



2027 CURRICULUM

Statement of Faith and Religious Identity Documentation Guide

A practical framework for Christian employers, churches, ministries and faith-based educational institutions

**RELIGIOUS IDENTITY MUST BE MORE THAN A PARAGRAPH ON A
WEBSITE**

It should be clearly defined, properly adopted, connected to actual decisions
and consistently reflected across the organization.

DEFENDING YOUR RIGHT TO DO BUSINESS GOD'S WAY

About This Guide

Purpose. This guide helps Christian employers evaluate how their beliefs are expressed across governing documents, employment practices, benefits, policies and public communications. It does not provide a model Statement of Faith or promise a particular legal result.

Who should use it. Boards, presidents, owners, pastors, executive leaders, human resources teams, benefits leaders and qualified legal counsel should work together. Religious doctrine belongs to the organization; legal and operational review helps ensure that the documents accurately carry that doctrine into practice.

Why Religious Identity Documentation Matters

A Statement of Faith is foundational, but it does not operate alone. When a Christian employer makes a mission-sensitive decision, the relevant question is often not simply whether the organization has religious beliefs. Decision-makers may need to understand what the organization believes, who adopted those beliefs, how they relate to the organization's mission and role, and whether the organization acts consistently with them.

No document automatically creates an exemption, resolves an employment dispute or guarantees protection. Strong documentation does, however, help leaders govern consistently, give employees and applicants clearer notice, guide benefits and operational decisions, and provide counsel with a coherent record to evaluate.

A STRONG DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM SHOULD

- › State the organization's beliefs in its own authentic voice.
- › Identify the governing authority responsible for adopting and interpreting those beliefs.
- › Connect religious convictions to the organization's mission and activities.

COMMON DOCUMENTATION GAPS

- › Statement of Faith on the website but not formally adopted by the board.
- › Bylaws or articles silent on religious purpose and mission.
- › Employee handbook does not reflect the organization's religious standards.
- › Benefits and compensation decisions made without documented faith rationale.

- › Explain how the mission affects leadership, employment, conduct, benefits and community life.
- › Use consistent language across governing, employment and public-facing documents.
- › Create repeatable processes for decisions involving doctrine or mission.

- › Inconsistent language between public-facing materials and internal documents.
- › No formal process for decisions that implicate doctrine or religious mission.

FRAMEWORK

Documentation Architecture

Religious identity documentation is not a single document. It is a coordinated system in which each layer builds on and reinforces the others. The table below describes the primary layers, their typical location within the organization and their core function.

LAYER	TYPICAL LOCATION	CORE FUNCTION
Statement of Faith	Formally adopted by the board or governing authority; incorporated by reference into articles and bylaws	Defines what the organization believes and the doctrinal basis for mission-sensitive decisions
Articles of Incorporation / Charter	Filed with the state; should reflect religious purpose	Establishes the legal existence and stated purpose of the organization
Bylaws / Constitution	Governing document adopted by board or membership	Defines structure, authority, membership standards and the role of doctrine in governance
Denominational or Membership Standards	External documents adopted by reference or affiliation agreement	Connects the organization to a broader religious tradition or accountability structure
Employee Handbook	Distributed to all employees; updated regularly	Translates the Statement of Faith into employment standards, conduct expectations and religious culture

LAYER	TYPICAL LOCATION	CORE FUNCTION
Hiring and Onboarding Documents	Job postings, offer letters, employment agreements	Gives applicants and new employees notice of religious requirements before employment begins
Benefits and Compensation Policies	Plan documents, carrier contracts, summary plan descriptions	Reflects the organization's faith convictions in health coverage, leave, compensation and lifestyle commitments
Public-Facing Materials	Website, marketing, brochures, social media	Projects religious identity to the public; should be consistent with governing and employment documents
Board Resolutions and Minutes	Corporate records	Documents formal decisions regarding doctrine, religious mission and mission-sensitive employment matters

A note on consistency. Each document layer should accurately summarize, not replace, the documents above it. Language that drifts between layers, whether softer in the handbook than in the bylaws or stronger in marketing materials than in board policy, can create confusion about the organization's actual religious standards and complicate employment decisions that depend on those standards.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Seven Qualities of Effective Religious Identity Documentation

Use these qualities as an evaluation lens when reviewing your organization's documentation. They are not a legal checklist, and meeting all seven does not guarantee any particular outcome. They do, however, reflect common patterns in organizations that have built coherent, mission-aligned documentation systems.

