

Tips for Preparing a Ministerial Cover Letter, Résumé and Reference Letter

I. Résumé

A résumé (Curriculum Vitae, CV for short) is a simple document that gives readers an introduction to your personal information, skills, education, and interests and chronicles your work experience.

A typical Ministerial Résumé Package consists of the following elements:

- I. Cover Letter
- II. Name and contact information.
- III. Personal, Spouse and Family information
- IV. Ministerial Experience.
- V. Secular Experience.
- VI. Education and Certifications.
- VII. Interests and Hobbies
- VIII. References.

Ministerial résumés are a little different than secular ones as they usually consist of more personal information along with your interests and hobbies. Below you will find a systematic approach to writing a great résumé for the ministry. I will address the architecture of a résumé before giving tips and directions on composing the Cover Letter and References.

Consecrate: Ministry is about God's business. It is about God using you and your family to make a positive difference and effect of a congregation of saints. Take every opportunity to the Lord in prayer. Pray! Pray! Pray! Seek God's direction; and remember the Lord is about to use a résumé, interview and most likely a sermon or two to get you where you need to be

God will move through all kinds of people in this process. Some will not be as spiritually minded. They will respond to education, experience and an interview in their decision. Others, after reading a résumé and perhaps conducting an interview will know in their heart that God has called you to their church.

Educate: Do some research on how to write a great ministerial résumé. The information presented here is a great place to start, but go above and beyond. Most likely you will have competition for the position; and the hiring church is looking for the very best candidate, one who meets and exceeds their expectations. Educate yourself on the job they are looking to fill.

Investigate: Know exactly what the church or ministry is needing. Do your homework. Look up information about the area. Ask questions. Is this a place you would like to live? Are there things for your children to do? Good Schools? Descent neighborhoods? Can you and your spouse envision yourselves living there? Will you be required to relocate away from family and longtime friends? What about a potentially long commute from a job?

Initiate: The résumé is often the initial point where many churches will get their first impression of you. As it has been said, “You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.” You absolutely cannot afford to mess this stage of the hiring process up, cut it short, dismiss it, or come across as ill prepared. Presentation is everything. If you are considering various jobs or positions you should think about writing multiple résumés.

Formulate: Your résumé should be consistent from the first to the last page as well as with ALL additional material you have to submit thereafter, such as your Reference Page. Headings, body text, fonts, margins, styles, and spacing should all be consistent.

Do not use different fonts throughout your résumé. You can make a conservative use of bold, italics and underlining if you need to differentiate something such as a heading. Use black ink and a 12pt. font size. Your font choice must be simple to read such as Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman, or something similar. DO NOT use fancy or hard to read fonts.

Sections or elements should not spill over into the next page.

Skip a line between sections. Make sure your spacing is even across the résumé.

Do NOT use Acronyms (IBM, NBA, IPHC, E.G., I.E.). The acronym for even the largest company in your home town would probably be meaningless to someone who lives in the next state. Assume that the person reading your résumé is not familiar with the company at all.

Your Résumé and Letter of References should be printed on the same kind of good quality paper. I suggest that you use a bright white 24lb paper or some VERY soft or neutral colored Résumé Stock. Do not use colored paper, especially something that is loud in color. If the paper consists of watermarks, please make sure all watermarks are right-side up, and copied to the same side of the paper. You must be willing to put the time it takes into creating a very attractive as well as creative résumé.

All specific education, work, experience and achievements should be listed in descending order—starting with the most recent and working backwards.

Ministerial Résumés are generally compiled in the order of these elements as listed below:

- I. Name and contact information.
- II. Personal, Spouse and Family information
- III. Ministerial Experience.
- IV. Secular Experience.
- V. Education and Certifications.
- VI. Interest and Hobbies

Accentuate: Communicate with strong, defining words. Bring to life and give power to your nouns and verbs by making use of rich adjectives and adverbs when constructing your résumé. People DO judge you by the words you use; however, be ready to give an account, or define EVERY word you use in your résumé during an interview.

Communicate: The résumé is a window into you, your past, present and even future. The fact that you are submitting a résumé tells them that you want to be part of their future as well. Be sure to communicate secular education and experiences that will assist in ministerial positions, too.

Use simple yet specific and unambiguous words. Sentences should flow smoothly and be easy to read and understand. Give as much power to your words as you can by choosing them carefully and using strong adjectives and adverbs. Do not exaggerate; be honest and as accurate as possible with all the information presented in your résumé.

A résumé should be written in the first person, so be sure to make use of the words “I” and “me”. However, remember that ministry positions require teamwork. You positively want your résumé to present you as a team-player. Do not overstate your personal achievements or take sole credit for something that was a joint effort.

