



Church workers in teams

TN139 Training Notes series: Management

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Many churches are struggling to recruit volunteers in a post-Covid world.

Some people who served in a range of ministries before the pandemic struck have discovered a freedom and seem unwilling to return to posts they held before. Older volunteers are using the break during 2020 and 2021 to retire now from regular service.

Recent visits to a range of churches show that this is a common phenomenon. Church leaders are complaining that they cannot get people to offer for the church ministries that are starting up again.

That of course raises issues of what should start up again and whether the break offers more of an opportunity to rethink church programmes. Too many churches attempt to do too much. It is better to restrict activity but manage what you do to a high quality.

But behind this there is a fundamental flaw in thinking: that you can advertise a need and expect people to offer to fill it (and presumably the 'right' people too!). If you are not careful this then turns into more and more desperate requests for 'volunteers'.

Article A43 on this website, *Every member on active service*, puts forward a better way of thinking about the whole concept of voluntary church workers. Part of what it recommends is a team approach instead of a rota mindset. This is also covered in Article A47, *15 principles of volunteering*.

These notes take this team idea a little further and show how it can be worked out in practice. Not only is it a more effective way of attracting voluntary church workers, it is also more in tune with Christian values and offers a proper understanding of how people relate to each other.

The focus shifts from getting a task done to working together in a team with others. Here is how it can all work out.

Key elements

The key elements of this approach are:

- You serve not solo on a rota every other month (say), but as a 24/7 member of a team with others, even if your sessions on active duty are solo.
- The team has a leader so you feel in a secure place.
- You are invited to join the team in person by the leader.
- You are expected to review your membership of the team each year so there is no expectation that you have to serve a life sentence.
- The church holds some kind of database of its members' skills, gifts and experience, with one person in charge of this.

Example – The church's Intercessions Team

The role, and this should be set out on about one side of A5 paper, is to lead the congregation in prayer for others each Sunday. You were invited to join this team by its leader, who is herself a volunteer, because of your passion for prayer, seen in your contributions during your regular attendance at central prayer gatherings.

You are only expected to fulfil this role about once every other month, but you are listed as a team member. You meet up with other members regularly for training, new ideas and to assess recent services. More importantly, you know who is leading in prayer each week and are encouraged to pray for them as they prepare. You seek to encourage other team members and learn yourself from the way they lead.

You tell people, "We lead intercessions", not "I lead the prayers".

So, how does it work?

Here is a list of FAQs to explain how such a system should work.

Who are the team leaders?

This concept depends very much on those who act as team leaders. In a larger church some may be members of staff, but in a smaller church most will be members of the church who have agreed to undertake this role.

There might be an understanding that no one can lead more than one team, but a paid member of staff might lead two. Here are some possible ideas.

- The Tech Team – led by a member of the congregation who can make this role a priority.
- The Children's Groups Team – led by the church's Children and Families Worker.
- The Catering Team – led by one member of the congregation with a passion for hospitality through catering.
- The Bereavement Team – led by the church's part-time Pastoral Assistant.

Team Leaders would have clear role descriptions, meet together to provide the leadership with the overall picture of service, and be trained together in team leadership.

The whole scheme depends on good Team Leaders so these are important appointments.

How do you find team members?

The church no longer asks for volunteers, though it may make needs known generally, suggesting that anyone interested might talk to the relevant Team Leader (without an expectation that they will automatically join).

But to invite someone to join their team should not be a random activity. The Team Leader needs to be very aware of the person profile requirement for a team member and to be seeking out people who match this. This calls for some kind of central database of church members' passions, experience, gifting, etc. and someone in charge of the whole system of appointing church workers so that no one is being invited by different teams at the same time. These points are covered in Article A43.

The approach should be personal and one-to-one, without undue pressure but with plenty of encouragement and explanation. People are far more likely to take part in an area of service if personally invited. It might be wise to restrict the number of teams anyone can join.

How many in a team?

It is best if teams are kept quite small. Teamwork only functions well with numbers under about ten and some teams may only be two or three. But much will depend on the ministry in question. For example, a Teens Group Leaders Team will need enough to run activities.

