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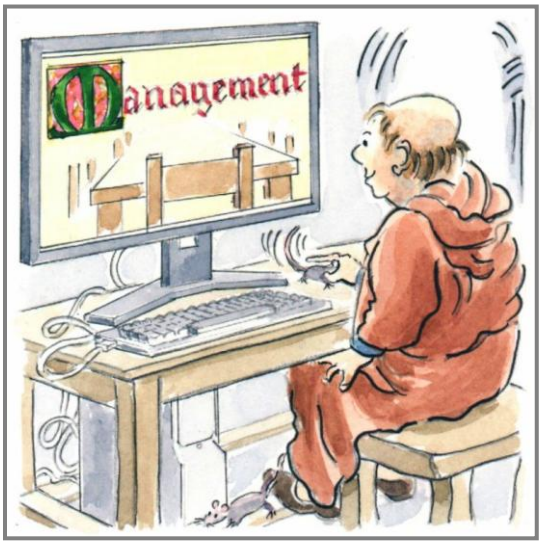

Job descriptions

Advice and examples for staff and volunteers

A6 Articles series: Management

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Chloe was recently appointed as Christ Church's first-ever Youth Worker.

In her first few weeks she made excellent contacts on the local estate. Several people in the community then asked her to start an open youth club for local teenagers. There was nothing provided for them.

So Chloe made plans, confirmed them with the Minister, and presented a report to the Church Council just before the launch.

To her amazement they expressed surprise and concern.

Surely, said several, she had been employed to support the church's own children, and the under 11's had been their intention rather than teenagers. There was a real need to revive the flagging groups from the crèche upwards and this should be her priority, at least for the first year or two. They did not want church income going towards something the local authority should be funding. And she should have come to them first, not to the Minister alone. They were her employers.

"What does your job description say?" asked one member. "I'm still waiting for one," was Chloe's reply.

Job descriptions sound such straightforward documents. Done well they provide a supportive and helpful framework for both employees and volunteers.

But more often than not they are drafted unhelpfully, used sporadically and then buried somewhere deep inside a filing drawer.

This article has three parts.

1 Questions and answers about job descriptions
2 Other helpful paperwork
3 Worked examples

First, let's try some straightforward questions and answers to help your church provide what should be a supportive and effective tool for all workers, whether paid or not.

1: Questions and answers

Are job descriptions really necessary in a church?

If we consider paid staff, a good job description shows that the employer cares about the staff's work and provides each employee with a clear definition of what is expected of him or her. Churches are no different from any other employers in these respects.

A clear job description can save all kinds of difficulties: misunderstandings (as with Chloe's case above), overlaps between two posts, wasted time and effort through lack of guidelines about the work, lack of motivation. Without a job description you cannot easily review a person's work, develop their role, assess training needs, or manage them well.

In my experience working with many churches and Christian missions, lack of proper job descriptions, or (more frequently) failure to keep them as current documents, leads to confusion and to relationship problems.

But do you mean for volunteers too?

Why not? If each person undertaking any church task had a simple role description, they would all know where they stood and what was expected. I suggest you avoid the term 'job description' though. You can simply use the role title to head the paper. The key is to keep them very simple and design them imaginatively.

The movement today is to make volunteer role descriptions the norm rather than the exception. The Church needs to keep in line with this, especially within a safeguarding context.

Are we allowed to copy a pro-forma from our businesses or the web?

The issue is not so much permission as how appropriate a business pro-forma might be for the setting of your church. Terminology from some workplaces can be unnecessarily cumbersome with their 'primary objectives' and 'core values'. I recommend you use only language that everyone outside the business world would recognise in everyday use.

On the other hand, avoid Christian jargon too (be careful with the over-used word 'ministry'), and don't create the impression that you have to somehow spiritualise the document's language to make it acceptable in a church.

For volunteers in particular, use your imagination. A job description does not have to look like an official tax form! Have some fun with the design, use some artwork, or simply prepare the sheet in a form that most people would find attractive. I am not talking about bureaucracy, but a tool for effective Christian ministry.

Is it better to head the paper with the title of the post or the name of the post-holder?

It depends what you are using it for. If you are preparing a job description with application papers for a paid post, then clearly it is a document that can only be headed with the post's title. But once the post is filled I favour the idea of heading it something like 'Christ Church. Henry Hoover: Post: Church Cleaner'.

This has two advantages. First, it makes it more personal and human; it gives ownership to the post-holder. Secondly, it makes the point that you may have adjusted the description a little to fit the gifts and experience of the person you appointed.

Should it be a permanent document?

This seems to be the assumption in many churches, but it needs to be reviewed on a regular basis, at least once a year and, for a new post, probably after the first few months. State the next review date clearly at the top of the document. Expect to adjust it slightly each time.

What does a good job description contain?

