enrolled in the pension plan of the United Church of Christ (UCC), subject to the policies, rules and provisions of The Pension Boards of the UCC. The Church will contribute 3% of the base salary or wage of each eligible employee unless otherwise specified in letter of employment. The Church may change the contribution at its sole discretion.

Regular Full-time Employees are entitled to contribute additional funds through payroll deduction.

### Health, Dental, and Life and Disability Insurance

Regular Full-time Employees shall have the opportunity, during the first ninety (90) days of employment, to be enrolled for single coverage in the UCC health and dental plans as available subject to the rules, policies, and provisions of the group plan. If an eligible employee chooses not to enroll during the first ninety (90) days of eligibility, they may apply for coverage at a later time, though acceptance is not guaranteed. Employees who elect family coverage will pay the cost differential between single and family coverage.

Should an eligible employee elect different health and dental plans, (i.e. non-UCC), the Church will pay for single coverage at the lesser of the UCC or non-UCC premium rate. The employee is responsible for the difference.

The Church provides life and disability insurance coverage for its eligible employees at no cost to the employee. Coverage is provided through the UCC Life and Disability Plan and is based upon salary or wage.

Payment in lieu of waiving any of these insurance coverages will not be provided.

### Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA)

The Church offers employees the opportunity on an annual basis to set aside part of their salary/wages, through payroll deduction, in a Flexible Spending Account with the UCC Pension Boards to be used for medical expenses not covered by health insurance and/or dependent care. The funds so deducted reduce the taxable amount

of the employee's salary/wages, but if not used by the end of the year, any remaining funds are lost.

Employees who have a Flexible Spending Account through the UCC Pension Boards, but do not carry health insurance through that organization, will be expected to pay any accompanying Pension Boards' administrative fee(s).

## **Other Benefits**

### Reimbursement of Expenses

Reimbursement is authorized for reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out the job. Limits on expenses may be present in the annual budget of the Church.

A form is provided to request reimbursement for expenses; such reimbursement must be approved in all cases by the supervisor.

Employees authorized by their supervisor to use their personal cars for Church business are reimbursed at the current IRS rate. An employee using a personal car for official business is responsible for meeting insurance requirements of state laws.

Employees are expected to assume transportation costs between the church and their homes.

### Plymouth House Nursery School Tuition Discounts

Full-time and part-time employees who work at least 20 hours per week may send their child(ren) at half tuition as space is available.

# Appendix

## I. Supervision of Non-Ordained Staff

In accordance with our congregational ministry, staff and laity enter into a sacred covenant where we offer one another mutual support to carry out the mission of the church. The leadership approach for staff and between staff and laity is collegial. There is mutual understanding and respect for the gifts and graces brought by each person and willingness to understand alternative perspectives.

### Supervision and Reporting Relationships

1. The Senior Pastor is the head of staff and is accountable for all ministries and to the mission of the church as defined by the Governing Council and the congregation.
2. All supervisors are held accountable for performance in their work area or ministry. They will be given proper authority to carry out their work.
3. Program Councils will have one staff person to offer them support on a regular basis and who attends council meetings regularly. A second staff person may attend as needed.
4. The Governing Council is the supervisor of the Senior Pastor. An advisory team of Governing Council facilitates the supervision process.
5. The Senior Pastor is the direct supervisor of the Office Operations Manager, the Communications Manager, the Family Life Pastor, the Director of Music, the Children's Choir Director, and the Bell Choir Director. The Senior Pastor supports the Office Operations Manager in the supervision of the Maintenance Engineer and the Plymouth House Custodian.
6. The Office Operations Manager is the direct supervisor of the Maintenance Engineer and the Plymouth House Custodian.

### Working Together and Supervisory Support

1. A chief function of the staff is to empower lay people and work together with the laity to carry out the mission of the church.
2. All staff are expected to work in a collegial, professional and collaborative fashion as a team. This means:
  - a. Attending staff meetings when required or asked by the Senior Pastor.
  - b. Allocating adequate time in staff meetings and other settings to communicate and build relationships to develop staff cohesion.

