



Important Considerations for Ministry Board Members



Individuals who serve on the board of a church are dedicated leaders who demonstrate their commitment to God as a servant to His church. Most don't take on the role of a trustee when they first join the congregation, but after years of heading up numerous committees, organizing fundraisers or helping oversee various projects and ministries, they stand out as trustworthy congregants who can be counted on to make important decisions on behalf of the church.

Even if a new board member served on many committees over the years or perhaps runs a successful local business, it does not always translate to understanding the role. It's typical for a newcomer to begin their tenure with preconceived notions regarding their duties as a trustee; when coupled with limited direction from the church, it can be difficult to navigate. Church boards of every size may feel overwhelmed from time to time; staff, volunteers, and resources are frequently stretched, and there are many projects to tackle. Of the many duties board members assume, developing an onboarding process for new board

members should be put on the top of their priority list.

The best way to maximize the potential of board members is to provide a board orientation for new members. Although a person may have served faithfully in other capacities within the church, the role of a board member contains another layer of responsibility. Once expectations and duties have been clearly defined, the chance of misunderstandings is significantly reduced, and new members are more prepared to fulfill their obligations.

As your church develops an onboarding process for new board members, Insurance Board offers the following considerations:

- Serving on the board is a position of authority within the congregation that carries a great deal of responsibility. Trustees have a fiduciary obligation to act in the best interest of the church. Should board members demonstrate the contrary, they could be opening themselves up for a lawsuit against them personally.

- As with any corporation, the board of directors for a church have three primary legal duties which include:

1. **Duty of Care:** Take care of the church by ensuring prudent use of all assets. This includes maintaining the facility, ensuring the safety of the congregation, and demonstrating good will.

2. **Duty of Loyalty:** Ensure that activities and transactions advance the mission of the church.

Board members should always make decisions that are in the best interest of the church, not for their own personal gain or for that of any other person or entity outside of the church. Any conflict of interest that might exist should be disclosed immediately.



3. **Duty of Obedience:** Ensure the church obeys any laws and regulations, including the church’s own bylaws, which are written to serve the overall mission and purpose of the church.

- Churches are urged to maintain their status as nonprofit corporations under respective State laws. This means properly filing of Articles of Incorporation with the equivalent Corporation Division of the Secretary of State’s office and making annual reports. Otherwise, the church is an “unincorporated association.” In an unincorporated association, all members can be found to be personally liable for the actions of the association.
- Churches should be governed by bylaws (or a constitution). Bylaws should be reviewed every five (5) years to assure they are being followed. Sometimes following bylaws strictly can prove impractical, perhaps for logistical reasons. The solution is to either change the bylaws by the designated voting process to

reflect actual practice, or to find the means to fulfill bylaw requirements. Make sure every new board member has reviewed a copy of the bylaws.

- If a church does not strictly follow its bylaws, it can result in litigation over contested matters, some of which are not covered by insurance. It is never proper to circumvent or ignore by-

laws because it is inconvenient or “messy.” If your church has both a constitution and by-laws, it is important to understand which takes precedence over the other and to assure that, when changes are made to one, that the changes are reconciled in both documents.

- Board members have an obligation to identify potential risks that exist at their church, and dutifully work to help mitigate those risks; this serves to protect the church, staff, volunteers, and the congregation. If board members are aware of potential risks at the church that could cause harm to others and they choose not to address the problem, there is an increased risk for the board to be brought into a lawsuit.
- Make sure to verify state requirements of non-profit boards that may exist in your state. For more information, visit the National Council of Nonprofits at : <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources>
- Insurance Board encourages you to review these considerations and allow them to serve as a guide in developing an onboarding process that will help good board members become great!