

The Annual Church Audit

by Dan Busby, CPA

Audit Guidelines

Church board members have a *long* list of responsibilities. Among these is the responsibility for the money that flows through the church.

Included in those responsibilities is keeping accurate records and never letting a single individual have control of the money. These make good common sense. There also must be an annual audit of the church's financial records. This is a bit more difficult.

However, an annual audit of the church's records is a must. External audits are performed by an independent auditor who has no impairing relationship to the church and, therefore, can review its data procedures with maximum objectivity. Internal audits generally are performed by church members or by persons closely associated with the church. A church may choose to have an external audit (review, compilation, or agreed upon procedures), this document relates to an internal audit.

External audits

The ideal is to have an annual audit performed by independent CPAs. Generally, however, only large churches can afford this extra expense. External audits of smaller churches often are done on a non-GAAP basis—the statements do not conform to the full accrual method with depreciation recognized. Non-GAAP audits of smaller churches often are acceptable to banks and other agencies that require audited financial statements. (GAAP stands for Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.)

Internal audits

Members of the church may form an audit committee to perform an internal audit to determine the validity of the financial statements. (Sample internal audit guidelines for churches follow.) If the committee takes its task seriously, the result may be significant improvements in internal control and accounting procedures. Too often, the internal audit committee only conducts a cursory review, commends the treasurer for a job well done, and provides a false sense of security to the church.

Key Concepts

Good accounting records and good stewardship go hand in hand.

Your church is the trustee of the money it receives—handle it carefully.

Tailor meaningful financial statements for your church.

Prepare timely financial reports covering all of your funds—not just the operating fund.

An annual audit—either external or internal—is a must.



Idea!

Use this document as a checklist for your annual audit.

Church Internal Audit Guidelines

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

- Are monthly financial statements prepared on a timely basis and submitted to the church board?
- Do the financial statements include all funds (unrestricted, temporarily restricted, and permanently restricted)?
- Do the financial statements include a statement of financial condition and statement of activity?
- Are account balances in the financial records reconciled with amounts presented in financial reports?

CASH RECEIPTS

General

- Are cash handling procedures in writing?
- Has the bank been notified never to cash checks payable to the church?
- Are Sunday school offerings recorded properly and delivered to the money counters?
- Are procedures established to care for offerings and monies delivered or mailed to the church office between Sundays?

Offering counting

- Are at least two members of the counting committee present when offerings are counted? (The persons counting the money should not include the pastor or the church treasurer.)
- Do money counters verify that the contents of the offering envelopes are identical to the amounts written on the outside of the envelopes?
- Are all checks stamped with a restrictive endorsement stamp immediately after the offering envelope contents are verified?
- Are money counters rotated so the same people are not handling the funds each week?
- Are donor-restricted funds properly identified during the process of counting offerings?

Depositing of funds

- Are two members of the offering counting team in custody of the offering until it is deposited in the bank, placed in a night depository, or the church's safe?
- Are all funds deposited promptly? Compare offering and other receipt records with bank deposits.
- Are all receipts deposited intact? Receipts should not be used to pay cash expenses.

Restricted funds

- Are donations for restricted purposes recorded properly in the accounting records?
- Are restricted funds held for the intended purpose(s) and not spent on operating needs?



Remember!

Neither the pastor nor the church treasurer should count the offering.



Caution!

Offering funds should never be in the custody of a single person.

**Remember!**

Keep accurate records and provide accurate receipts.

**Idea!**

Adopt a policy of issuing annual contribution reports to donors.

**Remember!**

Account for all check numbers—even voids.

**Caution!**

Never sign a blank check.

