

## Church volunteers in a post-Covid age

**17<sup>th</sup> September & 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

**When I ask churches what difference Covid and lockdown have made to their ministry today, some answer in terms of congregational size but more talk about the difficulty of finding volunteers. So here is a brief introduction to what I see going on with some ideas for a new approach. You may like to print these notes out and have them available at whichever of the two sessions you are taking part in, or simply have them as headings for each section.**

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After a short introduction we shall look at four aids that volunteers (is that the right word?) need if they are to be keen to serve:

- 1 a church setting that inspires**
- 2 information that offers clarity**
- 3 a team not a rota approach**
- 4 encouraging affirmation.**

### What's going on?

Alongside a national culture that is wary of commitment, we have the following.

- An army of dedicated but older helpers feeling they cannot go on for ever.
- The discontinuity of lockdown suddenly offering an opportunity to step back.
- Younger church members facing family, leisure and work pressures, living in a consumer society.
- A new generation either missing from our churches or untaught on discipleship of Jesus Christ.
- All coupled with pressures caused by falling clergy numbers.

## 1: A church setting that inspires

This is easy to ignore, but hugely important. People want to serve something worthwhile which they can get behind. They do not want to keep a show on the road or support a failing institution. They want to respond to something that attracts them, not be cajoled into joining something against their will. The hope is they will want to serve Jesus both within the church and outside it too. People tell me they want:

### A church vision they can own

### A church leadership they can trust and respect

### A discipleship challenge they can respond to

### A role they can develop within

See Training Notes TN148, *Serving in a post-Covid church*, in the Resources section of my website for more on this.

## 2: Information that offers clarity

People need to know what they might be taking on. Too often this is left to a vague, spoken description or ignored altogether until the volunteer finds surprises they were not expecting (such as being ex officio on a PCC committee).

But a quasi job description is not enough. Some form of person profile is helpful, expressed in the form of 'What we expect of you'. And then it is essential for the church to state what the volunteer can expect of them – though it is vital that the church then honours this in every detail.

### What this area of service is all about

Why does the post exist?

Who does the post-holder relate to?

What does he or she do (either tasks or responsibilities)?

### What we expect of you

### What you can expect of us

See Articles A6, *Job descriptions*, and A8, *Worker agreements*, in the Resources section of my website for more detail and examples.

### 3: A team not a rota approach

Most people want to be part of a team, under a great leader, which together achieves something for God, whether it is leading the intercessions or serving coffee. But most churches opt for a rota approach and the two are very different. Here are some of the features of a team:

**You are part of a team who encourage and pray for each other, even if all take their turn on a rota**

**You have a team leader so you are in a safe place**

**You are invited to join the team by the leader *in person***

**There is no expectation of serving for more than, say, a year at a time**

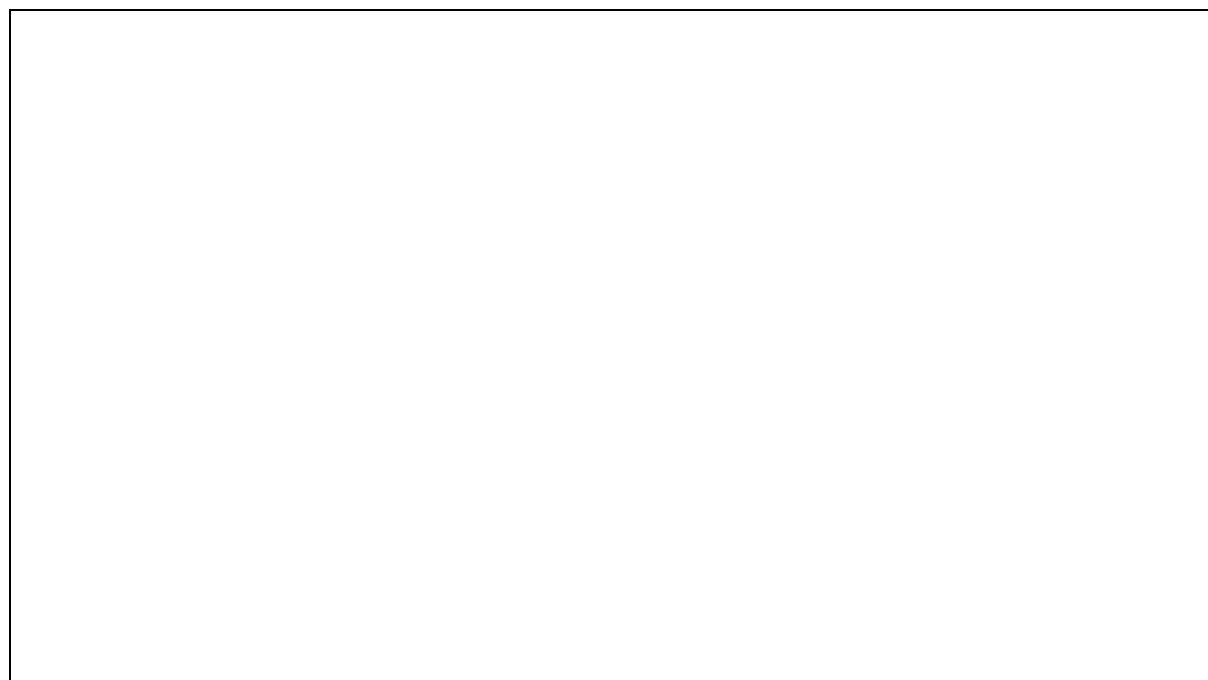
**The church holds a database of people by gift, experience, availability, run by one person who is responsible for the operation of every-member ministry**

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

## 4: Encouraging affirmation

But once appointed volunteers need to receive messages of worth and thanks. The PCC need to ensure that all volunteers, from cleaners to preachers, from stewards to, YES!, Church Wardens, are affirmed in their roles. Here is a possible list, overlapping with some points already made.

- 1 Christian teaching on discipleship
- 2 Prayer by the church
- 3 Due recognition
- 4 Ongoing communication
- 5 Training
- 6 Practical help and resources
- 7 Encouragement and thanks
- 8 Feedback and correction
- 9 Team support
- 10 Short-term contracts.



See Training Notes TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, for more detail on this list.

Other resources on working with 'volunteers' on my website: Article A57, *Working with volunteers*, for a fuller item on this whole topic. Also Articles A43, *Every member on active service*, A47, *15 principles of volunteering*, and Training Notes TN24, *Church members can burn out too*, TN36, *Square pegs in round holes*, TN100, *Why some offer, why some don't*, TN153, *How not to manage volunteers!*, plus other items listed on the previous pages.

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