



# 15 principles of volunteering

*By examining five ministries*

**A47** Articles series: Management

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**The word 'volunteer' brings two different ideas to mind. One is someone who offers to fulfil a role rather than being forced into it. The second is someone who receives no money to carry out a task as opposed to someone who is paid for the work. Churches of course depend on such people, in both meanings of the term. Whether 'volunteer' is quite the right word in a church setting is another matter.**

Much is written on how to motivate and support volunteers and I train in this area myself. But in this article I experiment with a different approach: starting with specific tasks within church life that require 'volunteers' and listing volunteering principles that might apply.

The five I have chosen are those who serve in some way in

- Worship services
- Finance
- Governance
- Small groups
- Outreach events

In each case I take three volunteering issues that apply and so build up a total list of 15.

## 1: Worship services

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For most Sunday (I shall assume) services in most churches a large number of people are involved. In some, especially larger, churches some of these roles will be paid but in most they will not be. In some churches there will be ordained Ministers who fulfil the first two or three of these, but in others or on regular occasions, it will be lay volunteers.

## Not just a service leader ...

You will need to adapt this list to fit the tradition and style of your own church. But consider the following.

- A leader for the service – someone to guide the form of worship so there is order.
- A leader or priest to administer the sacraments – an authorised person to lead a service of Communion or baptism, for example.
- A preacher or teacher of God's word – which might be someone giving a 40 minute exposition, a 10 minute outline or an all-age talk.
- Instrumentalists to provide the singing accompaniment: often a band these days, but still in many churches an organist or, in others, a single keyboard player.
- People to lead the singing – these may be vocalists in a music group or singers in a choir.
- Those responsible for sound and vision – technical people on the sound desk and operating the computer which runs the projector for churches where everything is now on screen.
- Those who participate up-front during the service by leading intercessions, reading Scripture out loud, assisting with Communion, or telling of what God has been doing in their life.
- Those who give announcements promoting church events or needs.
- Those who lead and teach in children's and teens' groups.
- Welcomers and stewards – those who ensure that people find seats, plus any newcomers' team to spot visitors and put them at ease.
- Those who are responsible for any financial offering and its subsequent sorting.
- Those providing refreshments before, after or during the service.
- Those who have prepared the building beforehand: chair movers, cleaners, vergers, unlockers and flower arrangers, for example, and those who clear up or shift furniture afterwards.

You may well be able to add to this list from how things work out at your church.

No mention has yet been made of all the preparation that goes on in the days before the service. Preachers and children's teachers may spend many hours in study and planning, service leaders similarly. Messy Church services require a considerable amount of planning and craft preparation in advance.

Yes, there is quite an army of people to put one service together! Many hours of people-time can go into the simplest of worship events. Most of us are so used to it that we forget the scale of people's involvement across this wide range of activity. It can be helpful to see the list above.

## Three volunteering principles

Here now are three elements of good volunteer management that have particular application for Sunday services: project management, training, and saying thank you.

### 1: Think big project

Volunteers need to feel that someone is 'in charge' and the activity is well managed. It might be worth asking who is in charge of co-ordinating this broad array of people involved in running a Sunday service.

The answer would normally be that the service leader is ultimately in command but in practice most of these volunteers will be members of groups that do not interact that much with each other.

So rotas of flower arrangers, welcomers, lesson readers and coffee makers, to give just four examples, will be seen as independent lists without much thought for how they might link together.

But might it be better if **everyone** was seen as contributing to the one activity so that there could be a measure at least of co-ordination? Presumably the musicians and the service leaders and preachers talk to each other, but what about ensuring that the flower arrangers are aware of the theme of the service, or that the coffee-makers see themselves as part of the welcome team?

Another way of looking at it is to see one grouping of service leader, preacher, musicians, prayers and readers under the Minister for the church and the 'practical roles' of technicians, welcomers and refreshment providers being under the general control of a senior lay officer or, in some larger churches, a Director of Operations on the staff who has responsibility for Sunday front-of-house.

But what will be lacking in most churches is much sense that *all* these people are working together to produce something worthwhile. Yet what people take away from that service may depend as much on the quality of the welcome and refreshments afterwards as on the preaching or music.

One good principle to motivate volunteers is to help them understand where they fit into the bigger picture. Most people in this long list will benefit from some sense of being part of not just their own specialist team but also a one-off project team for that one service.

The idea is worth exploring by individual churches for what might be done and what the implications of the change might be if church thinking shifted from many specialist, ongoing teams on a Sunday to a project team picked for that one event.

