



Put someone in charge

TN90 Training Notes series: Management

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We are used to individual church members taking responsibility for certain broad areas of ministry. One obvious example is the role of Church Treasurer.

In many churches of any size these days there may be a treasury team: one person is the Book-keeper, one person oversees Gift Aid, in larger churches there may be an Accountant.

But there should always be a Treasurer, the trustee with oversight of financial strategy and day-to-day accounting. The treasury team has a clear leader. The financial buck comes to a stop at one person.

That is good because when there is a financial issue to sort, one person takes the responsibility. Note that this is an issue of **responsibility** not so much of **time**. Some Treasurers do not spend long hours on this job because all the work is done by others. They take responsibility for it all and act as the figurehead and strategic thinker. Having said that, most Treasurers work their socks off!

Some churches follow this principle of 'one person in charge' for their children and young people's work, where one member heads the team of all the group leaders.

There are other examples too. Some churches have a Director of Music or a Worship Leader, others have a Small Group Co-ordinator, Baptist and similar churches have a Church Secretary as an overall Administrator.

Larger churches that employ a staff team may well apportion such areas of responsibility to different staff members. One may be in overall charge of pastoral care, or families work, or evangelism, or a specific congregation if the church has more than one. The idea of paid staff having responsibility for wide roles is well established.

What I want to promote in these notes is the idea of extending this concept to voluntary church members in churches of all sizes, and to areas of church life that would be unusual even for a staff member to oversee. In many of these cases the church may at present have a 'committee' (a word I advise churches to avoid if at all possible). But however collaborative that may sound, I believe there may be a better way.

Example: Church communication

Few churches put one person in charge of every aspect of communication. Some larger churches have a staff member with Communication in their title, but I don't find many churches asking one member of the congregation to take this on, just as you would ask a Treasurer to be in overall charge of the church's use of finance. Why not?

Communication is a wide topic and few churches claim to be good at it. Consider:

Internal communication

- how you share news (print, social media, email, announcements, texting, screens);
- how all these media can work together rather than in isolation from each other;
- whether this is done on Sundays and/or through small groups and/or in other ways;
- how people get to hear unofficially – grapevine, gossip – and what happens as a result;
- how the leadership keeps in touch with church members' views.

External communication

- how you put out news beyond the church membership (print, signboards, website);
- quality standards for print and design: branding;
- what your buildings and grounds (and people!) communicate;
- links to the local media.

Most churches have different people responsible for different elements within all this (such as a notice-sheet producer, a newsletter editor, a webmaster, a print designer, a press officer), but few have anyone charged with the responsibility of overall oversight and co-ordination, perhaps with a team made up of these people.

Some churches have a Communications Committee – but most committees are good at talk but weak on action. When you have seven people on a committee no one feels the ultimate responsibility for following up every decision.

Better to form a team with one overall leader/co-ordinator who has oversight of all communication, and the members made up of the workers within the field. Like Treasurers this overall co-ordinator might be one of the communications workers, but might equally be someone who did none of these tasks themselves but who thought strategically across all these media and acted as a figurehead for the whole subject. I repeat, this is an issue of **responsibility** not necessarily large amounts of **time**.

Other possible areas of church life

We are used to the idea of a financial supremo more than a communications co-ordinator. But there are plenty of other larger areas of church operations where no one person is usually responsible (unless you are a large church with a specialist member of staff). Here are some examples to consider.

Visitor care and integration

- Sunday welcome and visitors/newcomers team
- mid-week reception (desk, phone)
- co-ordination for visiting newcomers
- newcomers events
- route in to small group membership or Alpha-style course
- membership processes and classes

Every-member ministry

- church database and record keeping
- gifts identification through small groups
- newcomers ministry links
- apprenticeship strategy
- training programmes
- posts to be filled

Outreach and service

- Alpha-style courses
- evangelism training
- outreach events
- practical service teams
- links with local community groups
- specialist groups (eg. men's meetings)

Employment of staff

- recruitment of new staff
- induction and exit interviews
- line management and appraisal
- HR issues and employment legislation
- record keeping
- pastoral care of staff

Other ideas to explore might include

- pastoral care
- big events
- young people and children
- decision-making structures
- music
- catering and hospitality, and so on

In larger churches there may be an Operations Manager who has a general brief over all these areas. But even here there is a case for other appointments over specific areas such as the above examples, with the Operations Manager as the overall co-ordinator of it all.

So my plea is to take the Treasurer principle and apply it to other areas of church life. The idea is to ask one person to take responsibility rather than giving this to a committee or group where no one feels it all depends on them. The idea applies to small churches with volunteers doing this as much as to large churches with members of staff.

The point is to make one person feel the responsibility of ensuring things happen – to put one person in charge.

Advantages of a one-person buck-stopper

There are plenty of reasons why this idea should be pursued.

- 1 Someone feels the ultimate responsibility for ensuring things happen, that decisions are actioned.
- 2 When things go wrong (as they will), it is clear who needs to ensure that they are sorted and a repeat problem is avoided.
- 3 Broad areas of church life get co-ordinated – avoiding the risk of different people working against each other.
- 4 You save hours of people's time in ineffective committee meetings, with the focus now on action more than on talk.
- 5 Decisions can be made and actioned quickly rather than waiting weeks as can happen when it is not clear who is responsible.
- 6 You can have a real team (of workers, not talkers) involved under a clear team leader.
- 7 It stops everything reverting to the Minister by default.

Note that the leader envisaged does not necessarily *do* everything (far from it), but is responsible for ensuring that the right things get *done*.

So in the case of communication, someone is thinking and actioning how the website needs to be supported by the news-sheet, how a mess-up when two people booked the same room for the same time can be avoided in future, and which media to use to publicise a church outreach event. It's all about co-ordination and action.

Dangers of a one-person buck-stopper

But this does not mean that there will not be problems.

- 1 This one person can fall down on the job – and it may be difficult to move them on.
- 2 Church members may be too busy or stressed to take on such enhanced responsibility (which is why larger churches employ staff).
- 3 You may not be able to find people capable of this level of creative responsibility.
- 4 Someone needs to line manage all these people – the Minister is often not trained in how to do this and may not have the energy to do so.
- 5 Someone takes control and sets up an empire so that everything is done in their way.
- 6 There is less guard against error – it is a risky route to follow.
- 7 Those responsible for different elements of the topic may not take kindly to a new layer of perceived management: for example if the newsletter editor is now responsible to a communications supremo.

So it's not all plain sailing by any means. It needs introducing with great care or you upset people, the person appointed needs a crystal-clear role definition, and there is another vital point....

Accountability

The Treasurer has an accountability structure built into the post. The Trustees (Church Council or whoever) appoint the Treasurer who is one of them and reports to them. There is a governance body ensuring this role is carried out properly. So, yes, there is a committee involved but in oversight, not at an operational level.

So if you appoint a Communications Co-ordinator or set up any other such post, ensure that there is proper accountability to a higher body. As with the Treasurer this will probably need to be the Trustees but that may not always follow.

Why not try it out in one or two key areas and see what happens? My point is that we do this already in certain areas (such as finance) – why not in others? I would value feedback and will build that in to future updates of these notes.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN90. See also Articles A32, *Be creative as a line manager*, and A47, *15 principles of volunteering*, plus Training Notes TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, TN58, *Beware committees*, TN136, *Restructuring your committees*, and TN139, *Church workers in teams*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN90 under Management (with a link to Leadership).

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>