

WOMEN VOLUNTEERS

For twenty-five years Betty Pitra has been a competent career woman. Now she is semiretired and works only when she chooses. Unfortunately, that work doesn't include volunteer work at the church.

"I come only on Sunday morning for the worship service," she says. "When I was younger and my children were small, I took my turn in the nursery, taught Sunday school, and helped with some of the office work. But as my career progressed, I wanted to do more than teach Sunday school. In my profession I'd been given responsibility to get things done and make decisions, but at my church that doesn't seem possible."

How can the church provide the kind of environment where middle-aged women like Betty can grow spiritually, personally, and professionally, contributing to the body of Christ in the process? Church leaders can be aware of four things in utilizing this valuable source of volunteer help.

Match jobs with interests, skills, and abilities.

Richard Detrich is pastor of Faith Community Church in Littleton, Colorado. "Since our church is only five years old, we don't have to overcome tradition in order to utilize women," he says. "But the principle of matching jobs to gifts can be applied in any church, regardless of its policies.

"In our church, for example, two women who serve as deacons are in an interesting study in gifts and interests. Kris is a corporate attorney for a large Denver real estate developer, heavily involved in financial planning for her business. She does the same kind of work for our church's financial planning. Margaret, on the other hand, is a receptionist for a doctor. She has been very involved in coordi-

nating congregational social events. She does more of the traditional kinds of things our culture expects women to do.

"Kris would be totally lost coordinating a church potluck, while Margaret can hardly find her way through our financial report. Our church has made a conscious effort to isolate those gifts unique to each of our members and then try to fit them with jobs in the church that match."

Encourage personal development.

Although men are often given a chance to move up in the church ranks, women are too often stuck in one job and never given the opportunity to progress to other meaningful jobs that are open to them under the limits of their church structure.

Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Illinois, belongs to the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination, which excludes women from serving as deacons, elders, or pastors. Because of this theological position, the pastor, Robert W. Harvey, and the elders at Bethel are continually seeking creative ways to provide opportunities for women to be involved in other meaningful service. Women are represented on all committees outside the session and assume leadership confidently. In fact, at various times over the past years, women have chaired half the standing committees of the board of elders and deacons.

Two significant positions are Sunday school superintendent and human resources committee chairman. The human resources committee is responsible for analyzing leadership needs in the church and making recommendations to the session. Both of these positions have been held by competent, well-qualified women for several years.

Give decision-making responsibility.

The First Baptist Church of Cambridge, Minnesota, wrestled with the issue of how to involve more of its members in decision-making responsibilities.

A constitution revision committee, elected by the church, proposed a whole new system of church government. On May 1, 1980, with a spirit of anticipation mixed with apprehension, the church voted to try a new method of operation. Every activity of the church and its auxiliary organizations was assigned a place in the church structure as part of a committee headed by a steward.

The use of gender terms was purposely omitted from the constitution. Stewards were elected by the church, each steward being free to appoint as many people as needed to do the work. Now, two years later, most members seem enthusiastic, because many more members have been involved in the total life and work of the church. Eighty members serve on the various committees, forty-six men and thirty-four women. Dozens more, half of them women, serve on various subcommittees.

Affirm good work.

Men and women are motivated by the same things. People can be affirmed in the jobs they do in many creative ways:

- Have dedication services where workers are recognized and dedicated in prayer.
- Publish names in the church bulletin or newsletter.
- Have job descriptions for each position, with regular conferences and supportive reviews.
- Provide training for each job, with someone des-

ignated to give continued encouragement and guidance.

- Send teachers and workers to conferences and seminars.
- Pray in church services and prayer meetings for the various programs and the individuals involved.
- Have prayer partners for each volunteer.
- Provide job rotation to give new responsibilities and growth.
- Give added responsibility to people who will accept it and who have the gifts.
- Have appreciation dinners or services, give recognition certificates.
- Feature people who've given many years of service to the church in local newspapers or denominational magazines.
- Provide channels for all members to contribute ideas and suggestions.
- Conduct surveys when considering new ministries, changes, or issues.
- Write personal notes of thanks and appreciation throughout the year.
- Keep people informed of meetings, schedules, and events.

People are the most valuable assets the church has. It's through people that God has chosen to make himself known and accomplish his purposes. And women make up the majority of those people.

—Virginia Patterson, president
Pioneer Ministries