



Roles for a church office

2: Three more perspectives

A34 Articles series: Administration

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In Articles A33 and A34 I explore the idea of a church office seen from six different perspectives, each one a possible purpose. This is the second part of that.

By 'church office' I have in mind any place on the church site that operates as an administrative base in some way.

It may simply be a desk from where a voluntary Administrator works; in many churches it will be a room which functions as a work-station for a paid member of staff; in larger churches it may refer to a suite of rooms as a base for the staff team; sometimes it refers to the office for a group of churches, a Methodist circuit for example.

Each of these two articles explores three valid purposes for such an office, some of which will clash with each other. The first part covered the church office as a

- 1 reception point
- 2 communications hub
- 3 staff shield.

Part 2 now adds to this list with the idea of a

- 4 community interface
- 5 volunteers' base
- 6 administrative work-station.

Many will see the final one of these as the main purpose of a church office but I have deliberately placed it last to help bring the others into focus. You will also find some overlap in points made about each of these six – again, this is deliberate.

You will find the first part of this article on [***this link***](#).

4: Community interface

In this section I explore practical issues related to the role of the office as the point of contact with the local community and the world beyond. I do not have in mind its service to church members, although some of the points will apply to them too. This point builds on the earlier one about reception in Part 1.

Visitors to the office

Personal callers

Here is a list of the kind of people who might drop in to the church office from outside the church's membership:

- postal staff and other daily callers;
- service engineers and delivery drivers;
- any external contract staff such as cleaners;
- those, not church members, who are hiring out rooms;
- those attending activities and groups on your premises;
- those using your café or other facilities you have;
- visitors to a historic building or graveyard;
- visitors for the Minister or other staff;
- general enquirers or complainers (about anything);
- people in need including lonely people, the homeless.

Visitors by phone, email, web or social network

And now a list of the kind of callers you might get in other ways:

- enquiries about baptisms, weddings and funerals;
- enquiries about graveyards and other records;
- enquiries about service times, activities, groups, etc.;
- calls from salespeople;
- general enquiries off the website (about anything);
- requests for booking of premises;
- people wanting to speak to a specific member of staff;
- undertakers, wedding arrangers, etc.
- the local media.

You will be able to add to these lists from your own experience. I now study three areas suitable for an audit of the office's interface function or as training needs for staff:

- 1 The privilege of representation
- 2 Finding the way in
- 3 First impressions.

Have in mind the above lists as you read these points.

The privilege of representation

The point of contact

Those who staff the church office, whether a volunteer team or a paid Administrator, hold the privileged position of being the first point of contact that an external visitor may have with the Christian faith. The interest shown to the visitor, the care that is taken to help them and the efficiency of how their enquiry is dealt with will all create an impression for good or ill. This is both scary and exciting. The opportunities to build bridges are immense. Refer back to section 1 on reception.

Being 'normal'

One advantage that most administrative staff have over their Minister is ... that they are not a Minister! If a visitor finds a receptionist who is like them and who understands where they are coming from, this will be reassuring, especially to those whose view of the clergy is shaped solely by the media. Being 'normal' should be part of the job!

Being capable

The visitor's view of the Christian faith will be enhanced if they are dealt with professionally and competently. If they find that the administration is good, they will have one less thing to worry about. If their questions are answered helpfully, they will be put at ease. This may have implications for churches where a volunteer team staffs the reception area: what kind of regular training and review do they receive?

Clash of responsibilities

But if the Administrator is the receptionist, there is an immediate clash with their need to get other areas of their work completed on time as has already been mentioned in Part 1. Role clashes need to be sorted as far as is possible through different uses of space (a front office and a back office) or different times (the office officially open for less than the time the staff are working there). See the earlier section on reception once more.

Evangelist or counsellor?