QUALITY 1

Authentic

The Statement of Faith and governing documents express the organization's actual beliefs in its own voice. Borrowed language from another organization, copied without theological review, may not accurately represent what this organization truly believes or how it operates.

QUALITY 2

Properly Adopted

The governing authority with doctrinal responsibility formally adopted the Statement of Faith. A document that appears on a website but was never formally adopted by the board, congregation or equivalent authority may not carry the organizational weight the mission requires.

QUALITY 3

Mission-Connected

The documents explain how the organization's beliefs are connected to its specific purpose and activities. A Statement of Faith that lists theological propositions without connecting them to the organization's mission may not sufficiently explain why the beliefs matter to how the organization operates.

QUALITY 4

Operationally Integrated

The beliefs expressed in governing documents flow through into employment practices, benefit decisions and community standards. Where a faith conviction shapes a specific policy, that connection should be visible in the relevant documents.

QUALITY 5

Consistent

The language and standards used across document layers are coherent and mutually reinforcing. Significant inconsistency between the bylaws, the employee handbook and the organization's public materials can signal that documents are not functioning as an integrated system.

QUALITY 6

Noticed

Employees, applicants and members receive clear and timely notice of the organization's religious standards before they enter or continue the relationship. Notice in job postings, offer letters, onboarding materials and public communications helps ensure that religious expectations are not a surprise.

QUALITY 7

Practiced

The organization acts in ways that reflect its stated beliefs. Documented standards that are never enforced or applied inconsistently may undermine the credibility of the documentation system itself. Consistent practice is not a legal standard, but it is often a relevant consideration in understanding how an organization's religious identity actually functions.

APPLICATION

Religious Identity at Key Employment Touchpoints

Religious identity documentation is not only a governance matter. It also shapes how an organization communicates its mission to applicants, employees and the public at every stage of the employment relationship. The following touchpoints represent common opportunities to express and reinforce the organization's religious identity in a coherent and legally thoughtful way.

RECRUITING AND HIRING

- ▶ Job postings identify the religious character of the organization and any faith requirements for the role.
- ▶ Applications request information about alignment with the organization's Statement of Faith where relevant to the role.
- ▶ Interview questions about mission alignment are framed around role-specific religious requirements.
- ▶ Documentation of role classifications that carry specific religious qualification requirements.

OFFER AND ONBOARDING

- ▶ Offer letters reference the organization's religious mission and applicable employment standards.
- ▶ Employment agreements include acknowledgment of the Statement of Faith and religious conduct standards.
- ▶ New employee orientation includes review of the organization's mission, Statement of Faith and religious culture.
- ▶ Employee handbook is distributed and acknowledged during onboarding.

ONGOING EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ Performance reviews may address mission alignment where relevant to the role.
- ▶ Handbook updates are communicated and re-acknowledged by employees.
- ▶ Promotions, role changes and leadership appointments consider mission-alignment qualifications.
- ▶ Disciplinary actions involving religious standards are documented with the relevant policy language cited.

BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION

- ▶ Health plan design and coverage exclusions reflect documented faith convictions.
- ▶ Formal board resolutions document the religious basis for mission-sensitive benefit decisions.
- ▶ Compensation policies and pay equity decisions are consistent with stated mission and values.
- ▶ Leave policies reflect the organization's approach to religious observance, family formation and lifestyle commitments.

SEPARATION AND TRANSITION

- ▶ Separation decisions involving mission alignment are documented consistently with handbook standards.
- ▶ Ministerial exception determinations and records are maintained for relevant roles.
- ▶ Board or leadership involvement in separation decisions for mission-sensitive roles is documented in meeting minutes.

