



Volunteering in the Church

A Practical Guide to Equipping the People of God
for Ministry in the Local Congregation



The
Presbyterian
Church
in Canada



Volunteering in the Church

**A Practical Guide to Equipping the People of God
for Ministry in the Local Congregation**



Written by Dorothy Henderson, 2008

Members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada have permission to copy this manual for use in local congregations. Others may obtain permission by contacting canadianministries@presbyterian.ca



Contents

1.	Is the word “volunteer” the right word to use in the church?	3
2.	Who is likely to volunteer?	4
3.	What motivates people to volunteer?	4
4.	Who makes a good coordinator/coach for volunteers?	6
5:	What does a coordinator/coach of volunteers do? How do they train and support volunteers?	8
	a. Organize	
	b. Plan	
	c. Staff	
	i. Recruit	
	ii. Interview and place	
	d. Direct	
	i. Train	
	ii. Supervise	
	e. Evaluate, Provide feedback	
6:	What do volunteers expect from a volunteer position?	12
7:	To whom does the volunteer coordinator/coach report?	12
8:	What if volunteers don't get along?	12
9:	Why do many volunteer ministry tasks "fail" in churches?	13
10:	What road-blocks and set-backs can we anticipate?	14
11:	What makes a good climate for volunteering?	15
12:	How do we recognize and reward volunteers?	15



Volunteering in the Church

It is simply mind-boggling to imagine what could happen if every member of Christ's church were actively engaged in some form of volunteerism within the church and community. What things might be accomplished for the Kingdom of God!

Marlene Wilson, author of *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, has an exercise she does with large groups of people who have gathered for a workshop. She asks people to raise their hand assuming they have time and energy, they would enjoy doing a particular task in the congregation. She then lists off a wide variety of things—reading scripture in worship, doing the church banking, cleaning up the church nursery each week, helping to make strategic plans for the future and so on. Always, Wilson says, hands go up all over the room.

What does this tell us?

- We should not assume that people are unwilling to do tasks that we might find boring or unattractive.
- People are willing to do many more volunteers tasks in the church. They just need to be encouraged to do so.
- People would do volunteer tasks if they were simply asked.

1. Is the word “volunteer” the right word to use in the church?

In a way, “volunteer” does not begin to capture what unpaid workers offer to the church. Most Christians see the work they offer in the congregation as “ministry,” and they are happy to do this in the service of Christ. However, the word “volunteer” is used in this document to distinguish between salaried workers and workers who offer their time and receive no pay. Because it is a term that is easily understood by most people, we will use the term “volunteer” to describe the work of unsalaried church workers.

2. Who is likely to volunteer?

In the past it was likely that we would find more women than men doing volunteer work in the church. Now, however, over 7.5 million Canadian women work outside the home. This does not mean that women are not volunteering. It means, though, that they are more discriminating in how and what they do. When you begin to recruit volunteers, look for them in these groups:

- Stay-at-home parents
- Retired persons
- Youth (many schools require community service)
- People who are job searching
- People who work shifts
- People who have flex hours
- People who own their own business
- Half time workers

3. What motivates people to volunteer?

People have energy to volunteer when needs are being met. Volunteering feeds a deep part of the soul and gives meaning to life. There are at least four motivators for volunteerism in a faith-based community.

- One group of volunteers has a **desire to provide excellent or improved service.**

Example: Ted is a naturally friendly guy who makes it his ministry to welcome newcomers to church. However, he realizes that this cannot and should not be a one-person effort, so he forms a welcoming committee to help this ministry.

Example: Dora is a retired librarian. She sees the church library as a neglected and unused resource in the congregation. She recruits two friends who help her cull old books, add new resources and promote the library.

Volunteers who are concerned with excellence are willing to set moderate goals and take calculated risks. They take personal responsibility for finding solutions to problems. They enjoy concrete feedback and are often better organizers than maintainers. After things are up and running, they may need other “maintainers” to carry on.

- Another group of volunteers has a desire to share their expertise in a faith-based community. These volunteers have specific skills that they are willing to contribute, and they are happy and willing to share them.