Many churches muddle a job description with a list of tasks to carry out. It may include such a list, but it needs three sections, all of about equal importance. After a heading listing person (see above), job title, employer, hours perhaps, place of work (if relevant) and date, (or something rather simpler for a volunteer) it is a short paper that explains the answer to three questions.

1 **WHY** am I doing this job?

2 **WHO** do I relate to in doing this job?

3 **WHAT** am I responsible for? (Or, for a simple job, What are my tasks?)

Keep to this three-fold structure, and you will have a good job description. Far too many papers rush straight to No. 3.

What does the WHY section look like?

The **WHY** question provides the purpose for the job. It is a particularly important statement, so spend time getting it right. This may be the first time the purpose has been defined, so may require some hard thinking. For example, what might you put for a Vicar/Minister or a Church Warden (or equivalent)? There will be real value in having to think this through.

Try to keep it to no more than two or three sentences or a short list of bullet points. It is, however, well worth considering one or more negative points: 'The group leader's purpose is to help the whole group to function effectively together, not to be the one solo leader'. Then the **WHAT** section will show how the person is going to achieve the **WHY**.

So a Church Administrator's purpose might be something like: 'To manage the work of the church office so that the church's administration functions effectively and the pastoral staff are freed up to focus on their own roles.'

This clarifies why the job exists: effective organisation in the church and pastoral staff able to fulfil their proper roles. These two points should then set the context for the whole job. Does each task help achieve either of these? If not, it needs to be questioned. Note what the effect of including or omitting the second half of this statement might be.

What might the purpose of a church's Treasurer be? Apart from the more obvious answers, you might consider something about helping the whole church membership to understand what is happening financially, or something about supporting Christian teaching on stewardship, or encouraging the church's leadership into new faith ventures. Ideally any Treasurer should have a key spiritual role to play in the whole outworking of the vision of the church.

Note the 'so that' phrase in the Administrator purpose above. The WHY section should not just be one of the items in the WHAT section to come but:

- a point that is more **big-picture** than daily detail – the idea behind the responsibilities;
- something about the outcomes of the post using a phrase such as **'so that'** which then provides motivation.

Far too many church job descriptions that I see miss out on this bigger picture idea. If the Administrator's purpose is to run the church office, say what the 'so that's' will be if this is done well. If the Youth Worker is employed to work with kids on the local estate, what are you praying will happen as a result?

What is there to say under the WHO section?

The **WHO** question needs to look at people links in three different directions. For an employee it should say:

1 Who the person is responsible to (perhaps a line manager and ultimately an employer – so the Office Secretary is responsible to the Church Administrator and ultimately to the Church Council as the employer).

2 Who in turn the person is responsible for (perhaps the Office Secretary is responsible for the church cleaning staff).

3 Who the person needs to liaise with in the course of their work (so the Office Secretary may need to stay in close touch with the church's Treasurer), and details of any team that the person is part of.

For a volunteer the picture will be similar. The idea of someone to be responsible to is important. In churches we are often nervous about any idea of supervision for volunteers. The idea is that if someone is doing a task they cannot be expected to take orders from others. No doubt you can think of church members who make it very clear that their job is their own responsibility and no one is to interfere! But is this right within a context of service together for Christ?

The concept of team (see 3 above) is especially important for volunteers. Most will be part of a team and should be expected to play as a team member. I give an example at the end of this article of a role description written by a team for all the members.

What is there to say under the WHAT section?

The **WHAT** question then lists the tasks or responsibilities. Spell these out in numbered or bullet pointed form.

The mistake here is often to provide what is, in effect, a random shopping list. This does not help anyone. Instead aim to:

- Omit trivia – if necessary have a separate manual showing what is involved – the point here is to give an overview and not to go into great detail so the shape of the post remains clear.
- Group items under clear headings so you can see how it all fits together.
- Try then to keep to no more than ten points, even if they have sub-points. Everyone can then see what this post is.

What is the difference between tasks (or duties) and responsibilities?

Some posts may need clear guidance as to exactly what needs to be done, especially if the post-holder is inexperienced. A list of tasks may spell out what needs to be carried out each week.

But other posts assume greater responsibility. Here what is needed is up to ten areas that the person is responsible for.

So a part-time Office Assistant might have the task 'to check stationery supplies each Monday and order replacement stock from ABC Company as necessary'. An Office Manager might have a responsibility 'for all purchases of consumables'.

Some people cannot cope with such a responsibility and would feel out of their depth if given it. Others will quickly be demotivated if given a list of simple tasks. So it is important to get this right for each post.

How long should a job description be?

There is much to say for keeping most to one side of A4 at normal font sizes. Better to do this and refer within it to other documents than to produce a heavyweight tome.

Volunteer role descriptions should, if anything, be shorter although one side of A4 is still fine. They should be kept very simple. What you do not want to do is to put people off or seem to be over-controlling your volunteer work-force.

