

Diocese of Sacramento: Hiring Policy and Pre-Application Materials

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is this a new policy?

No. The documents that are now being distributed merely represent a change in the way the Church will implement the diocesan hiring policy that has existed for some time now. During the priest convocations held earlier this year, a number of pastors and priests requested assistance from Bishop Weigand in developing materials to assist them in making appropriate hiring decisions consistent with diocesan policy. In response to this request, these documents were developed by a team of vicars, administrative staff, and diocesan legal counsel.

2. Why can't we just rely upon the existing personnel policy – why fix what isn't broken?

The existing policy is fine as far as it goes, but it is largely focused on those who have already been hired. The existing policy does not reach out to job applicants to (1) ensure they are aware of the fact that while working for the Church is a wonderful and rewarding experience, it is unlike other places of employment, and (2) make certain that they proceed with the application process after some thoughtful and prayerful consideration of the unique aspects of lay employment with the Roman Catholic Church.

3. Will those who conduct hiring interviews need to act as inquisitors into the private lives of applicants?

No. The Pre-Application reflection document is intended to provide applicants with an overview of some of the unique aspects of being a Church employee. It is very important from a moral and legal perspective that prospective applicants fully understand the religious nature of their prospective employer — whether at the Pastoral Center, a parish, a school, or other diocesan entity — and that the expectations with regard to the standards of conduct applicable to Church employees be fully disclosed during the initial stages of the application process. Thus, each applicant will be asked to complete the acknowledgments and information on the form on their own and to submit them in a truthful manner, just as they would in response to a questionnaire from any employer regarding their background and qualifications for employment. Supervisors conducting the application process are not expected to independently verify or supplement information on individual applicants.

4. Are the documents intended to touch upon matters reserved for confession?

No. The Pre-Application documents pertain to “external forum” matters and are intended to provide each applicant with an overview of the ways in which being a lay employee of the Church is different from traditional jobs they may have had previously, and to obtain their acknowledgment that they understand and are generally in compliance with Church teachings. In presenting applicants with these inquiries, the Church is not soliciting information related to “internal forum” matters reserved to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, nor does it intend that the

applicant share such matters in the context of applying for employment. Such matters inviolably remain subject to the seal between the penitent and his or her confessor. Nonetheless, all employees and applicants must be aware that, if they engage in some public act that is contrary to diocesan standards of conduct, they will be subject to disciplinary measures based upon the public nature of those particular acts. This has always been the policy, and the new documents will make certain that applicants understand these expectations prior to accepting an offer of employment.

5. Is the Church allowed to ask these questions?

Yes. Because the Church is a religious organization, its hiring practices receive significant protection from the First Amendment, and it is permitted under law to give preference to members of the Catholic faith in making hiring decisions. These documents are intended to make applicants fully aware of what the Church stands for and generally expects from those who will further its ministry as lay employees. The Church will utilize these pre-application documents to help minimize confusion about what is expected of lay employees, and to assist with filling positions for which it makes sense to hire a Catholic applicant whose faith will be an important part of his or her job duties.

6. Are these documents intended to build a wall around the Church as an employer?

Not at all. They simply represent a recognition that in most respects it makes sense to hire individuals who share and are familiar with the Catholic Faith. These documents are not intended to denigrate people who do not share our Faith or to label non-Catholic persons as “less worthy.” Indeed, it is only fair to make full disclosure as to the nature of the Church and important principles pertaining to our Catholic Faith to those who may not fully understand who we are or what we believe. Moreover, as a Church, we certainly have a right, both as a matter of constitutional liberties as well as plain common sense, to express a preference in favor of our own Catholic people when hiring Church employees. This is nothing new, nor is it unique to our Church. Most churches and religious organizations fill important lay employment positions with members of their own respective denominations whenever it is possible to do so.

7. Is the implementation of these documents part of a “witch hunt” to target certain individuals or groups?

Certainly not. The Pre-Application documents are merely intended to educate applicants by highlighting and reminding them of the beliefs of the Church and the fact that they will be expected to publicly conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with those teachings. These documents are intended to educate — not as a tool for persecution. We understand that there are many people in our culture that do not share our religious and moral perspectives on many important religious and social issues. Many people may not be comfortable being associated with, or working for, an employer that espouses the religious and moral views of the Catholic Church. While we fully respect their right to disagree with us, we also want to make certain that prospective applicants fully understand who we are, what we believe, and what we stand for — at the very beginning of the hiring process. This is only fair.

8. What if an applicant reports on the form that he or she is in a second marriage and did not receive an annulment for the first marriage? Must that applicant be automatically excluded from consideration?

Not necessarily. It is going to depend on the particular pastoral circumstances of each individual case. As a Church, we are committed to the pastoral care of all people of good will. In addition to the education component that is a part of the Pre-Application documents, we should also recognize that this process presents an excellent pastoral opportunity to care for the spiritual well-being of our people and to evangelize those who may want to regularize their spiritual lives. For an applicant who may be, for example, a “fallen away” Catholic, or who is currently in a personal relationship that is not entirely consistent with the teachings of the Church, this is a wonderful chance to help him or her to regularize an existing life situation, to become closer to the Church and to God, and to offer pastoral care and assistance to them.

Realizing that such opportunities should not be overlooked, individual hiring situations involving applicants with such personal circumstances should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Efforts should be made to explore extending pastoral care and assistance to such applicants, with a goal of having them return to the fullness of communion with the Church. We must be prepared to walk this journey with the applicant (and any other employee) should they request our assistance. Provided the individual signals a sincere willingness to address any such areas by beginning that journey toward regularization, and depending on the specific steps necessary to address his or her circumstances, that applicant need not be automatically excluded from consideration for a lay employee position.