Example: Jessie is an accountant whose company specializes in tax returns. The congregation where Jessie worships has special programming for low-income families. Jessie is willing and able to provide advice and help for low-income families as they file their tax returns.

Example: George works in the city planning department and is well aware of community statistics growth areas, religious affiliation of newcomers, projected new areas and demographics of the people. George is willing and able to attend session meeting to share this information with the Vision Committee.

People who volunteer in churches because of a desire to be respected for their expertise are people who use their knowledge to benefit others to attain group goals. They are often charismatic people who inspire others and create confidence in others to help them meet group goals.

There is, of course, a caution for people who are motivated to volunteer because of their expertise. Since they are working with ideas that are tested and known to them, they may be impatient about waiting for others to “get on board” and may give up in disgust if others don’t follow their advice.

- Other volunteers have a desire for social affiliation. These volunteers want to be with others and enjoy the camaraderie and pleasure of developing friendships.

Example: When Don retired, he looked forward to being able to sleep in, putter in his workshop, golf and escape to the country whenever he felt like doing so. However, in several months, he began to feel disoriented and lonely. He longed for more structure in his life and more interaction with people.

Example: Beth is a graduate student who spends a lot of time in the library and research lab. Lately, though, Beth is longing for a new circle of friends, new ways to be connected with others.

People who volunteer because of a need to be connected or affiliated enjoy warm and friendly relationships. They are often nurturing and caring people. They make the church a warm and friendly place.

- Other volunteers have a desire to give of themselves as a form of ministry, as a way of learning better how to be a disciple of Christ. Although this is a component of each of the above three motivations, some people are genuinely motivated by their desire to seek out their unique ministry. Faith can be the most powerful motivator of all.

Example: Peter is in his mid-forties and has recently gone on disability because of a work injury. A committed Christian, Peter wonders if God is calling him toward ministry. When a volunteer opportunity arose in his congregation, Peter readily agreed, thinking that this will help him explore whether ordained ministry is for him.

Example: Joan is a new Christian. When she became a follower of Christ, the minister stressed that Christians are people who both think and act like Christ. Joan is searching for a volunteer opportunity that will let her live out this new commitment she has made.

Volunteers who are motivated to see volunteer work as a form of ministry are frequently zealous, searching and may be restless. They often need the soft touch of a shepherding coordinator/coach to keep them going. Also, because they frequently have a personal goal, they may need to be encouraged to stay in touch with others in the Christian community.

4. Who makes a good coordinator/ coach for volunteers?

It is important to have one or more persons designated as the official volunteer coordinator or coach. It is preferable for this person to work in a team or small committee. The coordinator/coach may be the minister, another salaried staff person, or a volunteer. The person/people who assume the responsibility of organizing volunteers should be knowledgeable about the church and its members. They should be friendly, enthusiastic and reliable.

Differing sizes of congregations

Can this work in all sizes of churches? Yes! Every church—small, medium and large—needs active, engaged volunteers. It is often assumed that small churches do not require a volunteer coach/coordinator, but this assumption may lead to difficulties.

Example: Marjorie has been treasurer of her small church for 30 years. When she decided to “step down,” the session invited Marjorie's daughter, Ruth, to take over the position. Ruth, however, is a high school English teacher with no experience in public accounting and not much interest in becoming the church treasurer.

A well-chosen volunteer coordinator will help this small church avoid an error which may hurt Ruth and the congregation.

Regardless of who assumes the responsibility of being volunteer coordinator, it is helpful to look at leadership styles. What type of person works well with volunteers?

In his book *Courageous Leadership*, Bill Hybels (Zondervan, 2002) describes ten styles of leadership which are helpful in church life visionary, directional, strategic, managing, motivational, shepherding, team-building, entrepreneurial reengineering and bridge-building. For a full description of each, see pp. 141–156.

Of the ten leadership styles, it is most helpful for the volunteer coordinator/coach to have characteristics of the shepherding leader and also characteristics of the managing leader.

The shepherding leader

- builds a team slowly
- cares deeply for team members
- nurtures members gently
- supports them consistently.