What happens when an evangelistic opportunity presents itself or someone needs a listening ear? This is an issue to discuss and agree on, but the point of agreement will differ from church to church and from person to person. There need to be clear guidelines so that the Administrator is not put in an impossible position. When is someone in need and when are they a time-waster? What should the Administrator do when a visitor smelling of drink asks for money? What happens when a visitor bursts into tears?

The waiting room

Most churches will not have a waiting room as such, but there will be an area where visitors to the office come through or pause in. Is this space being used to give clear, positive and friendly messages about the Christian faith? One idea would be a tidy rack of free leaflets and booklets – with clear signing. But be aware that a set of dog-eared pamphlets and tracts may have the opposite effect. If there are display boards what do they say about the church through their quality and visuals?

Complaints

It is worth training church office staff in handling people who come in to complain about some aspect of the church's work. A reasonable complaint, dealt with competently and quickly with any necessary apology and action taken to put things right, can lead to a positive outcome. Churches should be seen to be role models in this department.

Finding the way in

There are, of course, important considerations for disability awareness. But consider too the following, covered to some extent in the earlier section on reception but applied here to the visitor who is not a member of your church.

Finding the office

If the church office is not visibly obvious by being right by the main entrance, it needs to be signed and lit well so that visitors can easily find it. This is especially important if it is some way from the entrance or upstairs. Check that the signs are in good condition and create a professional image, if that is indeed the image you wish to give.

Reception point

As the visitor enters the office, what is their access to a real person and might there be any conflict with safety issues? One way is to have a counter or hatch system, but check the unspoken messages presented by these. If the Administrator has a desk against a wall opposite to the door, the visitor's first impressions may be of their back – and they may not be noticed.

Physical environment

Firms spend a great deal of money on their reception areas if they want to give customers a positive 'experience' (and that is the word used and abused). I see church offices with peeling paint, notice-boards that are tatty, carpets that are worn and cast-off chairs in any waiting area. All of these features communicate something to visitors about that church and therefore about the Christian faith. There is no need to rival the High Street banks or the private dentist's waiting area for quality, but there may be a need to smarten up to show you care for the people who come. That applies to tidiness in the whole office too.

The virtual office

All the above points apply to the virtual office too, the route in from the website or your Facebook page. Try all the above points for the website: ease of access, first impressions, information provided, straightforward navigation, and of course whether everything has been updated this week.

Dangers

Once the way in is made easy, issues of personal safety are bound to arise. Every church needs to take this point seriously and provide as safe an environment as is possible given the need for the church to be accessible. Alarms, CCTV, policies on locked doors when only one person is on duty and self-defence training are all matters to be addressed. There has to be a balance between being wholly open and yet taking all necessary precautions so that those on duty feel safe.

First impressions

If the secular world takes customer care seriously, how much more should we do so in the church? Here are areas to check up on and improve if necessary.

Greeting to personal callers

What matters most is the attitude that is communicated by facial expression, eye contact, body movement and clothing. This combination can 'say' a warm welcome and put the caller at ease or give the impression that the receptionist has more important business to deal with.

It is worthwhile considering what kind of dress code would communicate the right message – but far from me to say what that message should be in your case! It all depends on whether you want to create an image of formal professionalism or friendly and casual accessibility. But the point is that all these factors communicate something about the church and our faith, whether to the postman, the enquirer or a visitor for the Minister.

Words used

Formulae are not necessarily the answer; we have all experienced that 'Have a nice day' said without any meaning and with eyes averted by the sales clerk. But the first words to a visitor matter a great deal, as do the final words as they leave. It might be worth thinking through what they might be so that they welcome without judgment. Similarly, how do you address the stranger once you know their name: Christian name or a more formal approach?

Telephone

The same points apply as to personal visitors but tone of voice now becomes the key for people who cannot see you, together with the actual words used. Here it is worth having some standard wording for whoever answers the phone, but an unhelpful tone can ruin even the best of phrases.

The voicemail message needs to be scrutinised carefully. The first words are so important: "The office is closed now" creates a negative impression however accurate it may be. Always listen to your message after you have recorded it. If I am auditing a church I often ring the office number out of hours to check the voicemail message – though I have been known to find the Administrator working late at night!

