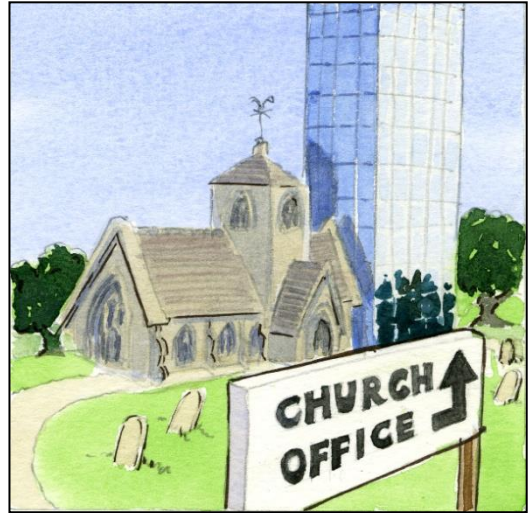


# A morning on **Church Administration**

Isle of Wight

10<sup>th</sup> October 2023



## **Resources you may want to be aware of**

### **Membership of the UK Church Administrators Network (UCAN)**

If you work as a Church Administrator, do join UCAN if you are not already a member. Go to <https://www.churchadministrators.net>. Benefits include a monthly emailing, online resources, local groups, online database, training events. I founded and ran UCAN until 2017 and then handed it over to a team of people who shared its vision with me.

### **'The work of a Church Administrator' distance learning module**

I lead the tutor team for this course, run jointly by UCAN and Cliff College. It has ten units and gives you an official certificate on completion. Details on the UCAN website (About – What we do – Distance courses).

### **Printed resources on my website**

Visit <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources> and access over 200 free Articles (A) and Training Notes (TN), several of which are relevant to today's event. Key items include TN40, 'Appointing an Administrator', TN112, 'Set my leaders free!', TN126, 'The small-church administrator' and A42, 'What do Church Administrators do?'. Others relating to today include:

A6	Job descriptions	TN20	Line management in a church staff team
A8	Worker agreements	TN32	What do you mean by vision?
A15	Christian administration?	TN48	Let's get purpose statements right
A17	Staff selection step-by-step	TN54	Creating space for a Planning Retreat
A27	Reliability in ministry	TN60	Administrator types
A32	Be creative as a line manager	TN68	Administrators who miss the point
A33/34	Roles for a church office	TN72/73	Church administration explained
A38	Appointing an Operations Manager	TN77	Administrator wisdom
TN4	Advice for all church administrators	TN92	How genuine are your GORs?
TN17	Suggested questions for an annual review	TN102	People who visit the church office
		TN115	Identifying gifts of administration

John

## THE BIG PICTURE

The world of Church Administrators in the Church of England has been developing over the past 50 years something like this.

### Before the 1980s

A few, mostly large, churches had appointed a Parish Secretary (the usual title) but these appointments were pretty few and far between and not known in most 'normal' churches. Vicars handled their own administration, sometimes with the help of a voluntary Secretary.

### During the 1980s

The idea of a paid Parish Administrator, often working from the Vicarage, started to become much more common. The early ones worked more as a PA to the Vicar. In 1983 the Administrators organisation started running training days for such Administrators. As these appointments developed more became based in a parish office, separate from the Vicarage. Meanwhile the amount of administration was increasing as churches introduced house groups and more lay involvement in leadership.

### During the 1990s

The idea of a Parish Administrator was now becoming the norm for churches of any size and the number of appointments increased rapidly. Parish offices started to become the hub of church life though not all were in ideal accommodation. The idea of clergy being set free from administrative burdens meant that administrative appointments took on a greater variety of forms: Administrator, Co-ordinator, PA, Office Manager, etc.

### During the 2000s

The development continued as the need for compliance with national legislation increased markedly (eg. Safeguarding, Health and Safety) and the number of clergy fell. Churches started to employ a wider range of lay staff (youth and families workers being the most common). The idea of operations in addition to administration was now becoming more obvious and larger churches were appointing Operations Managers with wider responsibility for turning visions into reality, co-ordinating the effective use of IT, overseeing HR, compliance, managing volunteers, overseeing the business aspects of church life, etc.