Your spouses’ name, date of marriage, children’s names and ages are all acceptable in ministerial résumés. This should appear first as part of your personal information.

Integrate: Consider what they want to know about you, and deliver yourself in terms that can best define you as an asset to them. You want to demonstrate how you and your experience and accomplishments can seamlessly integrate into the position they have open. Take time to list the experience, education and accomplishments that make you the perfect candidate for the position; don’t be afraid to sell yourself.

Eliminate: Do not waste words or focus on your weaknesses in a résumé; however, be prepared to address weaknesses in an interview. Do not focus on job experiences, skills and education that does not lend to the specific job at hand, especially if you have plenty of information to fill two pages. You need not discuss in detail all of your experiences. A ministerial résumé can go several pages; but aim for two, if possible, plus a page of references and any other information the employer may require.

Elaborate: Emphasize your strengths, accomplishments, experience and education that are an asset to the position at hand, but don’t be too wordy. List ALL relevant ministry experience—paid or volunteer. You can’t have too much ministry experience, but you can take up too much room listing it. Be concise and to the point in listing experience.

Evaluate: Go over EVERY single WORD of your résumé several times, then have at least one more person who is competent for the task to review your résumé as well. Misspelled words and poor diction and grammar are often game changers so pay close attention to this area of the résumé. Don’t be afraid to edit your résumé several times before getting it right.

Motivate: Your résumé must be written in a way that says you are the guy for the job, and it’s yours to turn down. Be encouraged about your résumé, and ask others to pray with you. You want it to be as effective as possible, but you also want God’s will to be done. Hiring and even firing is a process in which God uses people. Often, people are not very discerning. Therefore, a

résumé can be very productive even in spiritual work. Pray without ceasing, and have a positive mental attitude.

II. References Page

Provide a reference page ONLY when asked. Make sure that all reference material is current. All references should be of a higher social/occupational status than you. Ask permission before using someone as a reference. Some people may not give you a good reference, or they just may not be comfortable recommending anyone for a job. Contact the reference about the particular job you are interested in so they can be prepared to answer questions. Submit three to four references. Each reference must include their full name, job title, organization, complete address, phone number, and email address. They should include past and present employers, faculty members, advisers, coaches and friends with very little emphasis on friends and family. Last, but not least, it is NOT necessary to include on your résumé, "References Available Upon Request."

In formatting this page, remember to use the same margins, fonts, and styles as with the résumé as well as including your name and contact information exactly as it appears on the résumé.

Reference Example:

Rev. Mark J. Wilson
Senior Pastor
Eighth Avenue Pentecostal Holiness Church
236 Longleaf Drive.
Columbia, SC 29173
(803)234-0961
markjw@eaphc.org

III. Cover letter

A cover letter is VERY important. In fact, many people would assert that it is just as important as the résumé itself. Do NOT send a résumé without a cover letter. Explain the job you are looking for. Be specific. The cover letter will be seen first, and you must convince them to read your résumé; therefore, it must be written and targeted to a particular Church or ministry.

The cover letter includes four elements:

- I. Heading
- II. Opening
- III. Body
- IV. Closing.

As with the drafting of the résumé, you should stick to the same rules. Formulate the letter just the same, using the same paper, letter style, font and formatting. When writing this letter, be confident, positive, and focused as well as concise, accurate and polite. Cover letters can have a

right and left margin of 1.5 inches but certainly must be no narrower than a 1.0 inch on the left margin.

The heading should include the current date, name and contact information. The letter must be addressed to a person and include their title when possible.

The opening states who you are, your reason for writing, and how you found out about the job opening.

The body is where you explain why you are uniquely qualified for this ministry. Call attention to your education, leadership, and experience that is relevant to the position you are seeking. It is acceptable to use bullets in this section. Also, explain why you have chosen them as a potential employer.

The closing is where you thank them for their time and consideration. Reiterate how they can contact you for further assistance. Unless the church has told you not to follow up, let them know you will follow up in a week with a call.

Keep this letter to one page in length. Proof read and have others to evaluate. When finished, sign this letter in blue ink so that it does not look like a copy of a form letter.

Cover Letter Example:

Heading

Your Full Name
Your Mailing Address
City, State, Zip Code
Telephone number
E-mail address

Month, Day, Year

Mr./Ms./Rev. First and Last name
Title
Name of Church / Ministry
Street or P.O. Box Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Rev. Last Name

Opening Paragraph

Body Paragraph (multiple paragraphs but all on one page)

Closing Paragraph

Sincerely,
(*Handwritten Signature*)
Your name typed out

Enclosure(s) (*This refers to your résumé, etc.*)