Volunteers enjoy working with shepherding leaders. Shepherding leaders help volunteers discover, develop and use their unique gifts and talents while, at the same time, the shepherding leader keeps volunteers focused on the group goal. They balance the goal-meeting and people-growing aspects by removing roadblocks and by creating a climate where people can do their best.

But the volunteer coordinator will also need characteristics of managing leader.

The managing leader

- has the ability to organize people, processes and resources to achieve a mission
- likes to bring order out of disorder
- finds deep satisfaction in monitoring and fine-tuning
- motivates team members by establishing appropriate mile markers
- loves day-to-day operations.

The coordinator/coach of volunteers must have the capacity to be both tender and a bit “hard-nosed.” He/she asks questions like these:

“How are things going with your work, and what can we do to help you in it?”

“I noticed that you didn't show up for your shift at the ‘Inn from the Cold’ breakfast. It is really important that you let us know if you are unable to be here because there was no one to make pancakes. How can we help you with that?”

5. What does a coordinator/coach of volunteers do? How do they train and support volunteers?

The functions of the volunteer coordinator/coach are to:

- **Organize** – plan the overall task and develop job descriptions for the workers
- **Plan** – set or state goals and objectives
- **Staff** – recruit, interview and place volunteers
- **Direct** – train and supervise
- **Evaluate** – provide feedback.

Details of these five functions

— a. Organize —

It is important to plan and organize before the recruiting begins. Recruiting before designing the jobs is like trying to dance before the music begins.

Organizing involves defining the volunteer opportunities. The following chart helps define *each opportunity*.

Job title	
Responsible to	
Job description	
Time required	
In-service training provided	
Special skills or qualifications	
Opportunity for feedback	

— b. Plan —

The planning may be done by a small group who care about the ministry/volunteers. This may, in a congregation, include the volunteer coordinator/coach, the minister and another interested person.

The basic questions to ask in planning

- Where are we now (baseline assessment)?
- Where do we want to go (goals and objectives)?
- How will we get there (action plans and strategy)?
- How long will it take (timeline)?
- How will we know when we get there (evaluation)?

Baseline assessment involves questions like these: What are our current ministries? What volunteer needs do we have for the current ministries? If we have dreams for new ministries, what are the volunteers' needs for these?

The **goal** is the *why* of the ministry (e.g., we will provide emergency accommodation and breakfast because there are a lot of homeless people in the core of our city).

Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable steps to help move the group toward achieving the goal. (e.g., We will interview three social services agencies in our community who help homeless people. We will talk to the other churches in our downtown core. We will survey the congregation for possible volunteer staff and identify people who will donate food and bedding.)

An **action plan** breaks down the objectives into more detail. Action plans answer four questions: who, how, when and budget required.

The **timeline** may have a long range component but may also “chunk down” the time into mile stones.

Example: In two years we will have a fully functioning after-school tutoring ministry for Grades 1 through 9. In six months we will have the program established for Grades 1–3. In 14 months we will have the program running for Grades 1–6. In two years the program will be fully operational for Grades 1–9.

Evaluation should be both qualitative and quantitative.

Example: After six, 14 and 24 months we will solicit anecdotal feedback from parents, teachers and congregational members on the effectiveness of this ministry. At all these times we will make modifications, improvements and recommendations to our session. **Qualitative evaluation**

After six, 14 and 24 months we will tabulate the numbers of students using our mentoring program and the number of volunteers engaged in the programs; we will also monitor the length of time the children stay in the program.

Quantitative evaluation

— c. Staff —

Identifying and recruiting volunteer staff is both the most critical and the most exciting volunteer work. It is the task of the volunteer coordinator/coach to match the right person with right job. This matching process is the key to success.

i. Recruit

There are several methods for recruiting.

- 1 Identify a specific person who has demonstrated the gift you need. (“I noticed that you are particularly good at working with the older children at Vacation Bible School. Would you consider teaching Sunday school this fall?”)
- 2 Use a volunteer check-list form. Margaret may, for instance, be good at playing the piano but doesn't want to volunteer to do that at church because she plays for a community choir. But she may have other interests which she is willing to share. Remember that just because a person says no for a specific request, they may still want to be involved in something else if asked.
- 3 Use a general announcement. Use church newsletters, bulletin boards, websites, bulletins, announcements in church and so on. Once volunteer tasks have been identified, you need to let people know about them.

