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The Care and Feeding of Volunteers

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Chapter Four Helping Volunteers Plan

"What this church needs is a plan. Something that will keep us on track; some goals so that we know when we have accomplished something." The speaker sat down amidst a burst of applause. The meetings of the board in this church would no longer be the same. The call had come for a plan and goals for program.

"Could you tell me when and how to get people trained? I know the *why* and the *where*." The plea to the pastor was from a young woman recently appointed as children's department head. She wanted to do a good job but needed help in planning from the pastor.

Regardless of the task, a person must plan to get it done. Since pastors and other church staff or leaders are responsible for helping volunteers, it stands to reason that one of the most important contributions will be in helping volunteers plan. A purely selfish motive might be behind the help since planning is the best way pastors have to save time and energy when working with volunteers.

Planning is looking at a task and breaking it into smaller more manageable components. It assists people to think through the schedule needed to complete a task. Most important from the point of view of volunteers planning begins with goals toward which they are aiming. The goals

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relate each task to purposes critical to the existence of programs in the church.

A plan is built by volunteers and the pastor. It is not participative so much as it is cooperative. The difference between the two is that cooperative planning requires preplanning by the pastor who develops the basic plan including the schedule and checkpoints. Then, he or she and the volunteer cooperatively work out the details and come to an agreement on all phases and activities contained in the plan. Participative planning means that no preplan exists, and the pastor and the volunteer do the whole thing together. This type of planning is usually not necessary and is too time-consuming for most jobs in the church.

Regardless of the type of planning used, each job a volunteer undertakes requires joint planning with the pastor. It is not an optional activity. It is a necessity. It is a discipline. The dividends are significant, especially to pastors or church staff members who work regularly with volunteers.

A Planning Process

Everyone uses a planning process of sorts. The need lifted up here is to formalize a process but keep it simple. One such process consists of four steps.

1. Identify Purposes.

A planning process begins with the establishment of purposes. These may be quite limited, as in the typing of a newsletter. Or they may be extensive, as in the case of visiting to help renew a member's commitment to the church. Regardless of the scope of the tasks, each has a reason for being included in the total program of the church. Listing this purpose is the starting point for planning.

2. Establish Goals.

The next step is to establish goals that will meet the purpose. A goal, for example, might be that each

Wednesday by noon the newsletter will be typed, duplicated, and in the mail. This goal presupposes the attainment of other goals such as the deadline for receiving materials to be included in the letter; making certain that the persons responsible for typing, duplicating, and mailing do their jobs on the prearranged schedules; and having someone take the letters to the post office by noon on Wednesday. Each of these jobs has other tasks dependent upon it. The goals for each job must be specific, clear, and deadlines must be established so that the other goals may be met.

3. Identify Resources, Personnel, and Schedule.

The next step in the process includes: identifying needed and available resources, such as money for postage; persons and a few alternates to do each job; the training and orientation that is necessary; and an agreed-upon time schedule. These are all a part of the planning for a task. They are critical to getting on with the job, but up to this point the job has not been started.

Experience has shown that it is easier to work out these details during a planning session or two than to try scurrying around looking for resources as they are needed later. In addition, as in the case of the man who had trouble recruiting assistants for the stewardship campaign, planning relieves the need to stop halfway through a project to look for and train individuals to help.

4. Implement Plan.

The final phase of the planning process is implementation. Each aspect of the job has been carefully outlined, and work can begin on schedule. For example, a person has decided to visit on Tuesday and Friday afternoons at two different nursing homes. The planning phase included marking on a map the locations of the homes, listing the

church members in each home along with their general condition, calling the homes to find out the best time to visit, and putting together a packet of things for the visitor to take. Included also is a discussion on transportation to and from the homes. Finally, a church contact person is noted in case the volunteer runs into any emergency. Tuesday afternoon at 1:30 the visitor is on her way to see three members in one home. She is implementing the plan.

These planning steps are essential to the successful completion of each job. Some persons need more help in planning than others, but each volunteer will be assisted by careful and detailed planning guidance from the pastor or church staff member. Such a session is no time for skipping over the details. Small things turn out to be the most troublesome. All the details must be dealt with through the planning process. It relieves frustration and prevents lost time later.

The role of the pastor in planning with volunteers is critical, and needs to be emphasized. Experience has shown that the following parts of a planning activity are essential to increasing the effectiveness of volunteers.

Start with a Plan

Two approaches to planning with volunteers are often encountered. One is to begin as though the person has had no experience in a specific job. This approach is supposed to encourage creative thought. It is frustrating and time-consuming.

The second approach is to have a plan already in mind that is based on past experience. So far so good, but implementation can be troublesome in this approach. The existing plan cannot be changed or adjusted. The volunteer must do the job exactly the way it has been done before. Almost no job in the church needs to be done exactly as it was done previously.