



To pay or not to pay?

TN37 Training Notes series: Structures

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It can be a puzzling question. You need someone to oversee children's work, or a community project, or music in worship. Do you set up a formal paid post as part of a staff team, or do you simply ask someone in the congregation to take this on in a voluntary capacity?

What if your part-time Administrator is paid for five hours' work a week, while your Treasurer puts in double this without payment? Or if your Pastoral Visitor, who has worked virtually full time without pay, leaves the area and no one is able to offer the same?

As life appears to become more stressful, and as more churches employ lay staff, these become real issues. These notes attempt some guidelines to help your thinking. Feedback is welcomed so that these ideas can be updated and improved.

What does staffing imply?

Appointing staff involves establishing an employment contract and making payment. This implies some formality and discipline. Employees have rights but also obligations in the way they carry out their work.

They receive remuneration as part of this contract. I argue in Article A3 on this website that in a church or Christian mission, such payment should be viewed as a 'stipend' and not as a 'reward', as it is in most secular settings. A stipend is a payment not immediately linked to the actual work carried out. It enables the person receiving the payment to offer their working time without having to 'earn their living' elsewhere.

Whether that is your view or not, what follows still applies. These notes present six instances where it makes sense to employ a member of staff. These are followed by six dangers in such an approach. These notes do not attempt to offer trite answers, but to provide a basis for a possible church staffing policy.

Six cases for employing staff

Here are six occasions when a good case can be made for employing and paying a worker, rather than relying on 'volunteers'. It will be apparent that these overlap.

1 **When the post requires a full working week (or most of one)**

This is an issue of *time*. If it makes sense for a post to need, say, 30 or more hours a week to be effective, this is likely to be someone's 'job'. There are few people with significant time to offer who need no income. Those now retired and still fit often have a range of family and other responsibilities and look for flexibility and freedom.

So if you need someone to be a community evangelist with a daily presence on a housing estate, or to do schools' work each day, or to act as Director of Operations for a large church, few would argue against this being seen as a staff appointment.

2 **When the post requires set availability times**

This is an issue of *discipline*. Some positions rely on the holder being available at fixed times with little scope for flexibility. This may prevent the person undertaking paid work elsewhere. Most communities no longer have people with significant time to offer in normal working hours, as might have been the case 20 years ago.

So a Church Office Secretary may need to be on duty from 9 am. until 12 noon each day. There may be volunteers to help, but someone needs to oversee them and be responsible to ensure the facility is open as advertised. Other examples include a Caretaker for a building that is let out, or a Children's Worker running after-school activities.

3 **When the post requires a specialist**

This is an issue of *ability and training*. The most obvious example is that of a Minister, where there is usually an expectation of academic achievement and specialist skill training. If the membership of the church does not include a constant supply of suitable people prepared to be trained, it is normal to 'buy in' from outside.

Other examples include Organists and Youth Workers. Few church members in 'normal' employment can undertake necessary youth training. Those that have the skills (some teachers, perhaps) may want a break from such involvement in out-of-work hours.

4 **When the post requires a pioneering leader**

This is an issue of *energy*. To undertake a major new initiative, and/or to lead a team in carrying it out, requires not only time but effort and innovative thinking. If someone is committed to a normal workplace, this is expecting a great deal of them. Many are happy to serve on a church team, or to carry on an established ministry, but start-ups and leadership of a large team are different matters. It is also important that such people fit well into the church's agreed direction and values. This may more easily be achieved through an employment relationship.

Examples include significant initiatives in a local community (whether practical service or evangelism), experimentation in so-called 'fresh expressions' of church, and the planting of a new congregation.

5 **When church members are time-poor**

This is an issue of ***stress***. Some churches have significant numbers of double-earning families seeking to cover expensive mortgages, or commuters in stressful occupations spending long hours away from home. Other churches have large numbers of single-parent families, or find themselves having to tackle daily problems of deprivation and vandalism. Still others simply have very few members, most of whom are elderly. In these cases, adding excessive church burdens can produce guilt, health problems or family break-up.

Some of these churches may not be short of money and paying staff may be the only way forward. Some may be poor, but if funds can be found from elsewhere staff can still be a possibility.

