

JUMP START



- ▶ Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Culture
- ▶ Position Descriptions
- ▶ Vision & Action Plans

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The Biblical Foundation for Serving



**What do you believe about serving and ministry?
Here's a quick look at three theologies that are the
foundation for volunteer leadership in the church.**

Don't you love the question *what if?*

When we ask *what if?*, we can begin picturing what tomorrow might be like. Asking that question invites us to cooperate with God in imagining a vision for the future.

Your church will have a future—next week, next year, and beyond. Wouldn't it be best if your church had the future you prefer? One that's grounded in God's will for your congregation, that's spiritually healthy, and that's moving forward to do God's will in your community?

When it comes to involving volunteers in your church, there's no secret about what God wants to accomplish. It's all there in the Bible, and it is reflected in three interrelated theologies. Let's explore these together. As we go, think about your church and how you're living out these three theologies.

The Priesthood of All Believers

True or false?—God intends for every member of your church to be active in ministry.

True! According to Scripture, we're all called to be active in the ministry of the church. God never intended for church to be a spectator sport. Just the opposite is what God has in mind, as we see in this passage:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare

the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

That “royal priesthood” is for all Christians, not just professional clergy. Men and women—we’re all part of the priesthood of all believers.

Age doesn’t have anything to do with it, either. In the same way we’re not expected to retire from service when we get to the age of 65, neither are we too young to be involved when we’re in sixth grade. When you think of who’s been called by God to be involved in ministry, include your entire congregation.

Is it evident
that you believe
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When someone walks into your church, is it evident that you believe everyone has a place in ministry? Or is significant ministry done just by the paid staff or a handful of people? Maybe ministry is being done by just a few people because no one else will do it, but what’s your preference? Does your church have an openness to lay people assuming ministry roles?

Because if that’s God’s expectation—that lay people will have ministry opportunity—we’d better be providing those opportunities. Failing to do so only cripples the church.

I think there’s ample evidence in Scripture that God is looking for us all to roll up our sleeves and get involved. When we made a commitment to God, he made a claim on our lives.

Paul wrote:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20a)

In the book of Romans we read:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. (Romans 6:15-17)

Bought at a price.

Slaves.

Those words communicate that God owns us. He's paid for us. We're his. If he's got work to do, it's clear that we're all on his payroll. He wants to use us all.

Not everyone will preach, teach, or sing in the choir. But all Christians are supposed to be doing something that fits within their unique blend of abilities, skills, and passions. It's really not optional. Priesthood is all about *doing* something as well as *believing* something.

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What's the evidence in your church that you embrace the priesthood of all believers? Do church members see volunteers serving in significant and varied roles? Do they see every category of person involved in ministry of some sort?

If not, is your church willing to change?

By the way, here's the first place you should make changes: in the expectations of your leaders and lay membership.

When Jesus recruited his disciples, he called them to leave their businesses and families. It cost those fishermen something to follow Jesus. It often costs us little to follow Jesus, at least in the Western world. People expect to go to church and drop money in the offering plate, but that's about it.

So no wonder lay people look surprised when we explain they also need to serve in a ministry. It may be the first time they've heard they're required to do anything beyond showing up and writing a check.

We tell people all about the Savior Jesus. We teach about how Jesus saves people from their sins, loves them, and is preparing a place for them in heaven.

But we sometimes forget to mention much about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus calls everyone who follows him into the royal priesthood, where service and discipleship are more than theories—they're expectations. Joining a church isn't an invitation to retire; it's enlistment in an organization that's actively serving God. If you're going to expect people to serve in ministry, say so up front in your teaching and preaching.

- *Does your church invite every member to be in appropriate ministry somehow?*
- *Is there a place for each person in your church to do ministry? Are you open to an influx of volunteers?*

The Giftedness of Each Child of God

The Bible tells us that every believer can do ministry in some way. Each person has important work to do in the church, regardless of gender, age, or education.

Here's what Paul wrote:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

And again he wrote:

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:28-31)

Finally, consider this passage in Romans:

If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:7-8)

Clearly, believers' God-given abilities, skills, and passions are to be used to build up the body of Christ and to glorify God. Those are the truths wrapped up in the theology of "the giftedness of each child of God."

Our job is to help people discover where to put those abilities, skills, and passions to use. We need to do it for the health of the church and also for the spiritual health of individual believers.

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But before you embark on that journey, you need to decide:

- Do you believe each person in your church has something valuable to contribute?
- Are you willing to help people who aren't sure what they can offer to discover ways to serve?
- Will your church make room for people to serve in ways that align with their abilities, skills, and passions?

The Whole Body of Christ

In the same way each believer has a God-given ability, skill, or passion to use in ministry, each believer has a particular function in the body of Christ. We all fit *somewhere*, but we don't all fit *everywhere*. There's a big difference.