DONATION RECORDS/RECEIPTING

- Are individual donor records kept as a basis to provide donor acknowledgments for all single contributions of \$250 or more?
- If no goods or services were provided (other than intangible religious benefits) in exchange for a gift, does the receipt include a statement to this effect?
- If goods or services (other than intangible religious benefits) were provided in exchange for a gift, does the receipt:
 - ◆ Inform the donor that the amount of the contribution that is deductible for federal income tax purposes is limited to the excess of the amount of any money and the value of any property contributed by the donor over the value of the goods and services provided by the organization, and
 - ◆ Provide to the donor a good faith estimate of the value of such goods and services?
- Although not required by the IRS, has your church adopted a policy of issuing an annual contribution report to donors listing at least each week's donations, if not each donation?
- Are the donations traced from the weekly counting sheets to the donor records for a selected time period by the audit committee?
- It is helpful to provide the donor with a gift acknowledgment for all gifts of cash whether under or over \$250. The law requires that the donor have an acknowledgment from the church by the date they file their tax return for all gifts of cash, regardless of the amount.

CASH DISBURSEMENTS

- Are all disbursements paid by check except for minor expenditures paid through the petty cash fund?
- Is written documentation available to support all disbursements?
- If a petty cash fund is used, are vouchers prepared for each disbursement from the fund?
- Are pre-numbered checks used? Account for all the check numbers including voided checks.
- Are blank checks ever signed in advance? This should never be done.

PETTY CASH FUNDS

- Is a petty cash fund used for disbursements of a small amount? If so, is the fund periodically reconciled and replenished based on proper documentation of the cash expenditures?

BANK, SAVINGS AND INVESTMENT ACCOUNTS

- Are written bank reconciliations prepared on a timely basis? Test the reconciliation for the last month in the fiscal year. Trace transactions between the bank and the books for completeness and timeliness.
- Are there any checks that have been outstanding over three months?
- Are there any unusual transactions in the bank statement immediately following year-end? Obtain the bank statement for the first month after year-end directly from the bank for review by the audit committee. Otherwise, obtain the last bank statement (unopened).
- Are all savings and investment accounts recorded in the financial records? Compare monthly statements to the books.

- Are earnings or losses from savings and investment accounts recorded in the books?
- Are all bank, savings and investment account statements mailed directly to someone unrelated to the person receiving or expending funds?
- The statements should be opened and perused by the recipient. The weekly deposits should be compared to the bank statements and checks clearing the bank should be reviewed for unusual items.

LAND, BUILDINGS, AND EQUIPMENT RECORDS

- Are there detailed records of land, buildings, and equipment including date acquired, description, and cost or fair market value at date of acquisition?
- Was a physical inventory of equipment taken at year-end?
- Have the property records been reconciled to the insurance coverages?

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

- Is there a schedule of unpaid invoices, including vendor name, date, and due date?
- Are any of the accounts payable items significantly past-due?
- Are there any disputes with vendors over amounts owed?



Remember!

Keep insurance coverage up-to-date.

INSURANCE POLICIES

- Is there a schedule of insurance coverage in force? It should reflect effective and expiration dates, kind and classification of coverages, maximum amounts of each coverage, premiums, and terms of payment.
- Is Workers' Compensation insurance being carried as provided by law in most states? Are all employees (and perhaps some independent contractors) covered under the Workers' Compensation policy?

AMORTIZATION OF DEBT

- Is there a schedule of debt such as mortgages and notes?
- Have the balances owed to all lenders been confirmed directly in writing?
- Have the balances owed to all lenders been compared to the obligations recorded on the balance sheet?

SECURITIES AND OTHER NEGOTIABLE DOCUMENTS

- Does the church own any marketable securities or bonds? If so, are they kept in a safety deposit box, and are two signatures (excluding a pastor) required for access?
- Have the contents of the safety deposit box been examined and recorded?

PERSONNEL MATTERS

- Does the church maintain the following documents?
 - ◆ Applications for employment
 - ◆ Personnel files
 - ◆ Performance appraisal and evaluation forms
 - ◆ Employee handbook
 - ◆ Immigration I-9 forms

FEDERAL REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

- Does the church file on a timely basis the following forms, if applicable?
 - ◆ Federal payroll tax forms (Form 941, Form W-2, Form W-3, Form 1099-MISC)
 - ◆ Donee information returns (Form 8282)
 - ◆ Annual certification of racial nondiscrimination for Christian schools (Form 5578)