Website and email

Here it is worth checking how easy it is to find the response form on the site, how it is worded and how quickly the church will respond. The same applies to email enquiries, especially for churches where the office may not be manned every day.

Speed of response

Some church offices have clear aims: the telephone should be answered within four rings, a personal caller should be spoken to within so many seconds. This is not easy to achieve when the office is manned by one person and everything is happening all at the same time. But is there an aim for the priority to be given to the external visitor over the church member?

Email signature

When the church emails someone who is not a church member it is a good idea to audit the mail seen from the perspective of the outsider (so ask them how it comes across). One key piece of communication will be the email signature, the standard wording added at the end of each email. This must not be long, but it is worth checking whether it gives some positive message about the church (as well as helpful contact details) or simply gives a negative note about falling into wrong hands.

Forms

If the church asks people outside to fill in forms of any kind (including booking premises), it is worth checking (again, with outsiders) that the forms are simple, easy to complete, friendly and informative.

This section could be used as a checklist to see how outsider-friendly your church office is. Or you may want to think through training needs, whether for paid staff or for volunteers

One final point: how often is your office mentioned in Sunday intercessions, any prayer diary you produce or in meetings for prayer?

And when considering your church's outreach, is the office noted as a key feature of this or not?

If the office is at the front-line of your church's dealings with your local community, might it not be right to hold it in prayer?

5: Volunteers' base

In this fifth section I explore a concept that is rarely discussed in relation to a church office: its role in supporting all the church's volunteers.

A detailed membership database

My first point in this exploration depends on your understanding of what 'church' is. If you see 'church' as a set of activities you attend, or even as a group that you belong to, then the idea of a database would be to hold basic contact details about the 'membership' (however you define that term). You need name, address, telephone, email and so on so that you can arrange mailings, publish membership lists and, perhaps, link to donor records.

This of course is just what most church databases are – and there is nothing wrong with that as far as it goes. Phrases such as 'going to church' or – one step on – 'belonging to a church' demonstrate this kind of thinking.

If, on the other hand, you see church as a local group of disciples who are therefore Christian workers, you may want to have a wider view of what information the membership database needs to hold. You have in mind now not a passive collection of individuals who attend or belong, but a group of workers each with gifts and ministries both inside the church and out in the world. Phrases here are more likely to be along the lines of 'we are the church'.

So the database needs to include more in the way of what each person is doing, how volunteers are grouped into teams, what training and experience they have, where they might be able to offer in the future, and what their time availability might be.

A database sounds lifeless, but it is merely a structure for holding information. If that information is based around ministry and mission, the database becomes an invaluable tool for mobilising workers and planning for the future. This idea is not just for a large church.

Of course there are issues of confidentiality and data protection / GDPR to consider in all this. And a database like this needs constant work to keep it up-to-date, unlike just a list of names and contact details which is easier to maintain. But, for now, I simply make the point that databases can be valuable references for ministry – and such a database belongs in the church office rather than in someone's home or with the Pastoral Team. The Church Administrator's job may well include the maintenance of such a tool.

Discovering people's gifts

Where does this data come from? At this point someone may suggest some kind of survey of everyone's gifts but danger lights should now start flashing:

- such surveys are often directed inside the church rather than outside – they focus on the work to keep the show on the road;
- they rely on people's self-perception which may not always match other people's view of their capabilities;
- they take a considerable amount of work to organise, but even more to analyse afterwards;
- as a result of which my experience is that many people tentatively offer for something but then hear nothing and so are hurt.

That does not mean you should not seek to discover people's gifting and passions – there are programmes available – see Article A43, *Every member on active service*, for more on this.

But it does mean that you need to avoid the dangers: perhaps surveying different groups in the church at different times rather than all together, making it more personal than a faceless paper-based survey, expecting it to be a rolling programme to include people's changing availability, and including the perceptions of others within the safety of established groups.

