

Church Historian Job Description

Result Expected

An effective historian will document the historical identity of a congregation with orderly records so that heritage will be preserved and can be built on into the future. The congregation can easily trace its efforts of the past for fulfilling the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. By understanding the past, the local church historian helps the congregation envision and live into the church's best future.

Spiritual Gifts and Qualifications Helpful for the Job

- A church historian benefits from having one or more of these spiritual gifts: servanthood, knowledge, discernment, and administration. This leader should show evidence of an interest in history, the ability to gather information from several sources, and skills in organizing, classifying, and preserving historical material.
- The historian should have the ability to listen to and communicate with people of all ages, compile creative displays, and plan programs and events to share the history of the congregation.
- The historian should show genuine interest in the community's history and connection with the congregation's past.

Responsibilities of the Position

- The historian will review the historical materials and collections of the congregation to determine what needs to be done to update, preserve, and interpret the material to people of all ages.
- The historian will keep records in good order and interpret the history to others, particularly emphasizing the history of faith and the impact of "lived faith" on the larger community.
- The historian will document events and collect materials to add to the historical record of the congregation.
- The historian will build a team of interested people who can help with the task.
- The historian will assist the pastor and others in the annual observance of Heritage Sunday and in the celebration of anniversaries significant to the church and community.
- The historian and team will link with organizations, people, and resources in and beyond the congregation that are concerned with history.
- The historian will establish an archive if one does not already exist and encourage all church officers to keep accurate church records.
- The historian will provide for the preservation of important and historical materials that are no longer in current use.
- The historian serves as a member of the committee on records and history (if one exists).
- The historian is accountable to the charge conference through the church leadership team.

Getting Started

1. Talk with others in the church and community who have interest in building a historical record. Learn about community groups, events, and programs to increase your knowledge of local history and the relationship of the church with community and global historical events.
2. Review the historical materials and collections of the congregation to determine what needs to be done to update, preserve, and interpret the material.
3. Convene a meeting of a group of interested people to help you to evaluate, share hopes and concerns, and plan for your work.
4. Learn from people in your congregation, especially long-time members and people present during significant events. Collect oral histories as appropriate.
5. Participate in workshops, training, and information sessions in the church and community to gather ideas and collaborate with others.
6. Connect to the annual conference commission on archives and history. They have resources that can help, as well as guidelines on what should be kept and suggestions on how to keep and manage those records.

People and Agencies That Can Help

- Your pastor, district and conference leaders, and people in your congregation, the community, and other congregations who share your interest. Be alert to community historical groups, lectures, reunions, and other community events that might relate to the congregational history. As you travel, visit other congregations and sites of historical significance to learn about the heritage of faith traditions.
- General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcah.org
- InfoServ, the information service for the church, provides current information about United Methodist resources, programs, and staff services. Email: infoserv@umcom.org; Website: infoserv.umc.org.

Web and Print Resources

- African American Methodist Heritage Center, <http://aamhc-umc.org>
- American Association for State and Local History, www.aaslh.org
- *American Methodism: A Compact History* by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012)
- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016)
- General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcah.org | www.facebook.com/UMCHistory | www.twitter.com/UMCHistory
- *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation, 2017-2020: Church Historian*
- *Guidelines for Managing Records of the Annual Conference and the Local Church*
- Historical Society of the United Methodist Church, www.historicalocietyunitedmethodistchurch.org
- *How to Write a Local Church History* by Dr. Frederick E. Maser (free online at <http://gcah.org/resources/how-to-write-a-local-church-history>)
- *Interpreter*, www.interpretermagazine.org
- *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography* by Richard L. Morgan (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996)
- *The Story of United Methodists in America*, free online book, <http://depts.drew.edu/lib/books/200Years/200UM/homepage.htm>

- [*United Methodism in America: A Compact History*](#) edited by John G. McEllhenney (Abingdon Press, 1992)
- [*The United Methodist Way*](#) by Branson Thurston, a 48-page overview of UM history, organization, and beliefs (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997)

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/church-historian>



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