### Since 2010

The idea of an Operations Manager with a Parish Administrator or Office Manager is now normal in larger churches. The UK Church Administrators Network (launched in 2009) grows to over 1,600 members. Many 'normal sized' churches have parish offices and it is common for a church to use management software such as ChurchSuite. But now there is a move starting to consider operations staff for groups of small churches as there is a clear need in today's culture for people to take on responsibility for major operational issues for a church to function effectively and legally.

### In short

- 1 The world and our churches have both become much more complex.
- 2 The fewer clergy we have need to be set free to lead outwards, more than just to pastor.
- 3 Operational standards have increased and churches need to do things well.

## THE QUESTION ‘WHY?’ & THE NEED FOR CLEAR ROLES

Nobody may have told you this but Church Administrators should be radicals and subversives! The job is not to organise the wrong things better but to find the right things to do and then to do them well. The best way to ensure this is for the Administrator to be a nuisance and ask the question ‘Why?’. Others in your church will be asking ‘How?’ but we need people to ask ‘Why?’.

But be careful how you start your answer to the question. If the question is ‘Why am I here today?’ and your answer starts ‘Because...’ that throws you back into the past. If, however, your answer starts ‘To... ...so that...’ you get something rather different – in the future.

Here are some possible answers to the question ‘Why have a Church Administrator?’.

- 1 To provide high-quality **administrative services** for the church
- 2 To act as a **focus for church life**, a communications hub where questions are answered, data is stored and information disseminated
- 3 To **protect the Minister(s)** and other staff from as much routine business and unnecessary interruption as possible
- 4 To be the church’s **interface with the outside world**, providing a neutral and unthreatening point of contact
- 5 To manage a **reception point** for the church plant, especially in a church centre that is let out to a variety of external groups
- 6 To act as an **on-site trouble-shooter** for maintenance and equipment issues
- 7 To manage the membership records and **people’s ministry**, overseeing the work of all the volunteers in the church
- 8 To act as on-site **book-keeper** for the finances of the church, reporting to the Treasurer
- 9 To oversee all the **resources and operations** of the church, managing staff and ensuring the implementation of the strategic plan.

Another way of looking at this is to consider the four elements of:

- Paper
- People
- Plant
- Planning

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | What’s the mix now for your Administrator role (or the one you are considering) – if you had to take a total of 20 points how would you divide them over the nine ideas above (no halves allowed!)? |
| 2 | Which of these roles will clash with each other?  |
| 3 | What are the overall outcomes <b>you</b> want to see from this post? Use the formula above, ‘To .... so that ....’  |
| 4 | In what sense is the Administrator’s real role to enable the Minister to be the Minister, or even the church to be the church?  |

## An Administrator’s job description

Be careful. When these are done at all in churches they are often done badly. A good one is a blessing; a bad one, or even a good one misused, can do damage. Avoid bureaucracy!

A good job description consists of answers to three questions the post-holder asks:

- Why am I here?
- To whom do I relate?
- For what am I responsible?

These three have about equal importance yet most people jump to the third. So, consider a one-sentence statement of purpose, a definition of relationships (whom to be responsible to and for, and with whom to liaise with), and then a list of, perhaps, up to eight areas of responsibility (for some posts, these will need to be ‘duties’). It is also helpful to identify areas that the Administrator is **not** supposed to deal with. All, ideally, on one side of A4.

For general principles of job descriptions, see Article A6 in the Resources section of my website.

### Relationships – in all directions (issues of employment and management may arise)

### Responsibilities – not too many – try the top few here

1

2

3

4

### The role is **NOT** to – a vital part of this process

A good job description remains basically static, but should be checked at least annually (when work and appointment are reviewed) and adjusted as necessary.

## The person profile

We often devise ‘person profiles’ for a new job but then forget about them. But Scripture has more to say about the people we should be than the ministry we may have. If we are to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in our roles, what might the challenges be for us and our behaviour? Consider Christian character, personal qualities, church and/or work experience, skills and gifting.

## THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF THIS VITAL WORK

### The principle of release

*A biblical perspective on the work we do: Acts 6: 1-7*

The Bible is clear that you cannot separate Christian ministry into what is ‘spiritual’ (such as teaching or evangelism) and what may be termed ‘practical’ (the newsletter, the church finances). Some are front-line ministries, others are behind the scene. But all need the Holy Spirit to gift and fill the worker and bring glory to Christ.

