

# NOBLE VOLUNTEER

**"It is hard!"**

Those words take on some of the anguished dimensions of our Lord's "It is finished!" when spoken by a volunteer-seeking pastor. Recruitment is hard—hard enough to make us feel like giving up the ghost sometimes.

The reasons why it is hard have to do with three tensions.

## Tension No. 1: Is This Church or Kiwanis?

From a human standpoint, the church is a volunteer organization. The rules and dynamics that apply to Girl Scouts and Kiwanis apply here, plus a few others. We have recruiters and recruitees—those who sell the purposes and needs of the organization,

and those who listen to the sales pitch. We outline specific tasks and give strokes to those who volunteer their precious time to work. Words and letters of appreciation are essential, or volunteers begin to feel used and unappreciated. After all, they chose to give of their time to help out the church.

But what about God's standpoint? The church is his kingdom. Volunteer organizations are democracies in which the governed give their consent to the governors, and the consent can be withdrawn whenever the masses wish. Not so in a kingdom. The governor gives his consent to the governed. A king doesn't recruit; he decrees.

And strokes? Letters of commendation? These are not totally out of place, but neither are they of great importance. With a king and his subjects, it is more

# OR HUMBLE SLAVE?

BEN PATTERSON

## Is there any choice about serving the kingdom of God?

As what Jesus said in a parable: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" (Luke 17:10, RSV). Slaves and subjects do not owe to their Lord. They simply take their hands off what was his in the first place.

In my first contact with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, I was told that an underlying assumption of that ministry was that every Christian has a right to expect obedience to God from every other Christian. Hence, when staff people went on campus to introduce themselves to incoming Christian freshmen, they were unapologetic in their approach. "So you're a Christian? Wonderful! Now here's what you can do on this campus to grow in your faith and tell the Good News to others." The person was addressed not as a potential volunteer but as another person who had sworn allegiance to the King. If anyone was unapologetic, it would be the recalcitrant student!

One of our great problems is that while the church today functions like a democracy (even in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic traditions), it is really a monarchy. Sam Shoemaker illustrated something of this fact with the story of a near-sighted professor who was an expert in entomology. His office walls were covered with pinned and framed insects. One day his students decided to play a practical joke. They took the body of one bug, the legs of another, and the head of yet another and glued them all together.

The specimen was brought to the professor for identification. "What kind of bug is this?" they asked.

The professor eyed the bug closely and replied, "Gentlemen, this is a humbug!"

Shoemaker drew the analogy to a person whose heart belongs to King Jesus, but whose head is run by the world and hands are run by the devil. The church as a volunteer organization is yet another kind of humbug. This pernicious mixture of democracy/voluntaryism with the kingdom of God has diluted our Lord's call to commitment. And, if I may mix my metaphors, it has produced hybrid Christians. On the one hand they call themselves slaves of Jesus Christ, and on the other they regard themselves as volunteers who serve the church if they so choose.

### Tension No. 2: Am I a Prophet or a Persuader?

This first confusion leads to a second: the role of the pastor. When Alexis de Tocqueville came to America, he was taken aback to discover that everywhere "you meet with a politician where you expected to find a priest." In a culture where churchgoers see themselves as selecting the leadership, it is only natural that the leaders fall into the mode of persuasion. Consent must be requested, elicited, persuaded from the people. That, in large part, is the role of the politician and the advertising executive.

## MEETINGS THAT WORK

You have just been appointed (or elected) to lead a church committee. You're a beginner at this and don't know where to begin. How can you make this group work?

Here are some basic tips from one who has learned through trial and error and wishes to spare you some pain:

### Start on Time

Some people are always late—that's their style. And everyone is delayed occasionally by unforeseen circumstances. Don't delay the start of the meeting for either person. In announcing the starting time for the meeting, you have contracted with the committee members to begin at that hour. Keep your end of the bargain.

### End on Time

Announce not only the starting time but the adjourning time. This keeps the meeting moving and cuts down the frustration people experience because of unrealized expectations. If the session runs longer than expected, we feel the pressure of other commitments impinging on us. If the meeting is shorter than expected, we find ourselves with time that could have been put to productive use if we had known it would be available. Either way, we feel cheated.

### Agendas

Print and distribute agendas in advance of the meeting. This encourages committee members to do some homework before they meet.

### Making Motions

Formal motions help eliminate confusion. Have the one who makes a motion write it out for the minutes. Keep some half sheets of paper always on hand for this purpose. The secretary can easily add them to the minutes exactly as proposed and passed.

### Three Critical Questions

When your committee has made a decision, ask three questions *before* you move on to the next item:

1. Who is going to implement this decision?
2. What is that person supposed to do?
3. When is the report due?

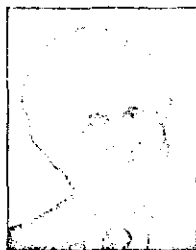
In the beginning, I found it difficult to remember these questions until it was too late. Finally, in desperation, I wrote them on a large card. At each meeting I chaired, I set the card up in front of me so that I could not miss seeing it. After several meetings, I found I relied less on the reminder card and more on my memory.

The vending, huckstering, and peddling we see on the religion page of every Saturday newspaper are the logical consequences of this syllogism. Voluntaryism in the kingdom cannot help but produce persuaders and politicians where there should be prophets and proclaimers.

I and just about every other pastor I know resent the recruitment end of our task. It always seems to carry the notion that we must convince people who

ought to need no convincing to do a job that is clearly part of what it means to be what they claim to be.