## 2: Value training for all

Putting aside budgeted funds and ensuring that everyone can receive quality training should help volunteers to see that their roles are taken seriously. But when it comes to Sunday worship, what training should there be?

Here are examples, sadly noted by their absence in many churches I work with. If Sunday worship is your church's shop window, surely it is worth seeking to provide something of an appropriate quality.

Training can be by reading, by attendance at external courses, by internal events and by team training together without external input. Here are some examples.

- Preachers: biblical studies, preaching technique, use of projection software.
- Leaders: liturgical studies, service construction, listening to God.
- Lesson readers: understanding different types of biblical passage, voice control and proper use of a microphone, the use of different speeds, pauses, emphases.
- Leaders of intercessions: different forms of prayer, enabling others to pray through their leadership rather than doing it all themselves.
- The tech team: the use of the equipment, new and updated software, enhancing the up-front speaker, troubleshooting when things go wrong.
- Welcomers: people-skills, recognising and talking to newcomers, drawing other

people into conversations, remembering names and faces.

- Flower arrangers: more advanced features of their art.

The one group used to the idea of at least preparation and rehearsal will be the musicians.

The trouble is that most churches have no expectation of all this training and so, when it is suddenly suggested, people see this as criticism of their work, believing years of practical service to be sufficient for all they do.

Sunday services need a training plan for everyone involved – and a sense of excitement in seeking to help everyone focus on meeting God and each other rather than moaning about a poor speaker, prayers that went on too long, and coffee that was instant and cold. Everyone, however experienced, can benefit from training.

## 3: Express genuine thanks

One way of encouraging volunteers is to express thanks to them in different ways so that they can see that their service is recognised and appreciated. In our example of Sunday worship there might be means of expressing thanks within each team.

- The Minister thanks the leading and preaching teams for their contribution at appropriate moments through the year and, individually, after specific events when something has been done particularly well.
- Similarly the leader of the tech team thanks all the members together at meetings but also makes a point of expressing one-to-one thanks on particular occasions (ensuring that no one gets missed out in this!).
- The Children's Church leader makes a point of ensuring each member of the team for each different age range is recognised in an appropriate way and thanked for their time and commitment.

In each of these cases assume a team with a leader. Churches that simply put people on 'rotas' for these activities without any sense of team and therefore of team leadership will find it much harder to ensure people are appreciated for what they do.

But is there not a place for the service leader expressing thanks one-to-one to each person who has contributed in a special way after each service? This creates a feeling of working

together across different disciplines and of being appreciated for the part each person plays in contributing to the one-off event.

It does not take much for the service leader to have a quick and quiet word with the musicians, the lesson readers, the intercessors, the coffee-makers and some of the welcomers over post-service coffee. It makes a world of difference.

Recently I did not manage to see the PowerPoint operator after a service I had been speaking at. She is a teenager who is brilliant at her job and

had put through my sermon slides for me from the notes I gave her. So I sent her a short email to thank her (though I would have preferred to do it in person). Her reaction was so positive to having been thanked (her mother told me later) that I realised once more the power of this simple action.

So, who says 'thank you' to the service leader and preacher? It would be good to think that there is a culture within the church of people expressing thanks to those with upfront roles.

## 2: Finance

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Handling church finance requires a range of tasks – and is very different today from when everything was neatly inscribed in bound ledger books. In larger churches some of the roles that follow may be paid jobs but here I have in mind several volunteers or, sometimes, even just one to cover everything (apart from the Trustees item).

### Not just a Treasurer ...

- For some churches cash has almost disappeared as a means of giving but there is still a need for people (with appropriate checks) to count, record and bank what cash is received, whether by giving or from sales.
- Some churches appoint a Gift Aid administrator (perhaps linked to a 'Planned Giving' or envelope scheme) to keep account of this aspect of giving and put in regular claims for tax to be repaid.
- There is a need for a book-keeper (called, perhaps, a Finance Officer or Accountant) to record receipts and payments, whether on a spread-sheet or in a digital accounting package. This person may, with due authorisation, also pay bills and prepare accounts for examination or audit.
- Special projects may need separate treatment with a fund raiser or others responsible for encouraging support, handling the books, and making payments.
- Stewardship programmes and annual gift days require organisation.

The setting of budgets and communication with budget holders will be a particular focus at one time of year.

