

Property Support Guidelines #7

TITLE: WORK AND WORKPLACE ISSUES AND THE PC (USA)

The congregation is the steward of the buildings it needs for its ministries. This stewardship is a necessary part of its overall ministry. The Book of Order G-10.0102o (see below) defines this responsibility of the session. To provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs, and officers, including member of the session, staff, board of trustees, and deacons.

In addition, the Book of Order G-1.0200, states: *The Great Ends of the Church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of human kind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.*

THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this publication to make available to Property committees the Principles of Vocation and Work adopted by our denomination as guidelines for its own workplace and employment practice and, to the extent that a committee may discern its applicability, for the worker policy and employment practice of contractors they may consider for hiring.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) approved at its 1995 General Assembly the following policy: It is the expectation that individuals and governing bodies will use the “Principles of Vocation and Work” for guidance.

PRINCIPLES OF VOCATION AND WORK (1995 Statement – PC (USA), pp. 426-427)

1. Vocation is a lifelong response to God in all aspects of one's life. Work, paid and unpaid, is an integral part of the believer's response to God's call. One's vocation may include multiple careers, volunteer opportunities, and should involve continual spiritual growth in every step of the life-journey to which God calls us.
2. The social policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should seek to change work from a burden to a glad and collaborative response to Jesus' transformative life and work of redemption. Such good work contributes to the creation as well as to the economy, by providing not only the means for subsistence, but also a way to honor human dignity and participate in community life.
3. The church must seek to become a model employer by providing workers with adequate compensation, meaningful opportunities for participation in decision making, leisure time in which to participate in family and community life, and by developing a “...reasonable relationship between the highest and the lowest salaries paid to all church employees.”
4. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should provide educational materials so that its members can become informed voters and advocates for economic policies that will serve to alleviate poverty, empower marginalized groups, and generate environmentally sustainable economic growth around the world.
5. All sectors of society—including labor, management, and government—must be engaged in the task of economic renewal of our life together. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should play a significant role as a catalyst for conversation among these sectors.

6. The social safety net that supports individuals, families, and communities suffering from economic dislocation must link both private voluntary agencies and the public sector. The church alone cannot provide an adequate safety net.
7. The foundation upon which all just employment policies are built is access to employment at a level of compensation that allows peoples to live in dignity and security. In a market economy, the private sector provides the majority of jobs, supported by local, state, and federal government policies designed to ensure that there is sufficient employment for all willing and able to be in paid employment. The cost of such policies must always be weighed against the cost to society of allowing high levels of unemployment or underemployment.
8. Inequalities in compensation and working conditions demand the strictest scrutiny. As our workforce becomes increasingly diverse, these concerns become even more urgent. Employment for persons who have suffered the injustices of prejudice and bias is the object of laws requiring affirmative action. A political, economic, and social system that translates unalterable human differences—race, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical ability—into occasion for oppression, exploitation, and hopelessness, is incompatible with Reformed theology. Restorative justice is the paradigm for affirmative action. It was God’s way of restoring the Hebrews. We have been restoring the inherent freedom of all of God’s children.
9. All conditions of paid employment, including compensation and working conditions should sustain and nurture the dignity of individuals, the well-being of households and families, the social cohesiveness of communities, and the integrity of the global environment.
10. Justice demands that social institutions guarantee all persons the opportunity to participate actively in economic decision making that affects them. All worker—including undocumented, migrant, and farm workers—have the right to choose to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining.
11. Domestic economic policies should be judged in the light of their effect on the most vulnerable groups of people in the society, including racial ethnic and national minorities, women, older and younger people, and persons with disabilities.
12. International economic policies should be judged in the light of their ability to raise the standard of living of the world’s most vulnerable groups, the human rights of workers, as well as of their effects on the global environment.

How these Principles may apply in practice to the Property committees is not a simple matter but suggest that the Presbytery and/or its churches may wish to give consideration to the following topics in interviewing a contractor and/or subcontractors prior to hiring:

- 1) that the contractor employ workers sufficiently trained in the trades for which they are employed
- 2) that the contractor provide just compensation, worker's compensation insurance, access to health care and safe working conditions at a fair level representative of the industry in general in a particular geographic area. NOTE: See Guide #6: Contractor Insurance for necessary commercial liability and worker's compensation certification.
- 3) that the contractor not discriminate against workers based on race, religion, national origin, gender or any other characteristic for which the PCUSA itself seeks to avoid discriminatory practice in its own hiring.
- 4) to the extent that union worker membership and contractor hiring practices can facilitate meeting these criteria, that union contractors be employed where practicable, especially in larger, multi0trade projects.
- 5) Recognizing that the financial burdens of meeting these criteria can penalize smaller contractors working on smaller, less complex remedial and remodeling projects, that non-union contractors, if being considered, be asked to explain their hiring and compensation practice to the extent necessary for the church or presbytery to satisfy itself as to the equity with which workers working for the contractor, and thus indirectly for the PCUSA, are being treated.