You may also want to talk to people as they join your church and feed this information in too. Many churches appear to be frightened of challenging new members but a personal interview early on to establish what they might be able to offer might have a very positive impact.

This needs to be a very human-centred exercise, but this is best achieved when the back-up systems are brilliant. So the idea of this being based in the administrative hub of church life, the office, again makes sense.

What you cannot do, however, is simply add this work to an already overburdened Church Administrator. Either this needs to be someone else's responsibility (see below), or it becomes an acknowledged main element of the Administrator's job description, whether the Administrator is directly responsible or supports someone else in charge of the programme.

Analysing the work of the church

Such a database needs to link up the people with the possibilities for service (note that I did not say 'with the posts' because that restricts all this to a list of jobs to be filled).

Here I move into an area of leadership responsibility. What is the church trying to do? Is it too much? What do leaders believe the priorities should be? If you are going to analyse people's gifts, you need to ascertain what the possibilities are for the use of those gifts. That may mean starting some new activities and closing others down. I don't find so many churches carrying out the latter exercise.

There is a danger here of defining the posts and then shoe-horning people into them, when perhaps we need a different approach of defining what we do by the gifts that God has given to us at this particular moment. This may mean that you see work outside the church as the real work of Christian people (would your church honestly view being a Christian in a local political party as more strategic than being Church Secretary?), that you are open to the idea of closing activities down when they are no longer priorities, and that you seek a sustainable programme rather than trying to copy the successful church down the road that seems to do everything.

You also need to consider roles that are hidden. It is too easy to praise the up-front people and forget about those who visit people who are ill or others who make a point of interceding for the church day by day.

In this respect the Church Administrator can serve the leadership by supplying administrative services, analysis, communication and strategic planning.

Someone responsible

None of this will happen unless someone is responsible. In large churches this may well be a specialist member of staff, in a few it will be a key component in the Administrator's role, and in others it will be a volunteer! This is not a normal post in most churches, but it is work that needs doing. The responsibilities include:

- maintaining the database of everyone's gifting and availability;
- keeping similar information for people's roles, as advised by the leadership;
- arranging for new members to be given appropriate forms of service as a way in;
- being responsible for training throughout the church (with an appropriate budget);

- keeping in touch with everyone's current availability to ensure no one has too much to do;
- helping people move on to new challenges in ministry;
- ensuring legal requirements are met (DBS, GDPR, health and safety, etc.).

This is a major responsibility. If it does not fall to the Administrator, such a person will still need administrative support and guidance.

So this people-centred work needs a highly efficient organisation behind it for it to be effective. This demonstrates the link between pastoral and administrative work. The best administration is all about people and so highly pastoral. At the same time the best pastoral work needs good administration for it to be properly caring.

The role of the Church Administrator

This point has opened up a new area of support function for the church's office. In a few cases it may be the Administrator who is responsible for all that has been described here, but this would be unusual.

But even in a support role this has implication not only for the job description but also the person profile of the Administrator – and hence of the work of the office. Consider the following.

- 1 Handling data for pastoral work calls for a pastoral spirit: a real love and care for the people involved. This is no work for a soul-less Administrator (a few appear to be so) whose interest is only in business efficiency and who finds people's unpredictability untidy and upsetting.
- 2 The work requires the highest order of confidentiality. It only needs one sarcastic comment to a friend about a member of the church's supposed gifting for the whole system to be called into question.
- 3 Both these points call for someone in the church office who people can trust and respect for both their efficiency but also their sensitivity.
- 4 All this means an office where the systems are robust and professional. Everything needs to be done well, especially when dealing with sensitive, personal data.
- 5 It also means that there is a need for the best database package for whatever information is stored. This might be a normal system like Access which has been

tailored for the church's use (dangerous if the person who tailored it then moves on from the church), a church-specific package on the market which will probably then link in to other church applications like giving, or a web-based system that gives everyone access to their own database entry.

