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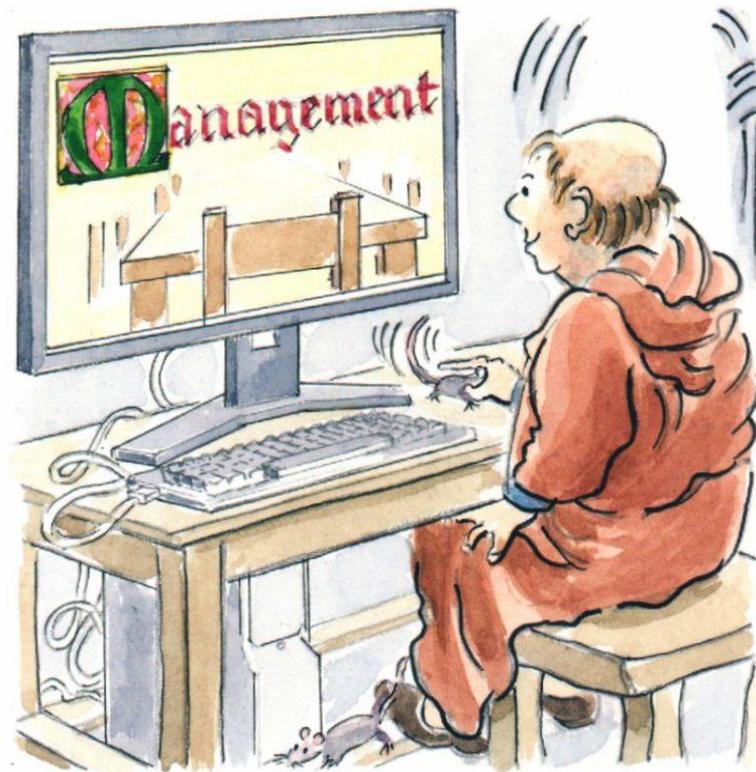
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Volunteering in church

Understanding service in a post-Covid world



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If you prefer to work from a screen, you may access this set of notes as a pdf today or later at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/News> and then the item for today's date.

Reasons why people offer their time and skills in daily life

Think widely: from formal volunteering (for a school, a sports club, a political society, a neighbourhood group, a charity, etc.) to informal (doing the shopping for a housebound neighbour, looking after someone else’s guinea pig when they are away, etc.).

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Factors that prevent people from volunteering (keep off church for now!)

What could be keeping the percentage of volunteers lower than it might be?

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Volunteers in our churches

The volunteering surveys distinguish between formal and informal volunteers.

Formal ‘volunteers’

Informal ‘volunteers’

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Why church members offer ...

Look again at the first list we drew up above. Which of these apply to churches in general? What others might we add for a Christian context?

... and why they don’t

Back to the second list above. Again, which of these apply to churches in general? What others might we add within a Christian context? Perhaps what people say to us.

Application

We could now look at any difference in emphasis for each of our lists above between the formal and informal roles in churches. And we might then apply all this specifically to any teams of volunteers we are personally responsible for or linked with in some way.

More importantly, we could ask which ones in the second list are excuses and which are genuine, and which ones relate back to the individual and which ones relate back to the church. It is all too easy for clergy and church staff to point the finger of blame in the wrong direction

On the issue of the people in the, perhaps, wrong jobs, see Training Notes TN36, *Square pegs in round holes*, in the Resources section of my website. For a fuller listing of the reasons we have looked at above, see Training Notes TN100, *Why some offer, why some don't*.

What Covid has done

Almost every church is struggling to find 'volunteers' in this post-Covid world. This is what has happened.

Churches were wonderfully supported by an ageing group of Christians brought up in a culture of offering time and skills for service. They loyally kept going. But then Covid and lockdowns meant there was a pause. This gave these people the understandable opportunity to say it was time to give up. They were getting too old and they were exhausted.

But there was no younger cohort to take over. The culture has changed, and today's parents are often both out at work and coping with childcare issues. At the same time the cost of living spiralled up and so employing paid staff became much more difficult. Hence the position we find ourselves in today.

Paid staff

Many (especially larger) churches now employ youth workers, community workers, administrators, music directors, pastoral assistants and others. Is this a healthy approach? What are the dangers?

A good case can be made for paying staff in the following situations:

- when the post requires a full working week, or most of one;
- when the post requires set availability times;
- when the post requires a specialist;
- when the post requires a pioneering leader;
- when church members are time-poor;
- when leaders are diverted from their priorities.

But there are dangers;

- a denial of body ministry;
- confusions over roles;
- tensions between staff and volunteers;
- poor staff management;
- the cost;
- tradition.

