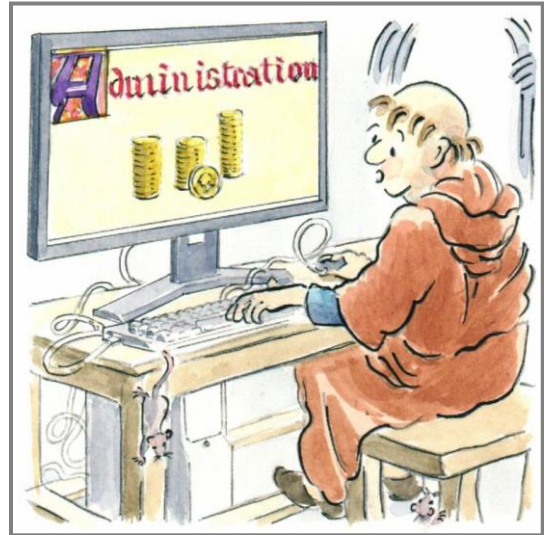


Church administration explained *part 1*



TN72 Training Notes series: Administration

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Here is a short introduction to church administration under five headings. It is written for those whose gifts lie elsewhere but who want to understand why some people, well this author at least, get so excited about this topic.

It should also prove useful to organisers, office secretaries, finance teams and a host of other behind-the-scene workers in churches who need reminding that what they do is so vital for the health of their church.

The five headings are:

1: The image 2: The scope 3: The gift 4: The motivation 5: The impact

Some ideas for group discussion and further thought have been added. Headings 1 to 3 are covered here in part 1. **TN73** then continues as part 2 with headings 4 and 5.

1: The image

Let's admit it: the phrase 'church administration' doesn't set many hearts beating.

Imagine you've been asked to write a letter to supporters to raise a salary for the following people in a mission team. Which ones will probably get the most prayer partners and highest level of giving and which ones the least?

Bible translator
doctor
office administrator
relief worker

book-keeper
evangelist
pioneer minister

church leader
mission worker
preacher

I guess you would find it a lot easier to raise money for several of those roles than for either the office administrator or the book-keeper.

Some church websites show photos of each one of the 'staff team' and then mention that you can contact the Church Office. No name – just the office. The email address is often admin@churchname. How impersonal!

Part of the trouble is that we administrators are often self-effacing people. We don't like to blow our own trumpet. The best administration is invisible – you only notice it when it goes wrong and then it draws massive attention to itself instead of to what it should be serving.

But another reason for the poor image is that administrators are seen as er, well, just a fraction dull. They are unimaginative, they sit at desks, they don't like to be interrupted. That's bad news, really bad news. Because that's not what administrators should be like at all.

Scripture gives a different image. At a very big picture level we could say that stuff matters to God. He doesn't miss out those genealogies and lists of names. He details the work involved in a project like building the temple.

Jesus was born in a messy place at a messy time in an unimportant corner of the world. The first real problem in the early church was solved by the appointment of administrators (Acts 6). In 1 Corinthians 12 the gift of administrators (more about this under a later heading) is sandwiched between some particularly spectacular gifts, not at the end. The person profile for a deacon (an office which was probably equivalent to an administrator today) in 1 Timothy 3 is almost identical to the requirements for church leaders.

Oh, yes, Scripture gives a very different image. Administration can be one of the most creative and powerful spiritual ministries around.

If a church has a godly Treasurer I can almost guarantee blessing will follow. A PA to a church leader may go unnoticed, but the leader's ministry might collapse without that appointment.

At the start of these notes giving a beginner's guide to church administration, please pause and think about your own attitude to this subject. Would you at least be open to there being some small possibility that those of us who are so excited by it, who feel so privileged to be in on it, may not after all be barking mad? Perhaps we have discovered something from God that others have missed.

Go on – try!

2: The scope

What does church administration look like? What sorts of things go on behind the scenes to enable our churches to function?

The answer includes a lot more than most people realise. Much depends on where you draw the boundary line between what is administration and what is something else, for everything includes an administrative element.

The musicians practising tonight for Sunday's services need to organise their meeting, someone needs to look after all the sheet music, or to be responsible for the copyright scheme, or to be the technical expert for the sound system, and so on. So even that one activity has a wide range of administrative tasks associated with it.

In addition, anyone holding any office will find that there is an administrative function attached to it. Ministers need to be able to control their diary and to handle their own deskwork, youth workers will have resources to produce and a Facebook page to manage.

But if we define administration as (a suggestion) 'the organisation and co-ordination of the earthly resources that are available in the service of Christ', and given that we cannot be over-neat in doing this, here are two different ways of listing the scope of this subject.