- 6 There also needs to be an understanding of the requirements of the Data Protection Act, whether the church is registered or not.

Volunteers in the church office

As part of all this there is also the related issue of having volunteers to help with the work of the church office. In some churches the whole work of the office may be undertaken by volunteers. The first section of this two-part article looked at the idea of reception and the possibility that this might be covered by volunteers.

A typical scenario is to have a part-time, paid Administrator who has the support of one or two volunteers whose roles are to act as receptionist or undertake specific duties, such as someone coming in on Friday to print and fold the service sheets or organise the PowerPoint slides.

This often raises key issues for the work of volunteers in churches which have to be considered irrespective of the organisation of volunteering in general. For example, what do you do if the person who prints and folds the service sheet never gets it quite right (crooked folds, etc.) but wants to help the church and would be devastated if you took her or him off

this job? Or what about the person who is supposed to do the book-keeping but, because they live alone, spends too much time chatting to people who drop in to the office?

The management of volunteers needs an article to itself but you will find relevant ideas in the Resources section of this website on the Management index page.

The office as a store

In its work of serving volunteers the physical office will need to hold stocks of printed and other supplies, and the website will hold information and links. But there are major dangers here as many Administrators will testify. It is so easy for the office to become a dumping ground for all kinds of clutter: lost property, playgroup toys, broken computers, odd chairs, printed materials, supplies, unsorted filing cabinets. Much of this will be left when the Administrator is not present to guard the surfaces and shelves.

Few churches plan for sufficient cupboard space for their activities. A Parents and Toddlers group needs walk-in cupboards for the equipment which no doubt needs to be cleared away after every session. Welcomers need to find that church packs, leaflets and booklets are in racks and ready for use when they go on duty. The All-age Services team need to know what to do with those bulky visual aids that might just be required again and so should be kept somewhere.

It's even worse when the office has to double as a vestry or crèche area on Sunday, but in many churches compromises have to be made.

6: Administrative work-station

In this final section of my six I explore the most basic of all possible purposes.

The church's admin focus

I have deliberately left this point until now because I wanted to give more attention to some of the purposes that may not come immediately to mind. But even though the idea of an administrative focal point may be the obvious purpose of any church office, it is still worth investigating what this might mean.

Here is a check-list of administrative services that the office may offer. But note these points.

First, the items in the list clearly overlap with each other.

Secondly, it is not necessary for all these to be carried out centrally in the church office. There are churches with a staffed office that have volunteers, working from home, producing print items (notice-sheets, agendas and minutes), acting as webmaster, organising special projects and handling all the finances. In fact there is considerable danger that if a paid member of staff takes over all the tasks previously carried

out by volunteers, it can turn the congregation back into spectators.

Thirdly, this is only one way of analysing the varied tasks that are carried out in any church office; an alternative would be to try headings such as 'Preparation of printed materials for Sunday', 'The organisation of pastoral care', 'Outreach record-keeping', 'Leadership support'.

But if you want a starting point to consider what church office work might look like, or what an Office Administrator's responsibilities might include, here goes.

