



A Few Thoughts about Volunteers and Volunteering

Q: How can I better serve my community and my church?

A: Volunteering is the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy in our society. It is offering time, energy, and skills of your own free will. Volunteers affect virtually every aspect of society including health, education, social services, youth, sports and recreation, culture, the arts, and the environment. By celebrating the efforts of volunteers, we create opportunities to raise awareness about the vital contribution they have made-and continue to make-to Canadian communities and society as a whole.

As church leaders we understand and appreciate the commitment and contribution of our volunteers. At the same time, we are challenged to be at the forefront of building a connected and engaged church; God's church of mission in our communities; understanding what we are being called to do and answering that call.

Volunteering in your parish

Ministry vocations can range from administrative functions such as property management and finance and administration to social justice tasks such as working with a food bank or a housing agency. The range of ministry is restricted only by our imaginations and the needs of our communities. Consequently as leaders, we must plan for and support lay ministry as carefully as we do for paid positions. There are simple and proven principles that help to make intentional lay ministry work. They are grouped into a model known as the lay ministry/volunteer management cycle. The acronym PROSE offers a simple way to share and remember the principles

Lay Ministry Empowerment Cycle

- Planning
- Recruiting
- Orientation and Training
- Screening and Support
- Evaluate and Recognize

The Plan

Our diocese is about building communities of hope and compassion through the development of healthy, sustainable, vibrant parishes. As leaders, in order for us to become connected and engaged, we must know the community and its needs, as well as the church and its mission. Ask yourself “What are the greatest needs in the community and the world? What are the strongest gifts in the congregation? Which needs can the congregation meet? What resources do we need? Remember that you are not alone. Meet with other community leaders, ecumenical as well as business and political leaders. They will be your partners in meeting the needs of the community.

Think through the specific ministry you want and write down the particular tasks and responsibilities you need fulfilled. Consider the importance of the function, why you want it done, the personality characteristics, competencies and skills needed. Then list the qualifications required, the training needed and the support and supervision you will provide. Last, but in no way least, figure out the benefits this ministry will bring to the person accomplishing it and how it would fit into their sense of call, ministry or faith journey. Put this all together in the form of a ministry description. A link to our diocesan ministry position descriptions has been included below.

Recruiting and interviewing

Begin with a search process which may range from an informal invitation to a structured job posting. When you find a possible candidate, invite them to meet with you to discuss the position and be mindful that:

- Volunteers can choose the number of hours they donate. This, in addition to their different motivations, means matching volunteers to appropriate assignments is important.
- Because we use different types of volunteers for different types of volunteer assignments, volunteer recruitment activities and policies should be geared to your specific needs.
- Just because someone has indicated they would like to volunteer, does not mean you do not have to ask them. If you do not ask them, they will assume their services are not required with your organization, and find another that needs them.

- We lead very busy lives, and so do our volunteers. You need to be very clear about what the job is, when they need to arrive, and how long they will be required to be working.
- Volunteer assignments that require continuity, such as those with a long learning curve or relationship building with a group or an individual client will require recruitment for long-term commitment and reliability. You will also need to consider transition plans to ensure that the support being provided by these assignments is not interrupted.
- Remember that volunteering is a two-way deal. We get an individual's time and talents but in exchange, the volunteer has needs he or she wishes to fulfill (see above).

Take time to sit down and discuss the position with the person. Remember: if you are casual about the invitation to minister, you may unwittingly be communicating that the ministry is not important. Be clear about what you are asking for and use the ministry description. Discern in the conversation if this person is a good match for the position in terms of skills, abilities, time commitment and personal qualities. If you discover that this person is not a good match for the position but would be suitable in another role, suggest that they consider something else.

During the interview, you both have an opportunity to see where those gifts can best be shared. Never twist people's arms, but do promote the benefits of the ministry. Give people time to think about the position and graciously thank them for considering the request. Encourage them if they are hesitant but interested, and offer opportunities to try it out.

Orientation and training

Get off on the right foot by scheduling time with the person at the beginning of the ministry so that they can be oriented to the position. Learning on the fly is neither satisfying to the individual nor effective to the organization. Offer training for the position, which may be in the form of formal or informal workshops, books or articles to read, on-the-job training, or written instructions. Offering on-going training is a great way to renew lay ministers.

Screening and Support

The diocesan Safe Church Policies (Screening in Faith and Anti-Harassment) have been implemented to ensure that the church is a holy place where the love of Christ can be modeled and learned. We have a fundamental obligation to the welfare of all members of our community, but especially to those who are vulnerable through age, infirmity or particular circumstances of dependency. The degree of screening reflects the level of risk in the volunteer position. Assessing risk includes financial responsibilities as well.

It is essential to support the ministry of the volunteer once they are in place. Help solve problems, recognize their efforts and accomplishments and coach and guide them. Never take a person's gifts for granted. You can never say thank you too often. Where appropriate, offer tangibles such as certificates or small thank you gifts. Provide adequate supplies and resources. Ensure they know who they report to and where to go for organizational approval. Be on the alert for over-functioning behavior and burn-out which can be destructive forces in ministry.

Evaluation and Recognition

Check in regularly to find out how things are going. It's a good way to recognize the work as integral to the life of the community. A more intentional evaluation can be done through a one-on-one conversation or in a small group, using a series of prepared questions. Provide immediate feedback. Evaluate both the job and the lay ministry volunteer. Include the lay ministry volunteer in the evaluation process. Don't forget to get feedback from partners and clients. Based on the feedback of the evaluation, adjust the job description if necessary, clarify misunderstandings, develop goals and celebrate accomplishments. If it is not a good fit, discuss a re-assignment to a more suitable ministry. Conduct exit interviews when people leave a position and, as appropriate, celebrate the service in a way that is meaningful to the lay ministry volunteer.

Recognition is a way of turning work into worship. It is an opportunity for the faith community to reaffirm how this particular ministry is connected to the wider mission of the church and how the role of the lay ministry volunteer contributes to its accomplishment. Recognition is as informal as a well-timed thank you and it should also be formalized. Formalized celebration of ministry has various forms: a thank you note, a gift certificate for a family outing, a liturgy of commission, a liturgy of covenant for the ministry of all the baptized at the beginning of the church year, pins, certificates and dinners are just some recognition ideas. Find out what is important to the lay minister and then be creative to find an appropriate way to recognize that individual. When done well, celebration enhances relationships, builds commitment, and fosters community.

Sample Parish Ministry Descriptions

Sample Ministry Descriptions are available on the Diocese of Ontario website at <http://ontario.anglican.ca/wp/screening-in-faith/>. If you can't find exactly what you are looking for, please feel free to adapt anyone of the listed ministry positions to fit your requirement. If you need any assistance with developing a position description for your ministry requirement please contact Doug Cowley at scdcdoug@gmail.com.

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