

Employment Relationship as Covenant Scenarios

Your congregation prides itself on being a Fair Compensation employer. Even though the funds are particularly tight this year, you continue to pay your staff fairly, according to UUA Guidelines, and to provide the complete array of benefits for the minister, the religious educator, the music director, and the church administrator, all of whom are salaried and were hired in the past 5 years.

As an hourly employee (20 hours/week), the custodian has never received any benefits. Pat has been working for the church for so long that no one can remember when ghe started. It seems that Pat has “always been there.”

Is this fair? Does it make a difference if the custodian is a member of the congregation?

What conversations need to happen?

What concrete actions should take place?

Evaluate options against the values your group chose and through the lens of covenant.

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Your Director of Religious Education was hired from within the congregation. Everyone knows that Chris puts in far more time than ghe is paid for. Chris maintains that it is a labor of love...and of course, ghe wants to see the strongest program possible for the benefit of gher own child, who attends the program. Chris has good relationships with the other staff, including the minister (who is gher supervisor) and the congregation’s Administrator. The Administrator supports the Religious Education program directly in some key ways, including assistance with database entry, mailings, and website updates.

After a stewardship drive that fell short of its goal, the difficult decision is made to reduce the Administrator’s hours from 35 per week to 25. At the congregational meeting to approve the budget, Chris speaks out emphatically against the budget, asserting that both ghe and the Administrator are increasingly being exploited by the congregation.

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Your congregation and its minister are very excited about having hired a talented Music Director who brings skills and knowledge of many musical genres and world cultures. Services are freshly energized as the Music Director incorporates some new styles of music into worship. The choir is pleased with the new director's leadership.

The minister gets inspired by the possibilities and mentions an idea to the Music Director for a particular piece that would work well with an upcoming worship theme. The Music Director is uncomfortable with the suggestion because it feels like cultural misappropriation. The Music Director explains that this particular piece cannot be performed authentically and that the true intent of the piece would be lost or misunderstood if it were used in this service. The minister lets it go, but tension later mounts as the musician increasingly snubs the minister's recommendations for hymns and other musical elements.

A couple of choir members get drawn into the escalating drama when they overhear the minister express frustration to the musician about having changed the minister's requested opening hymn. They mention it to another choir member....who is also President of the Congregation.

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Your congregation takes pride in its social justice programming. You are thrilled to call a minister of color who plans to have a strong presence in the community and to get some new justice ministries off the ground. The minister gets involved with local efforts to address the disparity in arrests and incarceration rates between white residents and people of color in your city, which has its share of racial tensions. Soon the minister is on a first-name basis with the mayor, the Chief of Police, and the newspaper editor. The minister gets invited to speak at events and to participate on panels.

The congregation loves having such a high-profile minister, and the social justice efforts of the congregation have gotten a boost. Of course, this means that some "church business" takes a bit longer to accomplish than it has in the past – emails aren't returned as promptly, pastoral calls aren't as frequent. That's okay...well, at least at first. But by spring, the minister's sermons don't seem as polished as they had been in the beginning, and many are based on the anti-racism work. The Board had anticipated in the minister a leader who could help them refresh their stewardship efforts and re-think some of their policies and structures. Little of this work has happened. Now a lead giver in the congregation has complained to the Board that the minister did not prepare sufficiently for his daughter's wedding ceremony and that the event came off poorly as a result.

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