9. Must a Catholic be hired even if another applicant is clearly more qualified?

In general, Catholic applicants should be given preference when we are hiring for open lay employment positions. However, each hiring situation will be different, and there may indeed be situations and positions where overriding concerns or needs will call for the hiring of a non-Catholic person. Obviously, in some positions (e.g., those involving faith formation, catechesis, liturgical matters, etc.) being a faithful Catholic is an indispensable and essential qualification; non-Catholic applicants are simply unsuitable. In other limited circumstances, non-Catholic applicants may possess skills and experience essential to the position and there may be an absence of similarly-qualified Catholic applicants. Under such circumstances, the hiring supervisor should consult with the Office of Lay Personnel for additional guidance and assistance.

10. May a non-Christian (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) ever be hired?

Yes. The hiring policy expresses the preference that Catholics be hired to fill open lay employee positions. In most cases, it is important to staff our religious institutions with individuals who are familiar with the teachings of the Church and the manner in which those principles infuse everything we do as a Church. As to positions that have a content that is closely tied to our ministry and liturgy (such as religious education director, liturgical music director, or Catholic theology teacher), it is simply not feasible for an individual of another faith (even another member of a Christian denomination) to perform the job duties associated with

such a position. As to certain other, non-ministerial positions, however, it may be possible for an individual of another faith to be hired — provided he or she understands what the teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church are, and agrees not to publicly act in a manner that is openly inconsistent with those teachings and beliefs. Such situations should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Office of Lay Personnel.

11. By utilizing these documents as part of the existing policy, does the Church intend that only “perfect” people be hired?

No. The Church has long recognized that only God is perfect, but in an era when society has in so many ways strayed from the principles that our Faith calls upon us to follow, it is imperative that the Church signal that we must still try to follow Christ’s teachings in our daily lives. The Church has no intention to sit in judgment of the spiritual state of job applicants. However, we have both a right and obligation to employ persons who share our principles and values as we engage in the work of the Church in the world. These documents are accordingly intended to make lay employee applicants aware of the fact that certain religious principles and moral standards exist according to the teachings of our Church. As lay employees, they are expected to comply with those principles and standards as they perform their job duties. They are also expected, as Church employees, to witness these principles in their public lives.

12. Does the Church intend that every applicant/employee agree with every Catholic teaching on every issue?

As it relates to the authoritative, magisterial teachings of the Church — yes, all applicants and employees are expected to refrain from taking any public position, or from engaging in a public act, that is contrary to those principles. As to prudential matters, however, we recognize that each person must consider the Church’s guidance as to such matters but that he or she is free to form an individual opinion as a matter of conscience. For example, it would be completely unacceptable for a Church employee to publish a letter to the editor of the local newspaper denying the divinity of Christ, a matter of authoritative teaching. On the other hand, that same employee would be free to write a letter to the editor regarding whether the war in Iraq is just or not, because such considerations are a matter of prudential teaching.

The Church understands that differences of opinion concerning particular prudential Church teachings exist among members of the Catholic faithful and that respectful dialogue regarding such teachings is both healthy and constructive for our Faith community. All employees and applicants are once again reminded that notwithstanding any such subjective opinions, the reasonable expectation of the Church is that employees will not engage in public acts that are contrary to diocesan standards of conduct (and hence the authoritative teachings of the Roman Catholic Church). Any such actions create the risk of scandal within the Church, and will subject the employee to disciplinary measures.

13. Must existing employees complete the Pre-Application documents?

No. Existing employees will be “grandfathered” into the Pre-Application questionnaire process, and no additional action is required as it relates to them. Existing employees are, of

course, subject to the standards that are set forth in the Personnel Handbook, and if they engage in public and open conduct that is directly contrary to basic Church teachings — and thus contrary to the standards in the Handbook — they will be subject to disciplinary review. Where the public act or other circumstances that can be addressed through pastoral assistance to facilitate conformance with Church teachings (such as marriage annulment, spiritual direction, etc.), the Church will assist the employee to address and, if at all possible, resolve the issue. Similar to the case with applicants in such circumstances, an employee's willingness to undertake this journey toward full compliance and good standing with the Church will be taken into full consideration in assessing the employee's fitness for employment under the diocesan standards.

Any employee who needs to regularize his or her status has the right to the pastoral assistance of the Church, but also has the primary responsibility to seek such assistance. Such persons are urged to contact their individual pastor to request the assistance of the Church. In the event an employee is uncomfortable discussing such matters with his or her pastor, the employee is urged to contact the Vicar for Canonical Affairs, who will promptly respond to and facilitate the request for pastoral assistance. The Vicar for Canonical Affairs can be reached at (916) 733-0232.

14. Once hired, must every employee be constantly “watched” to ensure compliance with Church doctrine?

No. Once an individual becomes an employee, he or she is then subject to the general standards of conduct that are applicable to all lay employees of the Church. Supervisors are no more required to “spy” on employees to determine what goes on in their private lives than they have been prior to the release of these documents. What an employee does in the privacy of his or her own time is generally his or her business, the exception being when the employee engages in open and public conduct that is contrary to Church teachings, as set forth in the employee standards of conduct. Should an employee engage in such conduct, that employee's supervisor is expected to appropriately address the issue, with the exact disciplinary measures being dependent upon the nature and gravity of the conduct.