- c. Sharing information about their work area that may affect another staff member and their work area.
  - d. Including affected staff people in decision-making.
  - e. According one another kindness and respect.
  - f. Seeking to reflect in their work the core values and mission of the church.
  - g. Allowing time and space for a diversity of perspectives to be shared.
  - h. Recognizing and respecting each staff person's role within the church organization.
3. The Senior Pastor and supervisors seek to offer generous resources, time and support to the staff so that they may succeed in their work. Supervisors will seek counsel, support and resources from the Senior Pastor if they are running into difficulties or have trouble choosing between work priorities.
  4. There will be regular supervisory meetings to ask how things are going.
  5. The Senior Pastor and supervisors owe staff private candor and public praise where appropriate.

### Job Descriptions

The Senior Pastor or supervisors will revise job descriptions or develop new job descriptions in consultation with Governing Council.

### Evaluation

1. Evaluations will include an opportunity for the employee to offer a self-assessment and make known their needs to fulfill their work responsibilities.
2. Reviews will be done annually by the employee's immediate supervisor.
3. Evaluations will include an action plan that includes goals and revisions for job descriptions and takes into account the needs of the supervisee.
4. Major revisions in job descriptions and goals will be reported to the Governing Council by the Senior Pastor and approved by Governing Council.

### Disputes

Staff are expected to work out their disputes directly and not attempt to use a lay person or council as a proxy to work out a dispute.

## II. Grievance Process

### Introduction

Plymouth Church desires to maintain a working environment that results in trust and goodwill among the pastors, staff, lay leaders and congregation.

We will make every effort to treat each individual with concern, dignity and fairness in terms of assigned job duties, working conditions, pay and benefits. In return, we ask that each employee perform his/her duties to the best of his/her ability, be flexible in helping in areas outside his/her job description when necessary, and take responsibility for making suggestions to his/her immediate supervisor as to how we can better serve our congregation.

At the same time we recognize that issues and conflicts may surface from time to time among people who work together. When that happens, we strongly urge the parties involved to make their best efforts to resolve the issue or conflict among themselves. If the aggrieved party has followed the process outlined in the section below and if there has been no resolution, then a formal grievance may be initiated as a last resort.

Filing a grievance initiates a formal hearing process to review a decision or to resolve a dispute, disagreement, or perceptions of unfair or inequitable treatment between two or more members of the paid church staff that cannot be resolved within the normal processes of management decision-making and supervision.

The grievance is reviewed by a panel of three, a “Grievance Committee” appointed by Governing Council, in a formal hearing. It informs the Governing Council of its decision subject to the Governing Council’s approval.

The benefits of a Grievance Process can be:

- A reconciliation of persons or groups that helps restore the wholeness and well-being of all parties.
- The stabilization of daily employee relations because there is a place to go for resolution
- Fairness in the workplace since most issues are not one sided
- Open discussion of issues and improved communication between the supervisor and employee
- The option to submit the problem to a neutral third party

The grievance process creates stability in day-to-day employee relations because it gives the employee a sense of assurance that there is a mechanism to resolve issues rather than letting them continue.

The grievance process plays an important role in creating a sense of democracy in the workplace by allowing employees to raise issues without fear of reprisal by the supervisor.

Furthermore, when employees voice their concerns through this process, the supervisor is able to focus on problem areas and bring about solutions. This reinforces strong relations, improved morale and increased productivity overall.

However, it should be kept in mind that any grievance process can be a difficult and sometimes adversarial process which can disrupt the work of an organization, as well as affecting the working relationships with colleagues.

Submitting a grievance should be a last resort. Once a formal grievance is filed, any discussion of the dispute will take place only within the confines of the grievance process.

### Consideration

As you prepare to address any conflict or dispute, consider these points for reflection.