- There may be administrators for special funds within the church accounts: a church bookstall, mission giving, a church weekend away, historic trusts.
- There is then a role that most will not consider for this list: the communicator of the church's finance to the congregation – which may be best done by someone who is not a financial expert.
- There will be church Trustees who need to receive budgets and regular management accounts. They take governance decisions in the light of these.
- There may also be a Finance Group, made up either of those who fulfil the roles above or those able to give the advice required in financial strategy.
- Finally, and over all these tasks, there is the role of the Treasurer in helping the Trustees to set strategy and make good financial decisions on the wise handling of the church's finances. This may involve issues of investment, risk management, tax and financial compliance.

In many churches one Treasurer will handle the majority of these roles (and be a Trustee). But increasingly the task is becoming too much for one person, especially if he or she has a full time job, and the post is being split into different components.

### Three volunteering principles

Here are three principles of good volunteer management that apply to a finance function.

#### 4: Discover people's gifts

Volunteering specifically in a church has an added dimension to it: the idea of service for Christ as his disciple.

#### Finance as a spiritual ministry

Many people see financial work as falling into the necessary and even important work within a church but not as a spiritual ministry. Yet the Gospels have a great deal to say about money, the epistles teach that God gives specifically administrative gifts to his Church, and people's giving may well be a clearer indication of spirituality than most other aspects of church life. In my experience godly Treasurers play a vital role in the spiritual health of a church. It is a key role.

Once these roles are seen as 'ministry', the search for financial volunteers from Treasurer to collection counters takes on a new importance. It is not just principles of volunteering that have to be taken into account but also principles of Christian service within a context of discipleship.

#### Different gifts and experiences

People hear the word Treasurer and assume you need an accountant. But many churches are small enough for anyone who is well organised and meticulous in detail to handle the finances. Larger churches need someone more qualified.

The Treasurer role may well need someone who can read a balance sheet well and determine financial policy, who is used to accounting packages and who will understand the wording of the latest SORP. But there are other gifts required.

- Much of book-keeping requires someone with a keen eye for detail, the ability to pick up a simple financial software package quickly, and a high degree of accuracy. Most good administrators can carry out this task well.
- The work of counting cash amounts or opening envelopes needs those who can work with a due sense of care and be trusted to handle cash securely.
- The one who organises a stewardship campaign or an annual renewing of pledges needs to understand both people and planning.

- The one who puts the accounts across to the congregation may not need financial expertise but will require communication skills and innovative thinking.

#### Knowing your congregation

It follows from this that in this ministry (and, for that matter, in all church ministries) the vital information that you need is embedded in the church database, in whatever form that exists. You require some understanding of people's:

- spiritual gifts and natural aptitudes;
- interests and passions;
- experience in the required areas;
- spiritual maturity, faith and wisdom;
- time availability.

It is rarely wise to seek to discover this kind of information by an overall survey of the congregation. You end up with too much data to be processed and then you hurt people by not following up offers of help. It is best done bit by bit, group by group, over a year or more.

But the point remains – you cannot mobilise a congregation accurately without discovering and holding basic information about them all. In the financial field, requiring a range of gifts, this is particularly important.

#### 5: Limit scope and length

The work of handling finance for even a modest-sized church is considerable. Many people are simply unable to take on a voluntary post that is going to involve more than an hour or two each week. For other reasons, see Training Notes TN100, *Why some volunteer, why some don't*, on this website. This poses real problems with a financial role where you cannot simply agree to drop that ministry until a suitable person appears. So here are two aspects of church volunteering that apply particularly here.

#### Break the role down into smaller parts

This makes sense for gifting as shown above, but also for producing roles that people can see are possible when you already have employment, young children, or older parents to care for. I have already listed the kind of roles that can be created in church finance.

The problem is that the more you divide up the work, the more time you spend communicating with each other, and the greater the potential for inefficiencies. But it can produce a team – see Principle 8 below – and this can have great advantages if done properly.

**Set up posts with a time limit**

The history of local churches is littered with examples of people who offered for a year and stayed for 40. They may have stayed to protect their identity or because there was no succession planning.

But today's millennials and others want none of that. They will offer – but expect limited-time posts which they can move on from after one or two years (or less in some cases). So setting up all church posts with a given shelf-life for each person is no bad idea. The Treasurer role probably needs two or three years to provide continuity, but other elements of the role could be shorter.

So make the norm one or two years with the possibility (and, usually, hope) of renewal, then people know it is no failure on their part to back out after that time.