PUBLIC IDENTITY

- ▶ Website, social media and marketing materials consistently reflect the organization's religious identity.
- ▶ Statements made in public materials are aligned with the language of the Statement of Faith and governing documents.
- ▶ Leadership profiles and communications reflect the organization's religious character and mission.

Apply the Framework by Employer Type

While the core principles apply broadly, each employer type faces distinct documentation considerations based on its legal structure, funding relationships, denominational connections and operational context. The priorities below reflect common patterns and should be reviewed with qualified legal counsel for your specific circumstances.

Churches and Ministries

- › Connect bylaws, denominational relationships, membership standards and employment documents.
- › Clarify the authority of pastors, elders, boards or other governing bodies.
- › Distinguish membership, volunteer, clergy and employee relationships in writing.
- › Identify roles that carry ministerial or pastoral responsibilities and document their qualifications.
- › Reflect denominational affiliation or independence clearly in governing documents.
- › Evaluate potentially ministerial roles individually and keep job descriptions aligned with actual duties.

Christian Colleges and Universities

- › Align charters, bylaws, board policies, faculty handbooks, employment contracts, student standards and public materials.
- › Define how faculty, staff and academic leadership advance the religious mission.
- › Coordinate religious-identity positions with Title IX religious exemption procedures where applicable.
- › Document how accreditation relationships and any federal funding affect the scope of religious employment rights.
- › Maintain faculty standards that reflect the institution's religious identity and integrate them into tenure and renewal processes.
- › Ensure student conduct standards are consistent with the Statement of Faith and publicly communicated.

Christian Businesses and Nonprofits

- › Explain how faith shapes the organization's purpose, leadership and workplace rather than relying only on owner beliefs.
- › Align mission statements, employee handbooks, hiring documents, conduct expectations and benefits decisions.
- › Document how the organizational mission, not only the owners' personal faith, drives employment standards.
- › Formally adopt the Statement of Faith through the board or governing authority with appropriate board minutes.
- › Review benefit plan design and carrier relationships to reflect documented faith convictions consistently.
- › Communicate the organization's religious character in external-facing materials and ensure consistency with internal documents.

Note on employer size. Smaller organizations with limited staff and resources may face practical constraints in documentation scope. The goal is not perfect documentation but coherent documentation. Starting with a properly adopted Statement of Faith that is carried into the employee handbook and job postings represents meaningful progress.

IMPLEMENTATION

How to Adopt and Implement a Statement of Faith

Adopting a Statement of Faith is a meaningful act of organizational governance. The following steps reflect common practices. Your organization's specific legal structure, bylaws and denominational requirements will shape the exact process.

1

THEOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

Gather the organization's leadership and, where applicable, qualified theological advisors to review the existing Statement of Faith or develop a new one. Confirm that the language accurately reflects what the organization believes and how those beliefs connect to the mission.

2

FORMAL ADOPTION BY THE GOVERNING AUTHORITY

Present the Statement of Faith to the board, elders, congregation or other governing body with doctrinal authority. Adopt it by resolution or vote consistent with the organization's bylaws and record the adoption in meeting minutes.

3

INCORPORATE INTO GOVERNING DOCUMENTS

Incorporate the Statement of Faith into or by reference from the organization's bylaws, articles of incorporation or charter. Confirm that the governing documents describe the religious purpose and mission of the organization and identify the authority responsible for doctrinal interpretation.

4

INTEGRATE INTO EMPLOYMENT AND OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

Review and update the employee handbook, job descriptions, offer letter templates, benefit plan documents and public-facing materials to reflect the adopted Statement of Faith consistently. Engage qualified employment counsel to review updates to employment documents.

5

COMMUNICATE TO EMPLOYEES, APPLICANTS AND MEMBERS

Distribute updated documents to existing employees and integrate them into onboarding for new hires. Post the Statement of Faith on the organization's website and reference it in job postings and public materials where appropriate. Obtain acknowledgments from employees as part of the update process.