Administration needs to be carried out by those whose gift it is seen to be. Then:

**Leaders are liberated**

Set your ministers free!

**Members are mobilised**

Let your members grow!

**Chaos is cut**

Get your act together!

**Growth is generated**

Net your growth in!

The role of Administrator is SO important because it is all about enabling God’s Kingdom to grow. Don’t let anyone see this work as second-rate or ‘unspiritual’. If God has gifted someone in this special way, they are to use their gifts for the benefit of the whole Church.

For more on this passage, see Article A15, *Christian administration?*, and Training Notes TN112, *Set my leaders free*, in the Resources section of my website.

## **WE'RE TOO SMALL TO EMPLOY AN ADMINISTRATOR**

Assume that paying for a part-time Church Administrator working from a properly equipped parish office is simply not feasible for the moment. What can you do?

The mistake here is to accept the offer of some admin from someone who needs careful direction in what to do and how to do it. Most Vicars would find the benefits small. Instead:

### **Think Assistant rather than Administrator**

In other words, don't have a Parish Administrator model in mind. Instead think of a competent Assistant who works closely with the Vicar and is able to take off them major projects and routine applications.

### **Think 'Gofer' rather than Secretary**

Don't start my thinking 'office admin'. Think instead of what could be lifted off the Vicar to set them free: shopping, errands, research work. It probably needs to be someone with good IT.

### **Think responsibilities rather than tasks**

As a small church do not think anyone will do. Appoint someone who can handle major responsibilities once they have been explained. Let them decide how they will accomplish what is needed. They need to be people who do not need hand-holding.

### **Think home rather than office**

Remote working is the key. Don't expect them to need a church office base or work from the vicarage. That used to be the case – no need for it now.

### **Think flexible rather than fixed**

Such a person needs to be available when required, not offering fixed hours on certain days of the week.

### **Think voluntary rather than paid**

See this as a voluntary appointment. I sometimes refer to it as a Third (or Executive) Church Warden. It is certainly on a par for leadership with a Warden appointment.

### **Think limited rather than open-ended**

Give it a fixed length of time with no commitment to continue it (though normally it will continue). Something may not work: chemistry, ability

These heading come from Training Notes TN126, *The small-church administrator*, in the Resources section of my website.

## WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

- 1 **Clash of roles**  
For example, the Administrator trying to produce weekly print to tight deadlines while acting as receptionist for a church centre. Need different spaces, or times, or people.
- 2 **Office a compromise between purpose and availability**  
Many Administrators are forced to work in an environment that is the best that the church building can provide. Churches need to be prepared to spend some money.
- 3 **Administrator caught between doormat and dragon**  
Either they do everything people ask of them, or get a reputation for coldness. A good job description is helpful (include negatives in it too).
- 4 **Sundays become a nightmare**  
The Administrator finds themselves unable to worship because people badger them and expect them to be on duty.
- 5 **Lack of realisation of responsibility by the employing body**  
They have a duty of care: ensuring good management, health and safety, salary issues, etc. They need to appoint one or two people to oversee this or it does not happen.
- 6 **Poor management of the Administrator**  
Ministers are not always the best managers. Explore other options. Poor line management is a frequent cause of distress whether neglect or micro-management.
- 7 **Relationship between Minister and Administrator breaks down**  
The fault may lie within either person, but more likely with both. Have someone skilled to keep an eye on how you are working together, to avoid dangers both of over-familiarity and coldness.
- 8 **Poor standard of equipment and facilities**  
To do the job well Administrators need good equipment, good surroundings (room, furniture especially chair, heat and light), and safety.
- 9 **Denying every-member ministry**  
It is possible to so professionalise the church that the principle of everyone contributing to the body becomes lost. So ensure that the Administrator mobilises others rather than taking work off volunteers.
- 10 **Lack of shared spiritual values**  
It is vital that the Administrator fits into the church's value system. If not a worshipping member of the church this may be helpful or may pose problems.

For a slightly longer list written from the perspective of the church see Training Notes TN40, *Appointing an Administrator* in the Resources section of my website.