

Revitalizing Volunteerism

Evaluate needs and streamline roles. Make certain that every role you define has a meaningful part to play in making ministry happen. People have no patience for tasks that serve no useful purpose. If you are unable to fill a particular role, leave the position open for a time to see what you learn about the void. Is it really needed?

Embrace technology. We have learned many things about working remotely. Let go of the notion that all ministry needs to take place in the church building. Let people do their work for the church the way they have learned to work for their employers.

Promote flexibility. Don't limit volunteer opportunities based on physical availability during narrow time slots. Certainly, some positions have a very specific time commitment—you can only teach vacation Bible school when the school is in session. However, much ministry can be accomplished whenever the volunteer has time to get the job done. Be creative about how you structure volunteer roles to allow people to use their available time.

Move toward episodic micro-volunteering. People are less interested in joining committee and boards with ambiguous workloads. They are more inclined to say yes to a specific task that falls within their wheelhouse—a task that they can complete on their own timeframe, working with other individuals who are equally invested in the task. This requires more work on the part of volunteer managers and committee chairs, dividing the tasks and delegating them between available workers.

Clarify the expected outcomes of volunteer assignments. Create volunteer position charters. What is the purpose of this role? How does it contribute to the mission of the congregation? What are the boundaries of the role and the expectations of its occupant? How will the volunteer grow by serving in this capacity? How will the volunteer be supervised and evaluated? How will the volunteer know that their work made a difference?

Help people pursue passion. Too many volunteer jobs are just plain boring. Too many meetings. Too many restrictions based on “how we've always done it.” Too many instances of being unsupported and overwhelmed by the need, because all the work fell on too few shoulders. Other instances of being recruited to serve when there wasn't a meaningful contribution to make.

CONSIDER THIS: Instead of starting with a position that the church wants filled, begin with the volunteer. Ask what they are passionate about, where they feel compelled to make a difference, and then craft opportunities that honor the passion while also supporting the mission and priorities of the congregation.