6

ESTABLISH A REVIEW AND UPDATE PROCESS

Schedule periodic reviews of all documentation layers on a cycle the organization can sustain. Include review of the Statement of Faith, governing documents, employee handbook, benefit plan documents and public-facing materials. Document the review process and any updates in board minutes or organizational records.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Consistency Review Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate the current state of your organization's religious identity documentation. This is a self-assessment tool, not a legal audit. The checklist is intended to help leaders identify areas for review and prioritize next steps.

GOVERNING DOCUMENTS

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | The organization has a Statement of Faith that has been formally adopted by the governing authority. |
| ☐ | The Statement of Faith is incorporated into or referenced from the bylaws or articles of incorporation. |
| ☐ | The bylaws identify the governing authority responsible for doctrinal interpretation and mission decisions. |
| ☐ | The organization's religious purpose is clearly stated in the articles of incorporation or charter. |
| ☐ | Board or governing body minutes reflect formal actions on the Statement of Faith and mission-sensitive decisions. |

EMPLOYMENT DOCUMENTS

☐	The employee handbook references the Statement of Faith and reflects the organization's religious culture and conduct standards.
☐	Job postings for mission-sensitive roles identify the religious character of the organization and relevant faith requirements.
☐	Offer letters and employment agreements reference the organization's religious mission and applicable standards.
☐	Role classifications for potentially ministerial positions are evaluated individually with current job descriptions.
☐	Employees have acknowledged receipt and review of current employment documents.

BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION

☐	Health plan design and coverage exclusions are consistent with the organization's documented faith convictions.
☐	The religious basis for mission-sensitive benefit decisions is documented in formal board resolutions.
☐	Leave policies reflect the organization's approach to religious observance, family structure and conduct standards.

PUBLIC IDENTITY

☐	The organization's website, social media and public materials consistently reflect its religious identity.
☐	The Statement of Faith is publicly accessible and consistent with governing documents.
☐	Public statements by leadership are aligned with the language of the Statement of Faith and governing documents.

GUIDANCE

Important Notice and Federal Reference Points

This guide is educational and does not provide legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship. It does not determine whether an organization or individual qualifies for a statutory, regulatory or constitutional protection. Laws and their application vary by jurisdiction and facts and may change. Christian employers should work with qualified legal counsel to review their governing documents, employment practices, benefits, funding, activities and applicable federal, state and local requirements.

REFERENCE POINTS

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Section 12 Religious Discrimination

eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/section-12-religious-discrimination

U.S. Department of Labor: Religious Exemptions and Accommodations for Federal Contractors

dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/faqs/religious-exemptions-and-accommodations-federal-contractors

U.S. Department of Justice: Religious Liberty Task Force Guidance

justice.gov/d9/2021-10/guidance-federal-law-protecting-religious-liberty.pdf

U.S. Supreme Court: Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru (2020); Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC (2012)

supremecourt.gov

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Religious Employer Exemption

42 U.S.C. § 2000e-1(a)

First Amendment Defense: Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)

42 U.S.C. § 2000bb et seq.

Title IX Religious Exemption (Higher Education): 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3)

Applies to educational institutions controlled by religious organizations where application of Title IX would conflict with tenets of the controlling religious organization.



Your membership gives you access to the resources to defend your right to do business God's way.

Christian Employers Alliance provides legal protection, policy intelligence and peer community for faith-driven employers across the country. Our legal team has won precedent-setting protections for Christian employers. Our member portal gives you access to actionable guides, policy analysis and the legal resources your organization needs.

MEMBER PORTAL joinceanow.org/portal

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LEGAL WINS

Federal injunctive relief from the HHS abortifacient mandate and EEOC transgender directives for CEA member employers.

POLICY INTELLIGENCE

Real-time analysis of federal legislation, regulatory changes and judicial decisions that affect your right to lead your organization by faith.

PEER COMMUNITY

Connect with other Christian business leaders, HR professionals and executives who are navigating the same challenges and building missions that last.

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