The other advantage of simplicity is that you can keep them up-to-date more easily. Avoid the danger of a sudden push on paperwork for everyone in the church which then quickly gathers dust as it goes out of date. Aim for something that is sustainable.

Should clergy have role descriptions?

Yes – provided it is appropriate to the role (and not a copy of one for a brigadier or a salesman!). Church of England clergy under Common Tenure now have 'role descriptions' but it may be better to write something personally which is 'owned' by the Minister concerned.

For one idea see Training Notes TN78 on this website, *The role of a church leader.* For a large church, check out TN6, *The Minister's role in larger churches.*

Should you fit person to job or job to person?

When you advertise a post you draw up details of the post you are looking for. But it is unlikely the chosen person will match this exactly, so there is no harm in adjusting the document for the person appointed. But do not then necessarily use this for their successor. The same might apply for some volunteer posts, although most will be straightforward enough not to require adjustment.

Are they private documents?

I believe that it is to everyone's advantage to make them public within a team or any group who have to work together in any way. For example a small team should have a folder with everyone's job descriptions included, to see how they all fit together. It makes no sense to have a team where this is not the case.

For volunteers in a church why not have a public folder listing them all? But keep it updated and ensure you keep things very simple or people will react negatively to the idea.

2: Other helpful paperwork

In this second part I list three other papers that can be valuable.

The person profile

A 'person profile' (or 'person specification') describes the kind of experience, gifts, and personal qualities required for the post.

Churches are often frightened of defining the kind of person for a volunteer post. The aim seems to be to keep the options as wide open as possible in the hope that no one will be ruled out! But this is hardly a Christian approach.

How can a Church Meeting vote for a PCC (or Diaconate, or whatever fits your denomination) without a good idea of the kind of people the church is looking for? What kind of Christian character are you looking for when you appoint a

Treasurer? What skills does a Small Group Leader need to have?

If you are not sure where to start, the Pastoral Epistles have some good principles and examples.

If you want to draft a person profile, aim for a list of bullet points, perhaps with each one starting 'You will be a ….' or 'You will have ….'. Group them under headings that are appropriate for the job in question from a list such as:

- Christian character
- Christian experience
- Personal qualities
- Skills
- Gifting
- Work experience.

In the workplace person profiles often list a range of points with some idea of whether each one is 'desirable' or 'essential'. This can be helpful but, especially with volunteer roles, avoid making them anything other than very simple.

For anyone leading a group or area of church work, check out Training Notes TN87 on this website, *What to look for in your leaders.*

The summary of expectations

For a paid employee this kind of information will be covered in the 'statement of particulars of employment' and/or in a staff handbook. So this article focuses on what might be helpful for a volunteer.

Understanding the job is one thing, but when there are no contractual obligations, what is the church looking for in terms of commitment, length of service, quality and teamwork? You can hardly complain if someone is given no guidance and then fails to come up to expectation.

A summary of expectations (head it in a more straightforward way such as 'We expect of you…') might cover points such as the following.

- The priority you are expected to give to this task.
- The kind of time input required each week or month.
- Length of service: minimum to make it worthwhile.
- Any specific points about the way the task should be carried out (be very careful only to include essentials – it is very easy to describe one method when the post-holder may bring fresh ideas that are more effective
- Overall vision into which this task fits.

.After this it is excellent if the church can list what it will do to support and encourage the worker, covering issues such as pastoral care, supervision, training, prayer, practical resources. But beware! Whatever you say here must then be provided in practice or you will be in trouble.

See the final example in Article A8, *Worker agreements,* on this website for a worked example for the same Newcomers Team whose role description is given on page 8 here.

The aims for this year

A job description is a pretty static document. But this does not mean that the job should be the same year by year: priorities may well need to vary and there will be things to achieve within the job description one year that will not apply the next.

So some kind of listing of aims can be helpful. Aims are things to be achieved in, say, one year. You will know at the end of the year whether you have been successful or not.

Some will be specifically work-based. So the magazine's Editor may have an aim for 2017 to redesign the layout into a modern format and have the new style in production by September. That will be an aim that should not need to appear again in 2018! But an aim to increase circulation by 20% might appear again next year, even if achieved in 2017.

Some aims may be about Christian character or about teamwork. They need to be agreed at a time of official review and then checked up on regularly; so this implies some kind of effective supervision system.

Don't give anyone too many aims. In a paid post aim for a handful. For a volunteer, two or three may be more than enough.

Assuming that every paid post-holder has a regular review with their line manager, the job description, person profile, expectations and aims then form the basis for that review. Most people think in terms of an annual occasion: I suggest that in most church work, six-monthly may be more appropriate.

If you do not have this kind of paperwork in place, these reviews have nothing to be based on. The review should look back on the past but, more importantly, look forward to the future. For this you may need to tweak the job description if necessary and then set new aims for the year (or whatever period you choose) to come.