How do you launch such a scheme?

Something like this can be introduced team by team. It does not have to be church-wide from the start. However, this may be the time to rethink all involvements so no one is assumed to continue in the ministry they are in at present. And it does call for central co-ordination so that the early teams being set up do not take people who might be better in a different team.

What about new church members?

The church might have a listing of their service teams both in print and on the website, with an outline of role for each. New church members can then be invited to join a suitable entry-level team within days of their deciding to make this their church.

Teams or committees?

Committees are sub-groups of the main Trustee body with responsibility for deciding or recommending policies and plans in specific areas of ministry. The list of teams that follows assumes that these are the workers, but sometimes the two ideas merge so that the committee for a specific area of ministry is in fact the workers. In the following list you will spot one or two examples that could also be Trustee committees.

What about length of service?

An agreed length of service before a review is always wise. In a team-based system it could be part of each Team Leader's responsibility to review each member's service with them on an annual basis and to let people move on when they feel the time is right. Knowing this means people are more likely to respond to an invitation to join a team.

A number of churches are now adopting this service team concept. It takes a very different approach from pleas for volunteers to fill rota slots.

A list of possible teams

Here are ideas for teams to consider, though most churches might only have a much more limited number depending on their ability to run the various ministries. Those shown as leaders are just examples and will differ church to church.

Sunday services

Note that larger churches with several Sunday services may have separate teams for each service.

- The Music Team or Choir – led by a Director of Music (paid or not)
In smaller churches this might be four or five people who play and/or sing most weeks. In larger churches a team of ten or fifteen who form separate bands each Sunday.
- The Worship-leaders Team – led by the Minister
Consisting of those who lead Sunday services.
- The Preachers Team – led by the Minister
Those who speak at Sunday services.
- The Intercessions Team – led by one of its members
Those who regularly lead the intercessions on Sundays.
- The Prayer Ministry Team – led by one of its members
Those who are available to pray with people at the end of a service.
- The Lesson Readers Team – led by the Assistant Minister
Those who have been trained to read the Scriptures aloud.
- The Tech/Infrastructure Team – led by one of its members
Audio and visuals support for the services, and IT support for the office.
- The Welcome Team – led by a Church Warden/Elder
Those who welcome everyone and those who look out for newcomers and staff the Welcome Desk.

Other church ministries

- The Small Group Leaders Team – led by a member of staff
For larger churches these may be broken down into two or more teams by zones.
- The Pastoral Visitors Team – led by the Pastoral Assistant
Some churches will break this down into a Bereavement Team, a Visiting Team, etc.
- The Seniors Team – led by one of its members
Those who lead the weekly meeting for Seniors.
- The Toddlers' Team – led by the group leader
Those who run the Toddlers' group.
(and other similar examples)
- The Children's Groups Team – led by the Children and Families Worker
Those who lead and run the various Sunday and midweek groups.

- The Youth Team – led by the Young People’s Leader
Those who lead and run the teens groups.
- The Alpha Team – led by the Assistant Minister
Those who lead the Alpha or equivalent courses.
- The Outreach Team – led by one of its members
Those who lead community events.
- The Mission Support Team – led by one of its members
Those who allocate funds for mission partners and stay in contact with them.
- The Church Staff Support Team – led by the HR lead
Those with HR responsibility for employment within the church.
- The Church Office Team – led by the Church Administrator
Those who help run the office during the week.
- The Finance Team – led by the Treasurer
A small team including Book-keeper and Gift Aid Secretary.
- The Maintenance and Grounds/Property Team – led by a Church Warden / Deacon
Those responsible for IT, maintenance, care of the grounds, etc.
- The Catering/Hospitality Team – led by a member
Those who work together to provide food for church events or arrange accommodation for visitors.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN139. See also Articles A43, *Every member on active service*, A45, *How to lead a team at church*, and A47, *15 principles of volunteering*, plus Training Notes TN100, *Why some offer, why some don't*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice or training on working with volunteers.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN139 under Management.

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