**6: Define each role**

National legislation is moving towards the time when all voluntary posts will be expected to have role definitions and person profiles. But such things, provided they are kept really simple, can be of enormous benefit anyway.

**Role definition not list of duties**

A good role definition is not a long list of what has to be done. Instead and first, it tells you why the post exists by putting it into the spiritual context of what the church is all about – yes, for finance as for any other role. Then it explains who you are accountable to and who you work with – which in the way I am describing it would be something about the finance team, the Trustees, even the whole congregation.

Thirdly it lists responsibilities (for those who

need broad areas to grapple with) or sometimes duties (for those who need to be told exactly what to do). But these only make sense in the context of the two earlier sections. Keep the list short, grouping items if necessary.

So, what is the role of the finance team as a whole as well as for individual posts within it? Grappling with that question should result in motivation, satisfaction and clarity of job.

**Person profile**

But volunteer posts in a church, financial ones most certainly included, need a person profile too. In the financial world some of the posts will need specific expertise and experience. But what about faith, confidentiality and Christian character? I don't find many churches daring to include such things but they are included in the requirements for deacons in the Pastoral Epistles.

This would then set financial roles in a completely different light from how many church members see them.

**Personal development**

Good volunteering expects people to grow into their roles and, for some, out of them to something more challenging. So does your church help your book-keeper gain a sense of movement in their ministry so that, if suitably gifted, they could take on more responsibility or a more advanced role?

This should include the idea of training. We train young people's leaders, and perhaps worship leaders, the music group and others. But why not the finance team? Both in financial matters (new software for example) but also in matters of faith, as for any church member. See Principle No. 2 above.

## 3: Governance

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Churches look for people to be elected or appointed to Councils and committees to be part of the decision-making process. There are particular issues that impact such posts.

**Not just a committee member ...**

First consider the church offices we might cover under this general 'governance' heading. Here are three categories – you will see that I am taking the meaning of the term quite widely.

- **Church Trustees or Council**

These may be elected by the trustee body itself or by a church meeting. In Church of England churches this will be the Parochial Church Council (PCC), elected by those who attend the APCM.

- **Committee members**  
These include those who serve on a Finance Team, a Worship Working Group, and other similar bodies responsible for strategy, usually sub-groups of the Trustees. Some such groups may have day-to-day management as well as governance responsibilities. Some may have a limited life.
- **'Leadership Team' / 'Deacons' / 'Elders'**  
These are terms used in different ways in the various denominations. The distinction between what is or is not a governance body is not always clear within some church structures. But some groups with titles such as these have a clear, governance role as in the Diaconate in many Baptist churches.

The second point to note is that this group of volunteers will include those in any or all the following five categories:

- those who have been selected for the role – head-hunted or recommended and approached or persuaded to take this on;
- those who have offered to undertake this responsibility knowing the offer will be immediately accepted, who have actively volunteered themselves in that sense of the word;
- those who have been elected by a church body or, more likely, a whole church meeting, in a competitive setting;
- those who have stood for such elections when there have not been sufficient offers for a ballot and those who have stood have automatically been appointed;
- those where a specific church responsibility automatically puts them on a governance body (such as an Anglican Church Warden on the Standing Committee and PCC).

There is overlap between these categories but at heart there are two areas of contrast: those who offer v those who are asked, and those selected v those elected. The first contrast is common to all volunteering posts, the second only applies in governance and similar settings where there are elections.

### Three volunteering principles

As with the previous two areas of ministry here now are three issues of volunteering that have a particular application to the ministry; in this case of governance.

## 7: Check motives

Why do people volunteer? There has been research on this in several studies over the years giving a range of reasons, mostly altruistic but sometimes questionable, as to why people offer their services without pay.

The pattern in churches is not that different from society as a whole, although there are special issues in church work where volunteering is seen in a context of practical service which is the privilege of all Christian disciples.

Many who offer for a church role on a council or committee will be seeking to give their expertise and their time to ensure that the church functions effectively. For many this will be part of an offering of themselves to their Lord in glad response for the blessings they have received from him.

But that does not mean that some more questionable motives can creep in – and none of us is free from such temptation. Consider the following possible reasons for volunteering.

- **Status**  
Successful election as a Trustee can be thought to bring with it a measure of status in the church community – although this is quite contrary to the idea of servant leadership. Some may offer or stand for election for this reason.
- **Power**  
Appointment to any committee can lead to some measure of power, whether through the ability to influence decisions, to exert authority over others (such as church employees) or to have access to confidential information. Some value the power that comes with governance positions.
- **Opposition**  
An election as a Deacon can enable someone with a grudge to oppose the church's Minister or leadership team, or to ensure ideas for change are neutralised. Some stand for this reason, perhaps with others, as a pressure group.