By groups of people

- **The Office Administrator**
The church office (if you have one) may well have paid staff to run its work, to act as receptionist, to be the hub for all communication, to provide printing services, etc.
- **The Business Manager**
Some larger churches may appoint a Church Manager or Director of Operations to oversee other administrative staff, to be responsible for the effective use of all the church's physical resources, to put strategic plans agreed by the leadership into operation.
- **Official voluntary offices**
There will be a Church (or PCC) Secretary, Treasurer, Stewards, Wardens, Editor.
- **Official groupings and teams**
Churches will have groups such as Church Council members, Deacons, Session, Trustees, committees, flower arrangers, maintenance team and many others.
- **Unofficial helpers**
But lots of things happen because people see a need and just get on with the jobs: lifts to church, washing up, putting out chairs, mending breakages.

By types of activity

A second way of analysing all this is to say that organisation can be broken down into a number of elements. These all overlap as you will appreciate.

- **Buildings**
Maintenance, cleaning, risk management, lettings, equipment, major projects...
- **Communication**
Website, social media, print, IT, church office, announcements...
- **Finance**
Book-keeping, accounting, statutory records, PAYE, budget holders, church giving, Sunday offering...
- **Legislation**
Safeguarding, HR, health and safety, employment, registers, insurance...
- **Office**
Database, supplies, organisation of staff and volunteers, filing...
- **Planning**
Committee structures, Mission Action Plans, budgets, major events, agendas and minutes...
- **Systems/structures**
Leadership structures, teamwork, manuals, procedures...
- **Volunteering**
Organisation of all volunteers, gift and availability records, apprenticeship schemes...
- **Welcome**
Stewarding, membership records, newcomers, reception...

You will appreciate now that this covers a wide sweep of church life. The scope is BIG.

3: The gift

Administration is a spiritual gift: Scripture makes that clear. But what does that mean?

First, in 1 Corinthians 12 there is a list of gifts which includes a word often translated as administrators (v28). The snag is that the Greek is a word not often used in Scripture and seems to apply to the person who steered a ship, the helmsman. The latest NIV translates the gift as 'guidance'.

The English word 'administration' here sounds just right to American ears where the word has a lofty meaning (as in the 'Trump (or whoever) administration'), but it's not really quite right to British ears where our idea of admin is rather more lowly.

But all is not lost because the word next to it, often translated 'helpers' or 'those able to help others', is the Greek term that gives us ideas such as 'rotas', people who take their 'turn'.

This idea of helpers seems much closer in meaning to what we Brits refer to as administration – and the key point is that it is still a gift of the Holy Spirit, given by a loving Father to be used in the community of God's people for the benefit of others and the glory of his Son.

So I prefer to talk about 'gifts' (plural) of administration – anything from putting out the chairs for the meeting ('helpers') through to putting the church's strategic plan into operation ('helmsmen', a term coined by a clever friend of mine).

Or, in the world of meetings, from taking the minutes through to restructuring the church's committees to be more effective. Or on Sundays, from being a steward through to being in overall charge of 'front of house' in a large church.

I tend to use the word 'organisation' to cover this whole range. But the point is that it is all about gift, at every point in the spectrum.

But, what exactly is a 'spiritual' gift of organisation or administration? Is there any difference from just being good at it?

Not wishing to be too dogmatic about this point, I feel there *is* a specifically 'spiritual' gift. I've seen brilliant secular administrators make a real hash of church organisation. So I tentatively suggest that it's the gift of

- being a passionate organiser with experience and skills at various points in the wide range of possibilities;
- being willing to work behind the scenes without recognition to release others for their ministries for Christ;
- having a real desire to see the detail of ministry done well for the sake of the gospel;
- sensing some form of privileged call from God to serve him in this way.

I long for churches to find gifted, creative, called organisers to serve the church, especially at the 'helmsman' end of the spectrum. When they wanted a group to sort out a tricky organisational issue in Acts 6:1-8 they looked for those who were 'full of the Spirit and wisdom'. It wasn't a job for anyone.

That's scary.

Questions and actions to ponder and discuss

- 1 Why do you think church administration does have such a dull image in many people's minds? What practical actions might your church now take to correct any unhelpful views you feel exist, whether among the leadership or the membership? Or even by your administrators themselves in all their different roles?

- 2 Make a list of your church's administrators: both the 'official' ones (whether paid staff or unpaid volunteers) and the 'unofficial' ones (who undertake a range of administrative tasks without being listed anywhere). How might you honour them in some way without unhelpfully putting them on a pedestal (which some of them would not want in any case)?
- 3 Who in your church has various gifts of administration, whether in the form of ability in planning or organising or co-ordinating or helping? How might you develop those gifts, and discover who else might be similarly gifted?

These notes continue at ***TN73*** in part 2.

These notes were first published (without the questions and actions) as blogs on the Willow Creek website. They are available here at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes> then TN72. See also Article A15, *Christian administration?*, A38, *Appointing an Operations Manager*, A42, *What do Church Administrators do?*, and Training Notes TN21, *Ideas for a sermon on administration*, TN40, *Appointing an Administrator*, TN60, *Administrator types*, and TN112, *Set my leaders free!*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about any form of administrative training or assessment.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN72 and TN73 under Administration.

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