3: Worked examples

On the next two pages there are sample job descriptions first for a paid employee (Chloe Charter) and then for a team of volunteers (Newcomers Team).

Notes for the paid employee example

PURPOSE

It can be helpful to set this in its big-picture context. Here reference is made to the church's vision statement (it is quite in order to refer to other documents if they are well known). The second bullet-point gives the specific focus within this and the third provides a helpful negative. It is clear now that Chloe is to work mainly with young people outside the church membership, but to motivate and train the church to work with her – perhaps even to work herself out of a job.

PEOPLE LINKS

Five different kind of links are demonstrated here, though most job descriptions might not have as many as this. The five include line management (both directions), team membership, links with volunteer leaders and external links.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

Six are shown. Some job descriptions might have a few more (up to ten maximum in which case it can be helpful to group them under two or three headings). All are expressed in the form 'To (verb) …' It is helpful to be consistent in form and verbs are stronger than nouns. Note how the points shown depend on the purpose statement above them. You might usefully add a responsibility for Chloe's own spiritual health.

The three headings closely match the ideas of WHY, WHO, WHAT – some might even want to use these words as simple headings.

This article is available at https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index then A6. For more on expectations, read Article A8, *Worker agreements.* For job descriptions for Church Administrators, A42, *What do Church Administrators do?* and A38, *Appointing an Operations Manager.* For reviewing staff and volunteers see Training Notes TN17, *Suggested questions for an annual review,* and TN144, *360-degree reviews for churches?* There have been references in this article also to TN6, TN78 and TN87.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A6 under Management (with a link to Structures).

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CHRIST CHURCH, CHRISTMINSTER

Chloe Charter

Post title: Youth and Community Worker
Employed by Christ Church PCC* ** or denominational equivalent*
Hours: Full-time (contract papers have details)
Work base: Home
Last updated August 2026; due for any revision by August 2027

Purpose of appointment

- To help the church work towards growth in the three areas set out in our current vision statement.
- Within this, to focus on culturally-appropriate outreach in the local community, working with young people (aged 11-19), their families and others.
- The aim is *not* to be the sole outreach worker for the church, but to help us all become a 'mission-shaped congregation' in our thinking and actions.

People-links

- To be directly responsible on a day-to-day basis to the Vicar.
- To play a full role as a member of the church's staff team, sharing in the team's corporate responsibilities and activities and playing a part as a member of the church.
- To manage the work of the church's one-year Pastoral Assistant (see separate paper).
- To keep in close touch with the leaders of the church's own teens groups and to work with them in involving teens in the work of outreach.
- To establish appropriate links with external organisations and individuals, such as the local schools worker, the interdenominational church youth network, social services and community police officer.

Main responsibilities

- To live within the local area, to identify needs within it, and to build up understanding and trust between church and community.
- To engage in work with both young people and adults who are not church members for a significant part of the working week.
- To devise, spearhead and then manage new evangelistic and social initiatives within the community, including culturally appropriate worship events when this becomes possible.
- To seek and take opportunities for Christian input into the three schools in the parish.
- To inspire, mobilise, train and co-ordinate church members in a programme of sensitive involvement in and outreach to the community.
- To build a team of the church's own young people who can reach out to their peers in the local area.

CHRIST CHURCH, CHRISTMINSTER

Member of the Newcomers Team

Responsible to the team leader and then to the Outreach Group
Last updated August 2026. Due for any revision by August 2027

Why do we have this team?

- To ensure that every Sunday newcomer or visitor receives a genuine but appropriate welcome to put them at ease and make them glad they came.
- To be the first point of personal friendship and pastoral care if they return, up until the point where they join a Christ Church group of any kind.
- The aim is *not* to be the sole welcomers, but to encourage the whole congregation to look out for and welcome strangers as we seek to become a truly caring church.

Who do we relate to?

- We are each responsible to the Newcomers' Team Leader, who is accountable to the church's Outreach Group.
- We are a small but dedicated team who rely on each other and work closely together.
- We complement the work of the Church Wardens* and the Stewarding Team who have a separate but related role in ensuring the smooth operation of all church services.
- We aim to pass people on to leaders within the small groups network, and so liaise closely with the Small Groups Co-ordinator.

What are our main responsibilities?

- To look out for visitors at Sunday services, to put them at ease in whatever seems an appropriate way (realising that this will be different for each person), to give information about the church if required, to give them a welcome leaflet, and to introduce them to leaders and others if this seems wise.
- To remember names and faces, so that people are recognised and welcomed personally on a second or subsequent visit. This includes occasional visitors and relatives of church members.
- To tell the team leader about any such contacts so that an accurate weekly record can be kept.
- To pray for the team's work.
- To encourage other church members to notice and talk to newcomers.

** or denominational equivalent*