When training on volunteering in churches I usually include a section on motivation because it is important that, just because someone offers for service or stands for election, this does not necessarily mean that all their thinking is generous and sacrificial. This becomes particularly relevant for governance positions. It is wise to be aware of this and stress that such service is not about status or power.

Check up the notes, *Why some offer, why some don't*, at TN100 on the Training Notes page of the Resources section of this website.

## 8: Investigate character

For many roles in church life the person profile, defining character, gifting, experience, etc., might be described as the most important feature of those appointed. This is particularly so for those in governance roles. The Pastoral Epistles make this explicitly clear.

But church practice often finds this too much of a challenge. In some churches the task is seen of finding anyone prepared to stand for such bodies, or that offers are gladly accepted without any form of testing.

This is a principle for all volunteering roles. If you are looking for people to serve in a retail establishment, the way they treat customers matters. If you need people to be part of a team, the willingness and ability to submit to this discipline is key. Safeguarding is now rightly seen as a major issue for all work with children and vulnerable adults.

If you are seeking volunteers to govern a church, Scripture makes it very clear that character matters. Trustees, Council members, Deacons or whoever are, whether they like it or not, role models for the Christian faith.

How can you serve on an Outreach Group without having a passion for evangelism? How can you offer for a leadership team if you do not display the fruit of the Spirit in your life and a clear understanding of Christian belief?

So what does your church do to help people elect new office-holders?

You should describe the task they are expected to carry out, but also the kind of people they need to be. I cover this point more fully in Training Notes TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*, in the Resources section of this website. That draws lessons from various Scripture passages and then lists possible requirements under the headings of:

- Essentials
- Church membership
- Gifting
- Competence
- Experience
- Teamwork
- Availability
- Legal requirement.

But within all this it is character that matters most of all. Churches should not be frightened to face this issue. Just because people are volunteers does not mean such matters can be side-lined.

## 9: Work in teams

It is surprising how few people see a church committee as any form of team, but if you look at it through this lens you get a completely different view of your meetings. They are gatherings of the team to enable everyone to work together. I express this in Article A24, *Mission-shaped Councils*, on the Articles index page in the Resources section of this website.

But the idea can be applied to all volunteering. Most people find any task more enjoyable when performed as part of a group. Team-working takes this idea one step further when the group grows into a team which has learned to take off their masks and be real with each other.

Volunteering should, wherever possible, be seen in a team context. Church councils and committees should seek to play as teams as much as they can. Even if they have been elected rather than selected, they can seek to play like a team (purists say teams have to be selected).

Even if volunteers work solo, they can take encouragement from seeing themselves as part of a team. Lesson readers, intercessors, flower arrangers and others usually work on their own. But there can be real value in knowing you are part of a team which meets regularly for encouragement, for training and for learning from each other.

This is especially true for governance groups. If their focus is on meetings then each person will be trying to get their way. If their priority is on playing as a team the focus moves to problem-solving together, valuing one another, working in harmony with each other, even though people come with differing ideas.

It makes a meeting a special event in the ongoing life of a team, rather than the be all and end all of what this group is about.

It should mean you are all aiming to play together on the same side. Church business meetings without this concept too often end up with everyone on different sides.

But that does not mean to say that life is easy. Working together as a team can be intensely frustrating as well as truly satisfying.

To become a team any group needs a single task and vision that the group as a whole is working towards, an agreed way of going about their task, a defined membership and someone who is the acknowledged leader.

So the invitation might well not be so much to 'sit on this committee' but to join 'us in our team'. That gives a different feel.

## 4: Small groups

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Most churches of any size will have a wide range of people involved in leading or hosting home groups, teaching in children's/teens' groups and enabling Alpha-type groups in some way. So this is an obvious group of workers to investigate in this article.

### Not just a home group leader ...

The shape of a church's small group structure will depend to a large extent on local decision-making and the size and style of ministry of the church in question. But have the following general roles in mind.