What to do about all of this? Preach. Teach. Pray that the church will be what it ought to be. Mean what you say. Last year we could not get anyone to volunteer to teach Sunday school. Nearly 25 percent of our attenders on Sunday are under the age of twelve. At the baptism and dedication of infants, we Presbyterians always stand and promise together to do everything in our power to nurture the faith of the children God has given us. Those three facts: the percentage of our congregation who needed teaching in the Sunday school, the promises every member makes several times a year to nurture the faith of our children, and the lack of people to volunteer to do just that, made me mad. I told my congregation that unless there were sufficient volunteers by the next Sunday, I would not be in the pulpit that day but rather in the Sunday school teaching my



*Ben Patterson is pastor of Irvine Presbyterian Church, Irvine, California.*

## Minutes

Every meeting should have a written record. It should be duplicated and distributed to all committee or board members within ten days of the meeting. The minutes will remind committee members of the tasks to be completed *before* the next meeting, in sufficient time to get the work done. And minutes read at home shortly after the meeting by a member who missed that meeting helps bring him or her in board with the rest of the committee.

Properly written minutes include:

1. A list of persons present, absent, and excused.
2. A list of each item discussed and a *brief* but accurate description of the final decision and/or motions passed. Include the vote count. It indicates how strongly the committee members felt about the issue.
3. The answers to the three critical questions, Who? What? When?
4. A reminder of the next meeting time, date, and location.

## Be a Pusher

One of the most important duties of a chairman is to give direction to the meeting:

1. Keep the group focused on the issue at hand. Look for arguments that are being repeated or discussions that wander into unrelated areas.

Suggestion: the making of a specific motion prior to the discussion will help keep everyone to the point.

2. Don't allow long discussions to develop on issues that can't be decided at this meeting. For instance, don't get tied down on issues that require additional research and data before a vote can be taken. If someone suggests it is time to look for a new refrigerator for the church kitchen, assign someone to gather data on refrigerator models for the next meeting. Do it early, before you spend time discussing what you aren't ready to resolve.
3. Recommend to committee members that ideas be as fully developed as possible when they are presented to your group. For instance, the proposal for a new refrigerator could include the costs of several models, the features or advantages of each, the source of the funding, and the reasons why a new one is needed. Make a copy for each committee member.

This is not intended to be the final word on improving the quality of your meetings. What is included here are some procedures that have worked for me. Maybe they'll give you some ideas.

—Mason M. Finks, pastor  
First United Methodist Church  
Springfield, Illinois

Children about Jesus. I meant what I said. They knew it, and we had the teachers we needed before the week was over.

I don't recommend that you do that, too. And I'm not sure I should have. After I said it, I shuddered inside to think, *what if they don't care to have me in the church?* But if you mean what you say, your people will get the message.

## Tension No. 3: Shall We Work or Soothe?

Unlike the first two, I do not want to resolve this tension. It is the pull between the church's task and the church's nurture. The church has a job to do in the world and within its own walls. The people who are appointed to carry out this mission are themselves also the mission. The very people who are called to care and minister and intercede are in need of care and ministry and intercession. Unlike an

army, where the feelings and personal needs of the soldiers are relatively unimportant, the church is a place where these things are crucial. But, as we all know, it is extremely difficult to lead a charge while binding up the wounds of the people who are charging.

That tension is just part of the turf. The Good Shepherd both leads the sheep and lays down his life for the sheep. To try to resolve the tension in favor of *task* is to invite burnout in the congregation. We must be continually nurturing those who have stepped forth to answer the call of Christ. Likewise, to resolve the tension in favor of *nurture* is to become a stagnant, narcissistic club instead of a church. We care for the souls of our people not only for their own sakes but also for the sake of the world they are called to go out and serve.

As much as is possible, I believe the twin assignments of nurture and mission should be done side

by side. Our elders spend a lot of time together in fellowship. Sometimes when we meet, we feel the pressure to skip an extended time of conversation and prayer, and get on with the "business" before us. It is then that we must be reminded that prayer and personal conversations are also the "business" of the church.

Whenever I think of my struggles over the issue of volunteers in the church, I remember a line from a Kenny Rogers song. He sings about the music man

and what a good singer and powerful man he is. "But you surround yourself with people who demand so little of you," he adds sadly. Once we name the name of Jesus, we cease to be volunteers in the kingdom. We become humble slaves. It is my desire that the church be a place where we surround ourselves with people who will demand much of us and themselves, as together we serve the One who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

## BROTHERS, WE ARE NOT PROFESSIONALS

Pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness, no professional tenderheartedness, no professional panting after God.

But our first business is to pant after God in prayer. Our business is to weep over our sins. Is there professional weeping? Our business is to strain forward to the holiness of Christ and the prize of the upward call of God; to pummel our bodies and subdue them lest we be cast away; to take up the blood-spattered cross and deny ourselves. How do you carry a cross professionally?

We have been crucified with Christ; yet, now we live by faith in the one who loved us and gave himself for us. What is professional faith?

And we are drunk, not with wine but with the Spirit. We are God-besotted lovers of Christ. How can you be drunk with Jesus professionally?

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Hasn't God made pastors last in all the world? We are fools for Christ's sake—professionals are wise. We are weak—professionals are strong. We are in disrepute—professionals are held in honor. Pastors don't try to secure a professional lifestyle, but are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we

have become the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things.

Brothers, we are *not* professionals! We are outcasts; aliens and exiles in the world. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord. You cannot professionalize the love for his appearing without killing it. And it is being killed.

The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. We are not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense, they are foolishness, they are refuse. The professionalization of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual and other-worldly nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity among the world's professionals) kills a man's belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them spiritual aliens in the world.

The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism. There is an infinite difference between the pastor whose heart is set on being a professional and the pastor whose heart is set on being the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of death to some and eternal life to others.

God, deliver us from the professionalizers! Deliver us from the low, managing, contriving, maneuvering temper of mind among us. Banish professionalism from our midst, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

—John Piper, pastor  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota