



Human Resources Considerations: Managing Our Churches During COVID-19

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

What are the HR or operational challenges you are facing?

- Basic logistics of getting mail and paying bills with reduced or interrupted mail service; this is especially challenging for organizations that rely on mail-in donations
- Uncertainty of future cash flow; we know it will go down but we don't know how much or exactly when
- Balancing maintaining essential functions with the health and safety of staff

What are some options for when the current regulations prevent someone on payroll from doing the job for which they were hired?

- Redesign staff responsibilities to more pressing projects to help maintain full-time status or regular hours. Answer the question: "Can we redeploy our people for the mission of the church, even if it's not exactly what they were hired for?" ie:
 - parishioner outreach
 - maintaining communication technology
 - facilitating livestreamed events
 - handling parish phone calls and communications
- Offer cross-training for staff to fill in as needed
- Remember: Shifting to pastoral focus can help maintain engagement and support
- Make an effort to continue normal responsibilities through technology; be aware of the various tools and services available
- Research options into grants and loans or government relief programs
- Be aware of relief options available to employees who cannot continue working, such as mortgage or utility payment deferment
- If at all possible, don't remove health benefits to save money – people need their health insurance now more than ever and may be more willing to sacrifice salary to keep their benefits

- Lay-offs should be a last resort

Insight from Carol Fowler: this is an unprecedented event and we need to remember things are uncertain for everyone

- Maintaining clear communication with employees and parishioners is the best route.
 - It's better for people to know what may lay ahead, even potential bad news needs to be shared
 - Leaders should model compassion and transparency
- Be open to learning from employees and discussing options with them
 - Ask them what they can handle; some employees may be able to weather reduced hours better than others
 - They may value benefits over wages and be ok with an arrangement that lets them keep them (ie: furlough while maintaining benefits?)
- Long-term, this is an opportunity to re-visit policies and priorities
 - Examine severance policies – some companies use this as a safety net when unemployment insurance is not possible
 - Look into the types of unemployment insurance you can offer in your state – does it all have to be tax-based?
 - Shifting giving to electronic giving
 - Churches need to be better connected and parishioners better informed

Protections for essential staff who still need to go into work

- Keep up with local and state restrictions and make sure these employees have what they need to get to work, such as a written statement or form approving travel
- Take steps to minimize contact, such as dropping of food pantry items or pre-packaging donated goods
- Stagger work schedules to reduce interaction between staff
 - If people are going into the office, make sure that surfaces are sanitized and people practice safety measures

What are ideas for keeping up employee and pastoral morale?

- Check in and reassure people of the value of their work
- Maintaining structure and routine as much as possible

- Organize groups throughout the congregation to delegate outreach and connection; delegate a group leader responsible for keeping up with their members
- Organize virtual retreats, maintain social relationships, and encourage small groups to continue “meeting” even if online or by phone
- If you don’t already, explore offering employee assistance programs through outside organizations that can attend to mental health issues
- Don’t just talk about the virus, provide times for people to just be together virtually and enjoy fellowship
- Don’t leave out anyone who may not be used to communicating virtually; teach an old dog new tricks, or have a team pick up the phone to connect with elders
- Explore Chromebooks or another relatively inexpensive communication device for parishioners without one
- Use the time we have for greater connection and more prayer
- Check-ins help everyone, not just those who might be isolated or at-risk. Consider virtual coffee breaks, group lunches, or happy hours with your team.

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