One of the fears in this type of general announcement is that people may respond who are not appropriate for the task. It is important to think through how this will be handled. You may, for instance, have a pool of tasks and steer the potential volunteer to one that is more suitable. Or, you may honestly say that the task has enough volunteers at the moment. Can you help them find another way to use their gifts?

ii. Interview and place

An interview is a “conversation with a purpose.” These interviews can be done with a group of trained volunteers. Church members usually respond very positively to the opportunity to discuss important matters with another Christian. The purpose of the interview is to (1) ask appropriate, open-ended questions and (2) use active listening in order to ascertain if there is a good match between the potential volunteer and the ministry position. The interview may include questions like these:

- Tell me about your family.
- Tell me about your job.
- What do you enjoy doing most in your free time?
- What are some of the things you would like to see in our congregation that would have real significance for you and your family?
- What are some of the most meaningful things that have happened to you in our community of faith?
- Are there disappointments about the church that you wish to share?
- We appreciate that you have taken the time to fill in the volunteer check-list form. How do you see yourself involved in... ? How much time do you have to help in... ?

— d. Direct —

We cannot just place people in positions and forget them. It is important to provide both training and supervision. Supervision means more than “checking up.” It means providing leadership, information, time and caring. The goal of the volunteer coordinator/coach is to find ways to help people succeed in their volunteer task.

i. Train

Use the following steps as a guide for training.

- 1 Identify expectations. Provide job descriptions.
- 2 If possible, use people who have done this type of volunteer work in the past. Interview them in front of the trainees and ask, “What did you need to know to do this job well? What did you most enjoy about it? What advice can you give new folks?”
- 3 Ask trainees, given their sense of task, to identify needs they may have for training.
- 4 As you develop the training program, take into account the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the learners. It may be, for instance, that you need to help some volunteers with learning a computer program while other volunteers may need help with learning how to tell a good story.
- 5 Use excellent and interesting training materials. Use people, media, equipment, books and field trips.
- 6 Create and maintain an expectation for on-going learning.
- 7 Post in your training area a circle chart that has the three elements of “continuous loop” for training. Learn—do—evaluate... and back to learn.

ii. Supervise

Supervising volunteers requires that the volunteer coordinator/coach drop into the location of work on an irregular and frequent basis. Volunteers should be invited to talk over problems, concerns and needs. The volunteer area should have the tools and resources needed to do the job well. Supervising also includes an evaluation process (see page 14).

— d. Evaluate, Provide Feedback —

Evaluation of volunteer positions is best done with the group. Follow these steps.

- 1 Clearly state the goal and objectives for the period being evaluated. Invite people to rate how well they think they did in meeting the goals and objectives. Did they do what they set out to do, on time and within budget? Invite volunteers to give their effort a mark out of 10, marking their number on a post-it note. (The volunteer coordinator/coach may do this too.) Post the notes on a wall where all can see.
- 2 If, in the evaluation, the group members give themselves a low rating, ask questions like these:
 - a. Is our goal not realistic? Are our objectives too vague or broad?
 - b. Did we not allow enough time?
 - c. Was there not enough training?
 - d. Is the program just not working?
- 3 If the evaluations were mainly positive, ask questions like these:
 - a. What contributed to the success of our program?
 - b. How will our goal and objectives change for the period ahead?
 - c. What ideas have you to improve our program?

6. What do volunteers expect from a volunteer position?

Regardless of the needs of various volunteers, most volunteers expect the following elements to be present in a volunteer task:

- 1 They want a sense of achievement.
- 2 They want a challenge.
- 3 They want increased responsibility.
- 4 They enjoy recognition.
- 5 They want a sense of growth and development.
- 6 They want to be respected for what they do.

The volunteer coordinator/coach will ask, “Does this volunteer position offer these six components?”