A check-list of administrative services

- 1 **Print services**
The production (printing, folding/binding), often the typing/layout and, in some cases, the writing and/or editing of items such as notice sheets, newsletters, magazines, programmes, media releases, PowerPoint slides, agendas/minutes/papers.
 - 2 **Web services**
Daily or weekly updating of the website and any online data (such as the church's membership list), possibly the management of the site and daily work on the church's social media networks.
 - 3 **Personal data**
Regular updating of church databases (with all the records they may contain) and official membership records, the processing of newcomer information, the maintenance of Sunday and other rotas.
 - 4 **Church information**
Upkeep of the church diary and events listings, synchronisation of staff diaries, the maintenance of all church statistics, church sign- and notice-boards, legal issues such as fire regulations and risk analyses.
 - 5 **Official registers**
Maintenance of all required documentation for baptisms, marriages, deaths, denominational returns, equipment inventories, insurances, etc., and the holding of graveyard records and dealing with requests for information where relevant.
 - 6 **Church files**
The holding of all church files both in hard copy and electronic, personnel files, correspondence files, safeguarding records, security issues associated with record keeping and the design of the filing system.
 - 7 **Supplies and maintenance**
The keeping and purchasing of stationery, church-specific supplies, catering supplies, cleaning and maintenance materials, and office equipment, together with the holding of maintenance contracts and the oversight of contractors on site.
 - 8 **Special projects**
The organisation of special events such as church weekends away or mission weekends, concerts, the oversight or production of materials for special one-off church projects.
 - 9 **Lettings**
Oversight of the room bookings diary, the promotion of the business, financial book-keeping, catering arrangements, assisting with the preparation of rooms, reception work.
 - 10 **Church finance**
Daily book-keeping, petty cash arrangements, banking, envelope record-keeping, monitoring of budgets, the oversight of all stewardship materials.
- In addition to these ten categories, although also contained within them, will be the other specific purposes of the church office already investigated, such as:
- 11 **Reception point and contact with the outside world**
Telephone, emails, personal callers, etc. for both church members and all callers.
 - 12 **Communications hub**
The dissemination of information in all directions throughout the church.
 - 13 **PA for Minister/staff**
The support of other staff and the handling of as much of their administration as possible.
 - 14 **Mobilisation of volunteers**
Not only record-keeping but also working with volunteers to place and resource them.
- And, finally, there are almost certain to be other areas specific to your church not included in this list.
- 15 **You add to the list**

But the point about an administrative hub is not just to get certain work done, but to do it well. And so it is to this key issue that I now turn.

Standards

A necessary topic to consider

I often say that good administration is invisible whereas bad organisation shouts loudly and so gets in the way of what it is trying to achieve.

A Sunday notice-sheet with the wrong date and time for the next church meeting can create not only frustration but wasted effort. An enquiry left on voicemail about a funeral which is not dealt with quickly is likely to insulate the family from any future evangelistic initiative.

A church office that cannot be trusted to deliver on time means that people will start to bypass it. Equipment that delivers shoddy print products gives a bad witness for the church. Ministers who cannot rely on their instructions being carried out will not be released for their real work. And so I could go on.

But it is not just administrative efficiency that matters here, but the personal contact too. It only requires an unfriendly glare at a visitor who happens to be interrupting a tricky print job or a rough word over the phone to an enquirer to undo weeks of effort to build up the church as a welcoming centre of community.

So what can be done to improve both efficiency and customer care at the heart of the church's administrative services? The answer has to be to tackle these as worthwhile and necessary topics within the discipline of staff management. This needs to apply both to paid staff in the church office and volunteers who work with them. Here are some ideas.

Quality equipment and training

In most cases the costs of administrative staff salaries will be significantly higher than the cost of the equipment they use. It therefore makes no sense to employ staff and then short-change them with poor equipment, second-rate furniture and a cold or damp office environment.

Ensure their computer is not only relatively new but also suited for the work, and that the software installed in it is state-of-the-art. Unsuitable IT equipment which is slow or prone to seize up is simply going to waste time that the church is paying for and cause emotional frustration for the Administrator. This will have a knock-on effect on how they view their work and their value.

I am often amazed at the poor quality of equipment and software in some church offices – justified on the basis that 'we are a church and funds are limited'. The trouble is that the Administrator then gets the blame for shoddy work.

The same applies to reprographic equipment and its ability to collate and staple where appropriate, and the use of colour printing.

But the problem is often that the responsibility for such decisions falls to a Church Council or Diaconate and so no one considers it. The office needs a champion on the key decision-making bodies, or a small management group to ensure that equipment is updated regularly and office staff are happy with what they have.

So set a proper budget for the church office. And, while about it, have a training budget too so that the Administrator can attend appropriate events, whether specialist training days for Church Administrators or skill training from a local supplier.

