



Support and encourage volunteers

Introduction

Volunteering has been shown to improve volunteers' wellbeing, help people to gain valuable new skills and experiences, and boost their confidence. As well as serving the church, volunteering gives people an opportunity to use their God-given gifts and skills in His service. It is important to note that Christians volunteer in a wide variety of contexts – not just the church and this should be recognised and celebrated. There are a large number of Christian, and non-Christian, local and national charities who are blessed and enabled in their mission as a result of those who volunteer. This guide looks specifically at how a parish can effectively support and encourage those who volunteer within the church.

Creating a positive climate for volunteering

People who volunteer to serve in the church are a blessing to the ministry of the parish. It is important that we make sure that their gifts and skills are used effectively and that an environment is created in which others will feel empowered to serve too.

'Your SHAPE for God's service'

This is a series of three sessions, written by the diocese and designed to help churches to enable people to discover their unique SHAPE; the gifts God has given them and how they might use those in His service. At the end of the three sessions participants are encouraged to have a conversation with a church leader about places where they might effectively use their gifts and skills. SHAPE can be downloaded here: www.bristol.anglican.org/SHAPE

Delivering the SHAPE sessions in your parish can be a hugely empowering way to help people identify their gifts and the ways God is calling them to serve.

Appreciation

It is also hugely important that we value, appreciate and thank those who volunteer. There are lots of ways to do this – thank you cards, words of encouragement, an appreciation party, small gifts at Christmas, praying for volunteers in services, notices of thanks in the church notice sheet or acts of commissioning, to name but a few.

Succession

If every leader or volunteer was raising up a deputy to replace them when the time came for them to move on, then there would always be a pathway of new people stepping into volunteering roles. This can be most effective with positions of leadership, but whenever a volunteer moves on, asking them to identify someone who they feel could be approached about replacing them can be really helpful.

Fixed term introductions

When seeking to recruit volunteers it can be really helpful to explain how long you are asking this person to volunteer for. Perhaps it's a one-year trail, perhaps it's just a six week programme or a one term trail. A huge obstacle to volunteering is if people think they are having to make a commitment to do something forever, so being clear that this can be reviewed after a set period sends a positive message to potential volunteers.

What steps should we follow when recruiting volunteers?

It is important to follow a safer recruitment procedure when recruiting volunteers. The diocese regularly hosts Safer Recruitment training which explores the scope of Safer Recruitment procedures in the church context for both paid staff and volunteers who work with children and adults.

Create a role description

The process of creating a role description can help to establish what the parish is expecting from a volunteer and help volunteers to identify a role where their gifts and skills can be best used.

Application

If we are struggling to find volunteers, it can be tempting to instantly accept anyone that comes forward. However, it is important to follow safer recruitment guidelines. A one-page application form can help you to find out more about the potential volunteer and help the volunteer to express their motivations for wishing to volunteer with you.

Interview

You might like to explain this to potential volunteers as a two-way conversation to cover:

- Why they have put themselves forward as a volunteer
- What have they been doing in the last couple of years
- What they would like to gain from volunteering
- Practicalities such as the skills that they have to share, relevant experiences, availability, training needs.

References

References can come from a variety of sources such as employer, previous employer or teacher. You might like to provide the referee with the role description so that they can comment on the person in relation to the role.

DBS check

Speak to your Parish Safeguarding Officer to find out if the role requires the volunteer to undertake a DBS check and to make arrangements for this to be carried out if necessary.

Getting a volunteer started

Induction

It is important to provide new volunteers with a good welcome and introduction to volunteering with you.

An induction might cover the following:

- Introduction to others they will be serving alongside
- Overview of the vision and values of the parish and the aims of the activity or area of service they will be joining
- Explanation of how things work e.g. equipment/reimbursement of any expenses or where to find key documents and policies
- Discussion around the role and the expectations of them as a volunteer. Expectations might cover:
 - To perform your role to the best of your ability
 - To follow the procedures and policies of the parish
 - To be aware of responsibilities in relation to health and safety and equal opportunities
 - To maintain the confidentiality of information and ensure that responsibilities towards GDPR are met
 - To let someone know if you are not able to honour a volunteering commitment that was made;
 - To agree to a DBS check being carried out where necessary
 - To meet or speak regularly with an identified main point of contact or support at the parish
 - To follow the parish complaints procedure if there is any problem

Health and safety for volunteers

A parish that is working with volunteers has a duty of care to its volunteers. There is a responsibility to ensure that volunteers are not exposed to risks and that risk assessments are carried out where appropriate.

Parishes should make sure that their insurance policies explicitly cover volunteers, the following should be considered; employer's liability, public liability, professional liability and personal accident cover.

Support to volunteers when they have started

For a volunteer to be successful in their role they will need to be supported, encouraged and kept informed of developments at the parish. The amount of support required will vary depending on the role being carried out by the volunteer. Depending on how many volunteers you have and what roles they are carrying out, you might like to consider the following:

Informal support – conversations that take place during a volunteering session or at social events

Supervision – a regular planned meeting that has the express purpose of checking in with a volunteer

Volunteer meetings – an opportunity for peers to support each other and for information to be shared.

Saying thank you

There are a number of ways that parishes can say thank you to volunteers; volunteers that feel appreciated tend to keep volunteering. Some ideas that you might like to consider are:

- Saying "thank you"
- Volunteer celebration or thank you events
- Certificates of appreciation or birthday cards on birthdays
- Training – a wide range of training for volunteers is available through the diocese
- Praying for volunteers during services, or holding an annual commissioning service for volunteers.

Volunteers that stop volunteering

Firstly, make sure you thank any volunteer who decides to step down, acknowledge and celebrate all that was achieved as a result of their volunteering. There is also an opportunity to review with the volunteer their experience of volunteering with the parish – from this you might learn new ways to support other volunteers better.

It may be that someone standing down as a volunteer feels called to volunteer in a different role and this can be explored with them.

You might like to ask:

- What have you most enjoyed about volunteering?
- What have you found most challenging or difficult?
- Is there anything you feel we could be doing differently? Is there anything that we are not doing?

Further links

www.volunteering.org.uk

<https://www.cuf.org.uk/learn-about/working-with-volunteers>