6 **When leaders are diverted from their priorities**

This is an issue of ***priority***. Many leaders find themselves constantly pushed away from their spiritual priorities by the expectations of others, by a growing complexity in legislation and administration, and by increasingly difficult counselling needs. For some the chief reason is that, whereas once a single church might have had a Minister and two or three Assistants, now it more likely that three churches will share just one part-time Minister. If clergy are to be able to focus on spiritual leadership and all that entails, there is a case for employing others to set them free for this.

Some churches have appointed Associate Ministers, Business Managers, Personal Assistants, interns and others with this as a key reason behind the move.

Dangers to consider in appointing staff

But here are six points that should make you hesitate before you rush into a recruitment process.

1 **A denial of body ministry**

This is an issue of ***theology***. In a time not so long ago, the Minister ran the church. He was assumed to be in charge of everything. The congregation turned up on Sundays and helped with children's work. Then the biblical concept of body ministry took root, and the Minister was seen as the enabler of the whole congregation's ministry.

Some staff teams now reverse that movement. The contributions from church members may not be seen as 'good enough' when there is a professional staff to do the job properly. No sole Minister could ever be omniscient, but a staff team can be! So you can end up paying for a staff who take on work currently undertaken by volunteers – and so gain little, lose funds, and effectively deny a biblical concept.

2 **Confusion over roles**

This is an issue of ***leadership***. It is becoming common for larger churches to confuse leadership with staffing. Where there is a gifted staff team, working out of one base and being together day by day, they tend to end up as the de facto leadership team. This again creates a 'professional church' led by employees, and loses out on the subtle differences in role between a charity's trustees and the staff they employ to carry out the day-to-day work. The church's decision-making bodies can then find themselves rubber-stamping decisions the staff have taken.

3 **Tensions between staff and volunteers**

This is an issue of **human sensitivity**. Tensions can arise when there are a number of very part-time staff, and some church officers and others are putting in long hours. It is not uncommon to find an Office Secretary working ten hours a week with two or three office volunteers working, perhaps, eight hours each. If it is seen as a matter of time (though it is not), where do you draw the line? Or you might get a Children's Worker employed for six hours a week, when the Church Secretary puts in twelve hours, unpaid.

4 **Poor staff management**

This is an issue of **responsibility**. Once you employ staff, not only do the trustees (ie. the church council or equivalent) have major legislative responsibilities, there is a need for the management of those staff. This takes skill and time – but needs to be done well because the benefits are significant. Who should undertake this? Few churches do it well. Training Notes TN20 offer some structural ways forward. (Note: volunteers also need quality management – and churches are no better at this.)

5 **Payment**

This is an issue of **cost**. It may be obvious, but a large proportion of a church's budget can end up going on paying staff (salaries, pensions, national insurance, expenses, office accommodation, etc.). Take on too large a commitment and you can end up with redundancies – or constant appeals for funds. If you cannot find the money in the first place, no staff appointments may be possible.

6 **Tradition**

This is an issue of **change**. Whenever you appoint a staff member, someone is bound to remind the church that you never needed this in the past (forgetting that things may have been very different then), and this is a waste of money. Those who gave hours of their time when younger find it difficult that today's church members appear to have less commitment and loyalty (this is often true) and so there are appeals to finance paid posts instead.

These are all real dangers. Several of them can be minimised if there is a clear policy of what kind of posts should be staff and which should be not, constructed perhaps on the six points made in the first part of these notes.

Two post-scripts

- 1 Some say that people are not prepared to offer their time now like they once did. I disagree. But what I do find is that people are only prepared to do this if they know that there is a much more professional approach to such offers than would have been true in the past, and that the time they can offer is less than would once have been the case. So is there excellent management of volunteers, limited term service, clear expectations both ways, the chance to back out without losing face, and proper training on offer? This implies a proper level of volunteer care, and that in some churches means a paid member of staff dedicated to just this!
- 2 You may have someone who can offer considerable time and who has both the skills and the energy required (perhaps they are taking early retirement). That is great, but never assume it will continue. In fact if the post qualifies for payment on my list above, it may be better to pay the person and let them Gift Aid the salary back to the church.

At least that shows the true cost on budgets, and saves embarrassment when a successor is appointed who does need to be paid.

These notes are available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/resources/training/tn37.pdf. See also Article A3, *Salary differentials for Christian staff*, Training Notes TN20, *Line management in a church staff team*, TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, and others. For indexes of all items available on the site, visit the [resources page](#).

Contact John if you would like to enquire about consultancy on church staffing, or training on staff management.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow and cover the six categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN37 under Structures (with a link to Management).

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