For more detail on these points, see TN37, *To pay or not to pay*, in the Resources section of the website.

2: Mobilising disciples

WEAKNESS 2: We are too church-centred in our thinking

What are our motives?

Why do we want volunteers to work for the church? The normal approach might be termed **CHURCH** – we want people to serve God to get the church jobs done.

We need a choir member, a home group leader, a caterer, a treasurer – so we look for one to plug the gap. The show must go on. This starts with the job and finds the person.

But a second, less usual approach, might be termed **DISCIPLESHIP** – we want people to grow in their faith through putting it to the test.

Here we have Andrew, or Beryl, or Chris and we want to give them something that will help them grow as a Christian. This starts with the person and finds the job.

Of course, neither approach can work on its own. But what are their respective merits?

Advantages/disadvantages of the CHURCH approach

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Advantages/disadvantages of the DISCIPLESHIP approach

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So far we have assumed that Christians are to work in the Church. But how can we be salt and light in the world if we are all so busy inside the safety of the Church?

Hence a third idea: the **KINGDOM** approach. This starts with the Great Commission and faces the challenge.

Advantages/disadvantages of the KINGDOM approach

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See Article A43 on the website, *Every member on active service*, part 2 for these three ways of thinking.

Practical ideas to underline this third idea

Here are some ideas to help make the third, Kingdom, concept work in practice.

- Ensure that for every church member their primary responsibility is to witness to Christ outside the church: be it in their family (for some), their community, their school, their social clubs, their work-place.
- Emphasise that service as a youth leader, home group leader, PCC member etc. is all secondary to people's external witness responsibility.
- Display a large-scale map of your wide-area (not just the church locality) and mark on it where your members live, where they work, the schools/colleges they attend, their clubs and leisure activities. Study the networks you have as a result.
- If you have a missionary display, set up the equivalent for church members, perhaps highlighting different areas of service each month. Add pointers for prayer and issues these people have to face.
- Start a regular newsletter that, among other things, tells people-stories about your church members in their life outside church activity.
- Encourage your preachers to take the theme of work as worship.

For further thinking see Training Notes TN10, *What do Christians do between Sundays*, on the website. For detailed advice on the idea of a people-stories newsletter see Article A9, *A church members' newsletter*.

Recruitment

If we are following the CHURCH approach, we will start with the vacancy and ask for, literally, 'volunteers'. If this does not work we may select some likely candidates and go and talk to them one-to-one.

If we are following the DISCIPLESHIP approach, we will be building up a profile of each member of the congregation and looking for a suitable area of ministry that that person could fulfil. So we may carry out a gift-identification exercise of some kind.

Seek good fits – instead of 'gifts' alone you might consider:

- knowledge base
- skill set
- natural talents
- spiritual gifts
- enthusiasm drive
- human impact
- life experience
- Christian character
- availability
- teamwork.

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| Two available schemes are <i>SHAPE</i>..... | |and <i>Network</i> |
| S: | Spiritual gifts | Personal experience |
| H: | Heart's desire | Character traits |
| A: | Abilities | Ministry convictions |
| P: | Personality | Others' observations |
| E: | Experience | |

A better way: Understand what I need to serve

- 1 **A church vision I can own**
- 2 **A church leadership I trust and respect**
- 3 **A discipleship challenge I can respond to**
- 4 **A scheme with a champion**
- 5 **An approach that is personal**
- 6 **A purpose I can see fits with the church vision**
- 7 **A gift, skill enthusiasm or experience I believe I have**
- 8 **A team I can be part of**
- 9 **A team leader I can serve under**
- 10 **A commitment that is limited**
- 11 **An achievement that is celebrated**
- 12 **A role I can develop within**

The above 12 points are taken from Training Notes TN148, *Serving in a post-Covid church*, in the Resources section of the website. For a more detailed approach to what is needed, see Article A43, *Every member on active service*. See also Training Notes TN24, *Church members can burn out too*. Or, for a light-hearted approach, TN55, *So, who should be in the dock?*

FINAL QUESTION TO PARTS 1 & 2: Is 'volunteer' the right word? If not, what is?

3: Supporting workers

WEAKNESS 3: We don't affirm church members in their service

The information volunteers need

Before they can make an informed decision as to whether to offer, people need some basic information. Consider the following for tasks such as: children's group leader, member of the catering team, organiser of the church weekend away, lesson reader, bereavement visitor, treasurer.

1: What this area of service is all about

This is the equivalent of a job description. Covering no more than one side of A4 (if in print) it should answer these questions:

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| 1 | Why does the post exist? | The overall purpose |
| 2 | Who does the post-holder relate to? | Working relationships |
| 3 | What does he or she do? | Key responsibilities or tasks |

For more detailed advice, try Article A6, *Job descriptions*, in the Resources section of the website.