7. To whom does the volunteer coordinator/coach report?

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the volunteer coordinator/coach reports to the session of the congregation and should do so in close cooperation with the minister. Ultimately, the session is responsible for the programs and well-being of the congregation. Ideally, a short report—either verbal or written should be included at each session meeting. The volunteer coordinator/coach may simply report on goals and objectives and how she/he is working with others toward meeting those goals.

8. What if volunteers don't get along?

Volunteers may have one of four reasons for volunteering:

- They wish to improve a service or activity.
- They wish to share their expertise.
- They long for more social interactions.
- They want to give of themselves as an expression of their faith.

It is entirely possible that mixing these four types of volunteers in one working group will result in “driving each other crazy.” For instance, people who volunteer to contribute their expertise may have little patience for long meetings. On the other hand, people who volunteer for relationships and affiliations enjoy long chats, coffee breaks and loose agendas. The reality is, though, in churches, we often have people of all four types in any group. How do you cope?

First, jot down the names of each person in the group. Identify what you believe to be their main motivation for volunteering and modify the agenda accordingly.

Example: Jon has been commissioned by his congregation to lead a group of volunteers through the beginning steps of establishing an after school tutoring program. In his group of potential volunteers Jon has two teachers—both of whom are achievement-motivated people. Both can see how this program will help them at their schools. In the group also are two stay-at-home parents who are social affiliation-motivated people. Jon has one person who has, in the past, run a similar program and this person is an expertise-influenced volunteer. Because of the make-up of Jon’s group he decides to run a short, task-oriented meeting with clear goals and deadlines. This appeals to the achievement-motivated and the expertise-motivated people. But he also invites those who wish to enjoy a cup of coffee together to stay behind after the meeting (the stay-at-home parents stayed) and brainstorm ways to make the church hall a warm and friendly place for children.

9. Why do many volunteer ministry tasks “fail” in churches?

In her book *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, Marlene Wilson tells of interviewing hundreds of volunteers over seven years. She asked them this question, “Why did you leave the last place you volunteered?” The answers were invariably one of these:

- I never knew what they wanted me to do; I didn't even have a job description.
- I didn't know who I was responsible to, so I never knew who to go to with questions, ideas, or problems.
- They never provided any training to help me do what I was asked to do.
- Nobody ever told me if what I was doing was helpful or not
- I was asked to do more and more and finally just burned out.

Volunteers repeatedly said that, in volunteer positions, they want and need to:

- be carefully interviewed and appropriately assigned to a meaningful task
- receive training and supervision to enable them to do the task well
- be involved in planning and evaluating the program in which they participate
- receive recognition in a way that is meaningful to them
- be regarded as persons of uniqueness
- be accepted as a valued member of the team.

Volunteer ministries in congregations falter for a number of reasons. When we know these pitfalls, it helps us to avoid them.

- Most volunteer ministry tasks in the church are not clearly defined. There are few or no job descriptions. There is little clarification of time and skill requirements, responsibilities and training provided.
- A congregation may inadvertently squelch new ideas and approaches, and this discourages people who try to do ministry in a new way.
- Congregations may not use time and talent sheets annually and when they do, they often fail to follow up on what people have chosen.
- Clergy and lay leaders may not do a good job of delegating. They may say, “Oh, it is easier to do this myself.”
- Recruitment is done with an attitude of “these are slots to fill” (e.g., ushering) rather than thinking of how people can best use their gifts. Members need to be encouraged to discover who they are in Christ.
- People in congregations may not be given much opportunity to describe what they are good at, what they are tired of doing, what they don't like to do, what they want to learn, when they need a rest.

10. What road-blocks and set-backs can we anticipate?

There are bound to be road-blocks and set-backs especially if this is a new way of “doing business” in your congregation. Here are some helpful hints.

- 1 Be a bit stubborn about carrying on. If you have followed the steps outlined in this resource and are reasonably sure of your course—just keep going!
- 2 It is possible that one of the biggest frustrations in volunteer ministry is that volunteers keep moving! They may move on to another volunteer position, move away to another town or find a new paid position and have no more time to volunteer. Recruitment can never stop since volunteers are a more fluid group than paid staff.
- 3 Conflict within the volunteer body can be very debilitating. It is essential that the coordinator/coach keep a close watch on the volunteer body and step in with simple and helpful conflict management skills. Here are guidelines during times of disagreement. Post these where volunteers may use them for reference and go over them in training sessions.

