**Recruitment ideas – within the local church**

It’s a routine that repeats Sunday after Sunday in churches throughout North America. Whether in the form of a bulletin announcement or a personal appeal from the podium, the call goes out for volunteers who are essential for an important project, event or program. Churches depend on volunteers. And all too often it is the same people who are repeatedly being called upon and expected to step forward, as if the prerequisite for volunteering is to have volunteered before.

The potential flaws in this recruitment method should be quite obvious. It is a recipe for volunteer burnout. It stifles the flow of fresh ideas that new participants could bring. It easily allows some members to hide on the fringes. And it can imply that being active in the ministries of the church is optional.

If indeed there were one simple, sure-fire solution that allowed churches to fill all their volunteer needs, your church and every other church would already be using it. However, there are some effective principles and practices that can help to foster a culture that values volunteerism at all times, and where volunteer energy can be rallied when it is most needed.

**SHOWING APPRECIATION FOR VOLUNTEERS**

One of the most effective ways to encourage volunteers to be there when you need them is to regularly show how much volunteers are appreciated, and to acknowledge the positive impact they bring to your church’s programs and ministry. Volunteers don’t necessarily want to be put on a pedestal or singled out for thanks, but they do deserve to know that their contribution of time and energy is appreciated and is making a difference.

Take time to thank your volunteers in formal and casual ways, and not just at the obvious occasions, but also in unexpected or surprising ways. And be sure to regularly thank God for blessing your congregation with faithful volunteers.

**PROVIDING SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

If the ministry, program or project that is seeking volunteers has the endorsement of the local church, then you should be asking your pastor and council to pray that God will provide the necessary volunteers, and bless the volunteers and their ministry work. Church leadership should be personally thanking, encouraging and praying for those within the congregation who are leading volunteer teams. Elders should periodically approach volunteer leaders and ask, “Is there anything you would like me to be praying for?”

From time to time, pastors, elders and deacons should remind the congregation that God expects all members to serve with their time and their gifts. Leaders within the local church should lead by example and be prepared to model what it means to be a ‘servant’ when volunteers are needed. If Jesus was willing to wash the feet of his disciples, then those who hold positions of responsibility and authority within the church should also be prepared to roll up their sleeves and participate in any task that requires volunteers.

Show that your congregation values the importance of volunteers by having an annual commissioning service, and also giving recognition and expressing gratitude at the annual congregational meeting and periodically during congregational prayer. Don’t just recognize the high-profile volunteer positions, but make a special point of thanking those who serve behind the scenes.

**CLEAR COMMUNICATION**

When it comes to recruiting volunteers, your message needs to be compelling and truthful. A compelling message focuses on the impact the volunteer role has in serving ministry goals and building Christ’s Kingdom. A truthful message not only demonstrates integrity, but it helps to ensure that expectations align with the realities of the task and the desired results.

In most cases, people already know the basic functions of an usher, church school coordinator, GEMS or Cadets leader, or other positions within the church. Instead of focusing on the obvious aspects of the task, be very deliberate and specific in explaining how, through their involvement, volunteers are supporting the ministry goals of the congregation and reflecting Christ’s love and compassion. Rather than saying, “we need volunteers to do” this or that, describe how “through your participation, you are serving Christ” by helping to meet a specific ministry goal.

Be ready with a concise story or recent example about the impact the program or project has made, and how the prospective volunteer can contribute toward that impact. People deserve to know what is being asked for in terms of investing their skills and time, and they also need to know how their volunteer involvement is contributing toward the ministry goals of the church.

If there are a number of volunteer positions in your congregation, you may want to have an easy-to-find Bulletin Board of all volunteer duties within the church, who is doing what, who is in charge, what are the volunteer needs. This is also a logical place to post [job descriptions](http://www.crcna.org/servicelink/engage/church-volunteers-and-staff) so people can clearly see what is expected of them.

* Prospective volunteers want to see the various roles/needs and so they can assess where their gifts will be the best fit.
* Prospective volunteers don’t want to be asking around to find out who is in charge of a specific area of ministry where they may be willing to serve – give them a central place to find that info, and make it easier for them to identify and personally approach the right person.
* For simple tasks that require a number of volunteers, be sure to have an easy-to-find sign up sheet that also contains all the vital information (where, when, what, who to contact).

**FINDING THE RIGHT FIT**

Some volunteer tasks can be done by people of virtually all ages and abilities. Other tasks, especially those that are more relational and ministry focused, will require a more selective recruitment process.

Consider what skills or gifts are needed for the volunteer role, and then look for the right fit ([‘Discover Your Gifts’](http://www.faithaliveresources.org/AdvancedSearch/Default.aspx?SearchTerm=%22Discover+your+gifts%22) leader and student guides are available through [Faith Alive Christian Resources](http://www.faithaliveresources.org/)). Time and time again, it has been shown that the most effective way to recruit volunteers is through a face-to-face personal ask. Identify the most suitable candidate and then personally approach and invite them to serve. When approaching candidates, be prepared to tell them why they are the one you believe is best suited for the position. Show that you recognize, appreciate and value the gifts they would bring to this role.

Even when appealing for volunteers through bulletin announcements, other print or electronic means, or getting up in front of the church, do everything possible to put a put a name and a face to the volunteer opportunity and the team, and to articulate how the team’s purpose aligns with the church’s ministry goals. Let people know that they will be part of a team with a common objective, and let them know who is the leader or captain of that team. Recruitment is a wasted effort without volunteer retention. Leaders must take deliberate steps to integrate new volunteers into the ‘team’. As new volunteers develop relationships and feel part of ‘the team’, the more effective and satisfied they are likely to be.

When recruiting or identifying potential candidates, don’t just look to those who regularly volunteer. Consider those who may be overlooked or circulate on the fringes of the congregation – they may be eager for a role that will allow them to become more involved. Also consider if this opportunity would appeal to young adults who may feel that the church tends to overlook their gifts and abilities.

If possible, have something in writing to give to those who approach you for more information – a project proposal or an outline of goals, a job description, or some other document that provides specifics about the expectations and role of the volunteer. This will demonstrate that the task is important enough to warrant planning and that the volunteer is stepping into a process that is underway – not one where they agree to a role and then need to figure out what actions need to be taken. If someone asks for more information, provide it. Say you will follow-up with them after a specific time, and do so.

**GETTING CREATIVE**

In addition to supporting a task that is aligned with the ministry of your church, volunteering should be enjoyable. It can’t always be about fun and games – there is serious work to accomplish. But fun does need to be part of the equation. So, when you are looking for volunteers, try to bring some creativity, energy and fun into your recruitment message or method.

God equips His Church with the gifts and resources needed to be part of His mission in the world and in our communities. Volunteer coordinators have the honour of helping to harness and channel those resources for Kingdom service, and experience both the challenges and the rewards.

**LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

***‘A New Strategy for Recruiting High Impact Volunteers’*** *is a ServiceLink workshop that is available to interested churches. Please contact ServiceLink (**volunteer@crcna.org* *or 1-800-730-3490) for additional information.*