2: What we expect of you

This should:

- show the kind of time commitment and length of service that will be needed – don't forget to include 'hidden extras' such as attendance at team meetings or training events
- list any desired gifting or experience (be careful) – and something of what it means to be part of a team
- list any point about Christian behaviour and/or biblical knowledge that is appropriate
- give an idea of any standard expected

Article A8 on the website, *Worker agreements*, may be helpful here.

See also Training Notes TN41, *What makes a group a team*, in the Resources section of the website. Also TN79, *'One another' teams*, and Article A45, *How to lead a team at church*. But sometimes it is better to have just one person clearly responsible: see TN90, *Put someone in charge*.

3: Adopt a team not a rota approach

- You no longer serve solo on a rota but with others on a team
- The team has a leader so you feel in a secure place
- You are invited to join the team in person by the leader
- You review your membership each year so there is no life sentence
- The church has one person responsible for the whole scheme

See Training Notes TN139, *Church workers in teams*, in the Resources section of the website.

4: Freedom and failure

A volunteer may well be frightened to offer because of the fear of failure. So what is the church's attitude to failure? Consider someone coming on to the lesson reading rota for the first time. What if the first lesson they read is inaudible? Or they trip up and fall flat on their face while coming to the front? Or they cannot find the page for Zephaniah?

The affirmation they deserve

Scoring scheme – use the boxes

- 5 Our present performance is excellent
- 4 We're pretty good
- 3 We're OK but need to improve
- 2 We really need to take action here
- 1 We do very little under this heading
- 0 We do virtually nothing

Training Notes TN31 on the website, *Affirming volunteers*, has more on each of the ten points on this page.

- 1 **Christian teaching and discipleship**
public preaching, one-to-one, reading ...
- 2 **Prayer**
from leaders, the team, prayer partners
- 3 **Due recognition**
not to pander to pride, but: commissioning, intercessions, certificates
- 4 **Re-envisioning and ongoing communication**
big picture context, updated information, efficient organisation
- 5 **Training**
induction, in-service, external – a church budget to show commitment
- 6 **Practical help and resources**
equipment, funds, baby-sitting, sabbaticals
- 7 **Encouragement by saying thank you**
regular recognition (not just at the annual meeting!), real interest, team parties
- 8 **Feedback and correction**
quick reviews through to appropriate appraisals
- 9 **Team support**
team get-togethers, sharing experiences, having fun doing the job together
- 10 **Short-term contracts**
move people on to new challenges to stretch faith and test gifting (but say goodbye)

Total out of 50 Points with low scores

What can we learn from the training of the twelve?

Try this for homework if we don't have time to cover it today!

In what sense did Jesus operate a 'church'-centred approach?

In what sense did Jesus operate a discipleship-centred approach?

What skills did Jesus show in dealing with his 'volunteers' (and should these relate to us too)?

What was his attitude to them?

Resources on my website you might find helpful on today's overall theme (especially those in bold italic) <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources>

Articles

- A6 Job descriptions – *advice and examples for staff and volunteers*
- A8 Worker agreements – *Appropriate paperwork for churches*
- A9 A church members' newsletter – *An idea for a new publication*
- A43** ***Every member on active service - How to mobilise your church***
- A45** ***How to lead a team at church - Practical help for beginners***
- A47 Fifteen principles of volunteering

Training Notes

- TN10 What do Christians do between Sundays?
- TN14 Setting up a Newcomers Team
- TN24 Church members can burn out too
- TN31** ***Affirming volunteers***
- TN36 Square pegs in round holes
- TN37 To pay or not to pay?
- TN41 What makes a group a team
- TN55 So, who should be in the dock?
- TN79 'One another' teams
- TN90** ***Put someone in charge***
- TN100** ***Why some offer, why some don't***
- TN112 Set my leaders free
- TN139** ***Church workers in teams***
- TN148** ***Serving in a post-Covid church***

You might also like to follow me on Twitter @johnntruscott.

Action plan

To help you turn today into practice. Consider:

- 1 Might it be better for our church to do less but do it better?
- 2 Do we need to invest more people-resources in managing church members?
- 3 How can we adopt more of a Kingdom approach to service?
- 4 How do we change the culture if people are not used to this approach?

As a result of today's event, the main areas I/we wish to develop further are

And some specific ideas I/we would like to put into operation are

My/our plan for action to be completed by the end of next week is

My/our aim for where I/we shall have got to by Easter 2024 is