Deadline standards

It is vital that a church office delivers on time and becomes known as utterly reliable. It may be helpful to set some targets (you can call them something different!). Here are some ideas – you construct your own list.

- The aim is to answer the telephone within five rings.
- If voicemail is on within office hours, we seek to call back within an hour. If outside office hours, within 30 minutes of the next open time or at a time the caller has stipulated.
- We seek to respond to all emails, where a response is necessary, within 24 hours.
- When a caller visits the office we seek to speak to them within 10 seconds.

And so on. This depends, of course, on having sufficient staff for the workload carried.

Accuracy

You can try something similar for accuracy and presentation.

- Whenever we make a mistake we apologise to those affected and analyse the issue in an effort to ensure we do not repeat the error.
- Our aim is that every item of print leaving the office has no factual errors or typos on it and, while recognising that mistakes will sometimes happen, our standard requires

us to proof carefully and check details thoroughly.

- We want every printed item to look good in terms of layout, print quality and finish (such as accurate folding and stapling).

Behind all this there need to be well designed and documented systems that volunteers and staff can know and use. It is a common problem in churches to find that when a long-standing Office Administrator leaves or retires, their successor finds no record of what needs to be done in what way by when and spends their first year struggling to work it all out.

Customer care

As a fitting close to both this section on standards and on the whole of this two-part article, it is recommended that church offices have a stated 'customer care' policy. This idea has featured several times. Here is a possible overview of one.

'We seek to offer a high standard of service to everyone who uses the church office in any way. We want church members and external

enquirers alike to find that contacting the office is a pleasant experience and that any questions they have or legitimate work they ask us to undertake are dealt with promptly, efficiently and courteously.

Where we are asked to undertake any service that we feel is not our responsibility we shall explain this and offer helpful advice as to alternative actions the person might take.

We seek to be faithful representatives of our church and to follow the church's value statement in all our work. We also recognise that we are representatives of Jesus Christ to each person we deal with.

If we have an enquiry we are unable to answer, we shall take all reasonable steps to discover the answer or redirect the enquirer to an alternative and appropriate source.

Our voicemail messages will always be welcoming in tone and informative in content.'

And so on. See Training Notes TN86, *Customer care for churches*, for a wider discussion. But then you have to live up to it, not file it!

The six together

So there are six angles at which you can look at a church office or, if you prefer, six broad purposes that such an office can have. Some ideas have appeared in more than one section: concepts such as training or customer care, or conflicts of interest apply across all of them. They are not supposed to be six distinct purposes, but this two-part article has tried to see the work of the church office through these six different lenses.

But the point is to hold them all together in tension. The most obvious clash is between the first (reception) and the last (work-station) but all the others run into each other too.

It can be a good idea to write out a role definition for a church office (such papers do not have to be restricted to people!). But the point is that these six do not live easily together and decisions are required to determine priorities. There is no one right balance: each church and each church office will need something tailored just to them.

In fact without such a documenting of purpose, the office is liable to be misused: by those who work there, by the Minister and staff, and especially by the congregation. There is a great need for education so that the office can function as it should and be used well by everyone. Teaching the congregation why it is there and how to use it effectively should be on most churches' agendas. And the same might be true for Minister and staff too.

But taking this wider view has advantages:

- 1 It enables the office to function effectively because its purpose is clear.
- 2 It motivates those who work there to see how their work fits into the bigger picture.
- 3 It helps the church select staff and volunteers to oversee its work.

So what about your church office? How does it fit as a reception point, communications hub, staff shield, community interface, volunteers' base and administrative work-station? Might it be helpful to review it under these six headings?

This article is available at www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles then A34. See also Article A42, *What do Church Administrators do?* and Training Notes TN49, *Appointing an Administrator*, TN66, *A daily office church staff*, TN86, *Customer care for churches?* and TN102, *People who visit the church office*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of an external audit of your church's office or advice on setting one up.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A34 under Administration.

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