- **Adult discipleship groups**  
These may be for mutual support, prayer and study of the Scriptures. These have traditionally been known as 'home groups' but there are many other possible names. The balance between these three key roles will differ from church to church, but the idea of mutual support and encouragement should be a key factor. They normally meet on a week-night but some, usually for retired people, meet during the day.
- **Children's and young teens' groups**  
These will exist for teaching and fun activity. These normally meet on a Sunday during main church services, but there may also be a week-night or Saturday activity. In larger churches they may be split into school years, but many smaller churches will have a wide age-range to manage in one group.
- **Older teens' groups**  
These will have a more flexible programme involving discussion, activity, outings, study and prayer.
- **Outreach and beginners' groups**  
These are designed to teach and discuss the basics of the Christian faith and usually lasting for a fixed number of sessions. The purpose may be to run an Alpha, Christianity Explored or equivalent course, to offer instruction in baptism classes or, for Anglican churches, Confirmation classes, or to run a parenting course or a book club.
- **Activity groups**  
Some groups set up to offer a discipleship element within a shared activity (such as for the church choir or music group, or the leaders of a Messy Church activity). Meetings here may contain both what might happen in a normal home group but

with the addition of time for planning or rehearsal for an activity

- **Speaker meetings**  
Examples include a monthly group for seniors where there is external input coupled with a meal or refreshments.

This list does not include very small groups such as prayer triplets or one-to-ones.

Within these possibilities volunteers may have roles which can vary in terms of autonomy, authority, independence and frequency. For example, taking these four aspects in turn:

- In some churches home groups devise their own programmes, but in others they are expected to follow a common syllabus chosen by the church's leaders.
- Some of the activities have clear leaders who decide on how the group will meet and lead the sessions, whereas others have people who are, in effect, co-ordinators and each member of the group will share responsibility for leading sessions and/or for hosting the meetings.
- Some groups will operate on their own, but others are part of a structure where the leaders of each group form a team and meet regularly for support and communication.
- Some children's groups have the same volunteers involved week in, week out. Others operate on a rota system so that no leader, for example, has to commit to more than a monthly session. This means more people may offer to help but creates problems of continuity and security for the children.

### Three volunteering principles

As before here are three principles of volunteering that are particularly relevant in this case. Teaching, or choice of visiting speakers, will be part of most of these roles. This raises issues of how much control the church will want to have over what is taught and who decides this. The following principles reflect this in differing ways.

## 10: Give due recognition

This, it has to be said, is a common issue to consider for all volunteers but a tricky one to handle well in a Christian setting.

If we take the human element first, it is important to provide those who have paid a cost in terms of time and certain sacrifices with some form of recognition as a means of expressing gratitude. In an earlier article we looked at the value of a spoken expression of thanks but there are other means used in volunteering too such as being:

- named with, perhaps, photograph on website or display boards;
- presented with a certificate or badge in recognition of length of service at particular milestones;
- given a Christmas present of some kind;
- offered an occasional party or outing;
- noticed and thanked by whoever is in charge of the organisation;

and for a church, being:

- included on a regular basis in lists for Sunday intercessions or any prayer diary;

If people serve but no one appears to take any notice of their service, they naturally become frustrated and feel of little value.

In a church context, this raises two areas of danger. First, Christians serve and, it can be argued, should not do this for human recognition but only to please the Lord Jesus Christ as part of their discipleship. Most Christians would be appalled at a church providing a list of those who had given to the church financially, and the giving of time and skill is not far removed from the giving of money.

Against this, in our example, would be the need to promote church groups or to offer them identity by listing them on a website or display board with the leader's photograph included.

The second danger, common to every enterprise, is to show appreciation and hence value to some volunteers but not to others. So the young people's group leaders have their names in lights whereas the cleaners or washer-uppers do not. It is easy to highlight leadership roles at the expense of behind-the-scenes service.

What is needed is some form of policy statement for how volunteer recognition is worked out throughout the church. The issue should, at least, be on the table. It would save small group leaders telling me they have done the job for years without any formal recognition at all.

## 11: Set control limits

Following selection the church then needs to be clear on the level of control that the centre has (be that Minister, staff, Trustees or an eldership group) over the small group leader. Some volunteers are capable of wise decisions and are frustrated if placed in a structure resembling a strait-jacket. Others value some hand-holding and are quite content to follow orders.

There are churches where home or children's groups can follow any programme they choose, and other churches where the syllabus is tightly controlled and leaders instructed in even how to lead each session within that syllabus.

Here are typical issues to consider.

