

Church Volunteer Administration - Part II: Several Programs Under One Roof

By Janet R. Richards

In a previous article (CHURCH VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION: Similarities and Differences--Fall (1978), a discussion was presented on how volunteer programs in churches are both different from and similar to those in other agencies. As other writings have circulated under the heading of religion and volunteering, I began to recognize the wide variety of views which were being expressed about this segment of volunteer administration. It is both exciting and confusing to hear writers talk about church members as change agents in the community, talk about the clergy as enablers, and still others call for more church members to become involved in specific community needs.

At the same time, my efforts to get a handle on all the volunteer efforts in Gloria Dei Lutheran Church (where I have been Coordinator of Volunteers for three and a half years) gave me the feeling of looking through a kaleidoscope. The picture kept shifting, each picture as fascinating as the one before and never repeating itself. I tried to cope with finding enough people to count the offering on Sunday morning and getting people out for the Blood Mobile and finding people to drive

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drive a member to the hospital for therapy. Mixed in with it all was the effort to complete a survey to identify needs and available skills. Dealing as it does with the joys and sorrows, successes and failures in the lives of its members, the church staff sees the whole spectrum of life unfold in the process of its ministry - a never ending series of events with humor and paths intertwined. The church's mission is a true kaleidoscope with every color in the rainbow surfacing and then merging with the others. This kaleidoscope effect then, becomes a part of the volunteer program in the church where the body of volunteers and clients is one and the same.

Gradually as I worked with the picture, certain patterns emerged and it became apparent that volunteering in churches can be divided into at least five categories as listed below. Recognizing this fact made it possible for me to decide which direction to move first. It also helped us to understand that some of those categories might never be a part of the volunteer program at Gloria Dei.

I. TRADITIONAL: This is listed as No. 1. because in my personal experience it has that position of primary importance. Coordinating the many needs of the church with the widely varied skills of its members is an ongoing process --- one which provides the most meaningful use of the volunteer

efforts while enhancing the internal programs of a church. Without volunteers, churches would have a difficult time surviving even a month. The traditional functions of the church are under this heading (singing in the choir, ushering, teaching Sunday School, helping with mailings, etc.) and represent the myriad of ways by which church members express their personal ministry within the church. For the most part, people have been recruited for these services by the Pastor.

I have a large concern for the multiple roles usually carried by the Pastor. He is expected to see that everything runs according to plan and on schedule. He is expected to be God's spokesman, and counsellor for the sick and troubled, a confidant of the wayward, a manager of whatever staff he has, a fund raiser and overseer of the budget, and, sometimes operator of the mimeograph and occasional handyman. In other words, the view held by many church members is that the Pastor must manage to be all people - view that is shared, also, by some Pastors themselves.

To relieve a small measure of that pressure, a Pastor might consider the delegation of responsibility for coordinating the volunteer services of the membership within the church. The coordinator, either one individual or a team of two or three, would systematically identify the interests, skills and availability of the membership. With this information the coordinator is then able to help people accept responsibilities which they find challenging and satisfying. The net result is that this kind of information is processed and organized into a file system to which any one has ready access.

Many people sharing responsibility creates a stronger, healthier church. An office with the responsibility for this coor-

ordination and for recording this information is a major step in that direction.

II. CONGREGATIONAL CARE: This second category of church volunteering is one which may be viewed as an extension of the pastoral care. In many churches systems have evolved for involving persons in reaching out to the needs of the membership. Some churches have been doing it for so long that it's as natural as breathing. In other churches it is a process that may have been overlooked.

Pastors place a high priority on the care of hospitalized members or bereaved families. However, once the immediate crisis is passed, other crises capture the pastor's attention. The hospitalized person goes home or the funeral service is completed and it is assumed they no longer need the attention of the church. In reality it is at this time that they may need the most care, support and comfort.

A coordinated congregational care program would identify and train individuals who would be willing to continue the church's outreach over an extended period of time. Such services would keep the church aware of additional needs that might develop or, at the very least, help the individuals feel the ongoing concern of the church.

A program of this sort requires ongoing training and support for the church volunteers serving acting as visitors. A thorough recordkeeping system is also necessary to continually update the congregational needs. It thus becomes a total program complete within itself. As of the first of the year at Gloria Dei, we have hired an Assistant Coordinator of Volunteers whose sole responsibility is Congregational Care. Though not all churches have a multiple staff situation, the principles work in churches of all sizes.

III. THE CHURCH-AT-LARGE: A third form of coordinating the church's volunteers is in service to the regional and national body of its denomination. Church boards and committees utilize many non-salaried personnel. We mentioned above the identification of skills, interests and time available for the church membership. This important resource could be tapped to make referrals to those denominational boards and committees as requested. There is always a need for new persons and new thinking to promote the church.

IV. THE COMMUNITY: Agencies in the community frequently turn to the church as a resource for volunteers. It is a time consuming job for an agency to send speakers to churches for recruiting purposes. The assumption made by many agencies who hear that I am a coordinator of volunteers in a church's membership for service in community agencies may eventually become a goal for some churches. At the present time it is generally a catch-as-catch-can process, and is likely to remain so in view of the fact that churches are just beginning to recognize the need for developing a better coordinated process for internal volunteer services.

V. ADVOCACY: This final category is a highly individual one. The role of advocate is very apt to require confronting a controversial subject. For example, in the tumultuous 60's and early 70's some churches were torn asunder over the Civil Rights Movement as their members held widely divergent ideas of the role (or stand) the church should take. A congregation united behind a cause can be a powerful force but it requires a highly skilled coordinator to provide the direction for that force.

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individual with community organization skills to coordinate that force can provide the impetus for that church to be an effective resource to the community.

SUMMARY: These then are the readily identifiable categories into which I feel the coordination of church volunteers can be divided. This offers a variety of directions for consideration by churches which may be contemplating the employment (paid or unpaid) of a volunteer coordinator. Each category (with the possible exception of III) can evolve into a full time job when the professional precepts of volunteer administration are applied.