In times of disagreement we will:

- a. treat each other respectfully, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ
- b. learn about various positions around the topic
- c. state what we think we heard and ask for clarification so that each side can hear each other
- d. share the concern directly with the person or groups with whom there is a disagreement; we won't go through a third party
- e. focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity

- f. if appropriate, share a personal experience of how the disagreement is affecting us; this may help others see why there is concern
- g. find points of agreement as well as the points of disagreement
- h. seek to stay in community with each other even though the discussion may be strong and full of tension
- i. seek conclusions
- j. pray that there may be a positive resolution.

(Based on *Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement*, 204th General Assembly, 1992, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.)

11. What makes a good climate for volunteering?

Volunteers are much more likely to stay in a volunteer situation if the climate is pleasant and positive. According to Litwin and Stringer (*Motivation and Organizational Climate*, Harvard Press, 1968) there are at least nine factors that greatly affect climate:

- 1 **Relationships** – Do members feel as if they are part of a synergic team?
- 2 **Rewards** – Are volunteers regularly recognized and thanked?
- 3 **Warmth/support** – Is the climate friendly? Are regular check-ins offered?
- 4 **Good conflict skills** – Are conflicts handled speedily, wisely and openly?
- 5 **Physical setting** – Is the work area hospitable, clean and bright?
- 6 **Identity** – Do all people feel valued?
- 7 **Standards** – Is there a clearly stated mission and vision statement? Are there clear objectives?
- 8 **Creativity/risk** – Does the situation allow for calculated risk and adventure?
- 9 **Croup expectations** – In the case of churches, are congregational expectations clear?

12. How do we recognize and reward volunteers?

Many church volunteers say that they do not need to be recognized for their ministry, but most of us enjoy hearing when some area in which we have worked is noticed, recognized and appreciated.

Here are some ways to support, recognize and reward volunteers.

- Be friendly, smile; ask "What's new?"
- Publish a list of volunteers in church news sources.
- Host a volunteer recognition breakfast, luncheon or dinner.

- Reimburse travel or out-of-pocket expenses.
- Provide child care for mothers and fathers of small children.
- Offer volunteers a challenge or new training.
- Continually offer on-the-job training.
- If they wish, provide times for informal gatherings with other volunteers.
- Create pleasant surroundings for their work and training places.
- Share positive comments you hear about volunteers and their work.
- Provide bursaries for volunteers to attend continuing education programs.
- Write thank-you notes.
- Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements.
- Provide good resources and equipment.
- Praise volunteers to their friends.
- Be prepared to write a reference for volunteers seeking a job.
- Send a letter of appreciation to the person's family.
- Host a picnic for volunteers.
- Say "thank you!" lots of times.
- Ask volunteers to write a statement "Why I volunteer in the church."
- Give a gift of appreciation.
- Form volunteer support groups for sharing joys and concerns.
- Host a retreat for volunteers.
- Publicly thank volunteers.

It was late in the afternoon when Susan pulled out of the church parking lot and headed home. When her husband asked about her day, Susan sighed and began to recount her busy schedule—a baptismal call, the work on her sermon, the new after school program. Then she paused, a pensive look on her face.

"You know," she said, "it is absolutely amazing to me how much time Marg Zalameda devotes to the church. In the morning, she was there to help clean up the pews after Sunday. Then, she came back at two o'clock to set up for the children's program."

"Well," Susan's husband responded, "perhaps you notice Marg because she is there when you are. What about John Turnbull? Now, there's a guy who is a high school vice-principal and still finds time to be our church treasurer and chair the Leading with Care committee."

"You're right, of course, my dear," Susan said. "These folks are more than just volunteers. They are saints!"

**Volunteering in the church—the work of the body of believers and saints
helping to grow the Kingdom of God.**



50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, ON M3C 1J7
presbyterian.ca ♦ 1-800-619-7301