- Who decides on the teaching syllabus of the group (or the course material being followed, or the speakers to invite) and how much freedom does the group leader have to vary this?
- Who decides on the purpose of the structure and the format and content of meetings – is there scope for creativity within an agreed set of values?
- If a central programme is offered so that all the groups follow this, what action takes place if one leader decides to take their group onto a different course?
- What if a leader shifts in their own beliefs and no longer agrees with the core doctrines of the church? What kind of initial agreement was set up to take situations like this into account?

Volunteers will not be under contract as a paid employee would be, but they can bring great value or serious harm to any enterprise by their actions. Micro-management may prevent people volunteering, but lack of any discipline can be more dangerous.

## 12: Deliver personal review

The concept of appraisal is common in employed staff management, but much rarer in volunteering. But if we see this not as a means of control but as a genuine attempt at enabling development in workers, it should be there, at least for leadership/teaching roles. Here I use the less emotive term 'review'.

What you do not want is suddenly to thrust this idea on a volunteer: it needs to be a clear expectation of the role. If applied well it should demonstrate that the church:

- takes this leadership or teaching role seriously;

- is committed to investing time and energy in each worker to help them develop;
- aims to do it well for everyone's benefit.

An annual review should take time to go through the past year with care, identifying lessons learned and noting what has gone well and what might be done differently another time.

It should then move on to the future to discover what would help and support the volunteer by

way of challenge, change in role, training, or alterations to the way the church treats them.

The review should not just cover the role itself but the experience and gifting of the volunteer, their membership of any team and their relationship with whoever in church leadership is responsible for the groups they are part of and which they lead. This may well be the time to reassess the vision for the groups in question as well.

## 5: Outreach events

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The final part of this article considers the kind of outreach activities a church might be involved in. It includes enquirers' groups in this category even though they were also listed under small groups in Part 4.

### Not just an Alpha group leader ...

The key means of outreach will be church members witnessing to friends and colleagues and inviting them to specific church events. Here we take those centrally-organised activities that require volunteers to run and staff them, while appreciating that these also depend on personal invitations. Here are some possible categories.

- **Enquirers' courses**  
Many churches run courses such as Alpha and Christianity Explored, either as occasional one-off series or on an almost continuous basis. These require a considerable investment in volunteer time to lead the events, prepare and serve meals (if these are included), lead table discussions, organise the setting up and packing down of each event, oversee technical issues, offer prayer support, and so on.
- **Life courses**  
These include video and discussion evenings designed for the local community, or for church members to invite friends, on topics such as marriage support, parenting (at various age-groups), and debt or personal finance. These too need a group of church volunteers to run them effectively and to engage with those who come.
- **Fresh Expression events**  
This broad heading includes regular events such as Messy Church and its spin-offs, plus a range of activities seeking

to meet local needs while presenting a clear focus on the good news of the Christian faith. These might include toddler groups if combined with some form of simple talk and worship time.

To take Messy Church as one example, this requires a considerable amount of innovative planning, craft preparation, table leadership at the event, cooking and serving meals for, often, large numbers, giving the talk, preparing singing, as well as all the logistics of collecting craft materials, setting up and packing away.

- **Evangelistic services**  
When a church arranges invitation services, usually with a visiting speaker, everyone is encouraged to invite others. But there need to be people to speak and lead the event, welcomers to make everyone feel at home, people to prepare and print publicity and others to distribute leaflets or invitations, not to mention musicians, sound and visual operators.  
  
The church may also run services in care homes, prisons or other institutions in the area, with loyal teams who often are not seen at work by the congregation.
- **Young people's events**  
Even if a church employs a Youth or Schools Worker, young people's work needs high levels of staffing to be effective, and especially so with outward-facing youth work. Volunteers in abundance are needed for young people's activities for the local community, sports activities, children's holiday clubs, after-

school sessions, and other events designed not just for the church's own young people.

- **Local visiting**

The scope for door-to-door work may not be what it used to be, but while the sects still employ it, Christians should not write it off. Some churches distribute print round the homes in the parish or area, especially at festival seasons, and a few door-knock at the same time to make it more personal. This requires a considerable number of people prepared to distribute and talk to people as a way of promoting the church's ministry.

- **Global mission**

Another aspect of outreach is a church's support for global mission, and in particular for members who have left the church to serve in specifically outreach ministries around the world. Volunteers may be involved in groups to promote support for such people in the church, and churches increasingly send people to Third World venues to partner with Christians in other parts of the world for special missions or for building projects.

- **Practical service**

Church members may be called upon to staff church projects in the local community: a drop-in centre, a food bank, litter picking, and so on. Some churches run coffee shops and bookshops.