1. Remind yourself that everyone, including you, makes mistakes and has complex intentions and feelings that affect personal interactions.
2. Ask yourself how you may have contributed to the conflict, unintentionally or knowingly? How could your actions/reactions have been perceived by the other person differently from what you intended?
3. Examine your feelings and how they were influenced by the actions/words/behavior of the other person. Has your assessment of the disputed situation been tempered in the intervening time?
4. Try to abandon 'blame' and focus on 'contributions', for both yourself and the other person.
5. Identify what you want the outcome to be. Then try to imagine what outcome the other person seeks or needs. Think about how these opposing views might be modified to find common ground.
6. Recognize that nothing will change unless one person takes the first step toward reconciling the differences between you. Can you be the person to make the first overture? What do you risk by being FIRST? What benefits might result?
7. Recall and try to internalize how our (Christian) values of love and forgiveness can lead to reconciliation.

### Peer to Peer Conflict

Prior to an individual submitting a grievance, the individual must make a concerted effort to resolve the differences directly with the person with whom they have the conflict.

If unsuccessful, the aggrieved person should take the problem to their supervisor for help in resolving the conflict.

If that is unsuccessful, the person and the supervisor should take the issue to the Senior Pastor. If that is not successful, the person can submit the issue to the Grievance Committee for their review.

### Conflict with Supervisor

Prior to an individual submitting a grievance, the individual must make a concerted effort to resolve the differences or dispute directly with the supervisor. The immediate supervisor must be provided an opportunity to be made aware of the issue and have an opportunity to resolve it.

If that is unsuccessful, the person and the supervisor should take the issue to the Senior Pastor. If that is not successful, the person can submit the issue to the Grievance Committee for their review.

### Conflict with Senior Pastor

If the Senior Pastor is part of the conflict, then prior to an individual submitting a grievance, the individual must make a concerted effort to resolve his/her differences directly with the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor must be provided an opportunity to be made aware of the issue and have an opportunity to resolve it.

If the conflict cannot be resolved between the two parties, then the conflict is brought to the Governing Council or a body appointed by the Governing Council (the Grievance Committee) for resolution.

### Assessment of the Grievance

When a grievance is submitted formally, the Governing Council will first ask two initial questions:

1. Have attempts been made by the complainant to address the conflict directly, and/or with the supervisor?
2. Is the conflict unconnected to issues of misconduct (i.e. a violation of our Safe Church Policies or sexual harassment (see VII. Anti-Harassment Policy))?

If yes, the Governing Council will appoint a three-person Grievance Committee to interview parties, review any relevant materials, and make a determination.

### The Grievance Committee

#### *Membership*

The Grievance Committee is an ad hoc committee consisting of three persons and two alternates appointed by the Governing Council.

Committee appointees should not be participants of the grievance, nor should they be allies or opponents to any party there in. Any member of the Grievance Committee or the Governing Council who is directly involved in the grievance should recuse themselves from the process. If not a part of the grievance, either or both pastors may be consulted for advice and assistance.

Once the grievance process is complete, the Grievance Committee dissolves.

#### *Guiding Principles and Guidelines*

The Grievance Process is a confidential process between the parties, the Grievance Committee and the Governing Council. The committee shall be objective in their research, deliberation and decision-making. They shall consider all aspects of the problem and resolution.

They will facilitate at least one face-to-face meeting between the affected parties. They will not withhold any information from either of the parties concerning the grievance. All supporting documentation should be known by both parties.

### The Grievance Decision

The Grievance Committee will brief the Governing Council on the issue and submit its resolution or any recommendations for approval.

Parties involved in the conflict/grievance process cannot:

1. Continue to question the decision or action after it has been decided
2. Refuse to honor the decision

### Grievance Submittal

*Complete the following:*

Submitted By: Date Submitted: Grievance must be filed within 30 days after the last management recourse Please answer the following questions:
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1. Explain what happened, from your perspective, to give rise to your complaint.
2. When and where did it occur?
3. How did you contribute to the problem?
4. What have you done to address the problem yourself?
5. What redress are you requesting? What would you like to see happen? What need would you like to see met?