There will also be involvement in community activities, food banks, events and local politics where Christians can demonstrate their faith in a public and personal way.

## Three volunteering principles

As in earlier sections here are three principles of volunteering that are particularly relevant in this case. The support of a team is one key idea, but not covered here as it has been taken above in Principle No. 9. Here are three other means of support particularly relevant to outreach work: issues of quality, failure and leadership

### 13: Seek quality

One way of encouraging outreach workers is to organise events where the media equipment is of good quality. Most children are used to hi-tech presentations at school with interactive white-boards and professional data projection.

Poor quality tech does not go down well.

Anyone who works in a corporate office will be using sophisticated hardware and software and will expect the same quality in any presentation at a guest event at church.

Alpha and similar courses are now themselves produced to a very high standard. The host church needs to be able to go some way towards matching this when they present the material. This calls for good sound mixing, PA and data projection with screens large enough for the numbers present and bright enough to counter typical daylight.

When it comes to print, for print is still very much a viable medium, anything being distributed to local homes needs to be on quality paper or card, in colour, with good photographic visuals and a look that speaks of professional design.

Welcome leaflets have to compete in a marketplace where normal standards are now well above what many churches seek to get by with. One feature of many new and independent churches is that they have embraced new technology and aim to achieve presentation standards that are at least as high as in the world of work, sport and education.

The church website needs to be seen to be designed for mobile use with a contemporary look and well-presented wording and graphics. Many look somewhat amateur.

The work of outreach is tough enough as it is, but if it is not backed up with quality presentations to match your area this will simply demoralise many who are seeking to give their time and energy to such ministry. That is why quality in facilities and presentations is a means of encouraging and supporting volunteers. But to balance this point we also need No. 14.

### 14: Offer freedom to fail

All volunteers need encouragement: whether in praise and thanks for their work, serving in teams and in clear support from others. Outreach workers often toil for years and may see little in the way of obvious results. To do this alone is demoralising. To have leaders of these activities that offer plenty of encouragement to their teams and who are themselves encouraged by others is a must.

Outreach, most will admit, is getting harder as the UK becomes increasingly pagan. It is possible to make mistakes in all areas of ministry, but in outreach there can often in many churches be a sense of failure.

Church leaders who preach some form of perfectionism can put many potential volunteers

off. With outreach work it is all the more important to show that when the going is tough it is support that is required, not criticism. Many forms of outreach do not produce quick results. Workers have to be in this for the long haul. When things do go wrong there are lessons to learn but then the need to carry on.

If this is recognised and if there is both sufficient encouragement and an acceptance that some things that are tried may not work and that is OK, people will serve.

### **15: Provide leadership support**

A vital element of encouragement is leadership support. The Minister, key leaders and trustees/PCC need to show that they are fully behind the work, in all kinds of ways. For example, by:

- taking an obvious interest in the work and asking pertinent questions;

- asking for regular reports to be tabled and discussed at trustees meetings;
- backing the work with sufficient financial and other resources;
- encouraging the whole church to get behind what is happening;
- releasing the volunteers involved from other expectations of time-consuming ministry;
- turning up to observe and help out at events;
- personal involvement wherever possible.

But in my experience, even if the Minister takes a clear lead, other leaders keep their distance. It may be that they are busy elsewhere but some means of support are not time-consuming, for example by a personal interest and asking after an event how it has gone.

This is much more valuable than a listed approach to thank everyone at an annual meeting.

## **Conclusion**

This article has used five areas of church ministry as the starting point to illustrate the application of, in each case, three volunteering principles. The fifteen recommendations that have resulted from this approach are far from a comprehensive list but highlight some of the ideas that are specifically relevant for differing areas of service.

- |                            |                           |                                |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1: Think big project       | 2: Value training for all | 3: Express genuine thanks      |
| 4: Discover people's gifts | 5: Limit scope and length | 6: Define each role            |
| 7: Check motives           | 8: Investigate character  | 9: Work in teams               |
| 10: Give due recognition   | 11: Set control limits    | 12: Deliver personal review    |
| 13: Seek quality           | 14: Offer freedom to fail | 15: Provide leadership support |

For a fuller treatment see, among other items on this website, Article A43, *Every member on active service*.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A47. See also Articles A8, *Worker agreements*, and A43, *Every member on active service*, plus Training Notes TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*, TN100, *Why some offer, why some don't*, and TN153, *How not to manage volunteers*, and several others on the five specific areas of ministry that this article covers.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A47 under Management.

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