The theology of "the whole body of Christ" acknowledges that each member of your church has something to offer, but it's a specific something. People aren't interchangeable; you can't just move them around on the organizational chart. Someone God has designed to be an empathic, caring people-helper isn't going to thrive in a volunteer role that's designed to enter data on a spreadsheet. If someone's a hand, he or she won't fit a role designed for a foot.

The ministries in our churches are enhanced, changed, and expanded when we discover people's gifts and abilities. We get the right people in the right ministry, and everyone benefits.

Consider these passages...

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:14-27)

Are you willing to encourage people to minister within the constraints of their unique abilities, talents, and passions? If not, how do you expect those volunteers to be successful and fulfilled?

Are you willing to not do programs if you can't staff them appropriately?

Now let's ask a few *what-if* questions about your church—and mine.

What if we took seriously the implications of our theology when it comes to serving in our churches?

What if we reflected biblical principles in our policies and procedures when it comes to inviting and equipping volunteers in our churches?

What if we learned from our brothers and sisters in Christ who have found ways to connect serving to discipleship—and we put their experience to good use in our churches?

I'll tell you what will happen in most churches when *what if* becomes reality: We'll see dramatic and profound changes.

That's because in most churches, volunteerism is suffering. Most of the work of the church is done by the hired staff or a small group of volunteers. The vast majority of church members sit and watch, or, at best, are peripherally involved. They certainly don't find any meaning in their service through the church.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if serving in and through the church became the norm instead of the exception? What if the days when you had to beg for volunteers faded into a distant memory because people were actively seeking to serve? Wouldn't that be a welcome change?

The question is: How do we get from where we are to where we want to go?

Change does not happen overnight.

This book will help you, but it's a journey and a process. There's no pixie dust you can sprinkle on your church directory and find that, suddenly, calls will pour in from willing volunteers. Change does not happen overnight.

But the churches that grow successful volunteer equipping all have three things in common, and this is the place to briefly talk about them.

- **They approach the process prayerfully.**

Sometimes the apathy in the pews toward doing the work of the church is a spiritual issue. It can't be fixed by doing a better job writing volunteer position descriptions. Nor can it be fixed by initiating a new process. It has to be fixed through what is called a "heart transplant," a renewing and refreshing of the heart.

Your church might just need a change of heart about serving God and serving the church. And that gets fixed through prayer and through sharing God's vision for what your church could be as God's representative in your community.

Will you commit to pray for your church? For your leaders, for your vision and mission, and for the members of your church who are willing volunteers—and those who aren't? They all need prayer.

- **They embrace the entire process.**

This can't be stressed enough: *You must embrace the entire process we'll be describing.* If you pick and choose an idea here and a process there, you'll see improvement. It's all good stuff and it works. But you'll be sticking an adhesive bandage over a broken bone.

You're already doing many things right. If you're like most people who are responsible for finding, recruiting, training, and maintaining volunteers, you have strong communication skills. You're already experiencing some success at the process just described.

The problem is that the processes mentioned—finding, recruiting, training, and maintaining volunteers—are missing several key components. You may be excellent at all those things; you've still skipped important steps. Until you have them all, your effectiveness and results will be compromised. Your success will be limited, and you'll have to work harder.

A process for placing volunteers in ministry that assures you—and the volunteers—that you'll have the right people in the right positions involves church-wide systems.

- **They build programs on a solid biblical foundation.**

The three theologies we examined aren't new. We've all nodded in agreement as we've heard them preached and taught. But do we *believe* them? And if we *do* believe them, are the actions and attitudes expressed in our churches consistent with them?

Those three theologies are fundamental to your church's volunteer culture. They reflect God's values when it comes to our doing kingdom work and how he has designed the church. When we let the values in these theologies slip, some terrible things can happen. Things that actually discourage serving.

Consider this example of how a church leader chose to value a program over the people who were in his congregation...

The Little Drama Team That Couldn't

The pastor of a small church attended a conference hosted by a California megachurch. The pastor noticed how well drama was used in the megachurch's worship service, so he did a little investigating.

It turned out the drama ministry was comprised of a team of more than 50 people. They rehearsed regularly and performed two plays each year. They also sang musical numbers and performed skits each week that reinforced the sermon theme. They even had a sub-team of writers who did nothing but create original skits for the actors to perform.

The pastor couldn't wait to pull together a similar team back home. He just knew it would revolutionize his church's worship experiences.

So, two weeks after the pastor returned, he called a meeting for everyone interested in drama ministry. Two people showed up...and one was a junior high student who'd never been in a play.

The pastor made it a personal priority to get a team organized. He made another announcement and did a bit of personal recruiting. That got his team up to five. Still not enough.

So the pastor called a few of the perpetual volunteers—people who always said yes when asked directly—and twisted their arms. Reluctantly, two of those people joined, too, giving the team a total of seven members. Not ideal, but for a church of one hundred, not bad. Not bad at all.

It wasn't bad—it was worse than bad. The first skit was a disaster. Some of the team forgot lines. Others got stage fright and simply stood in place. The few people with an aptitude for drama couldn't pull the skit out of a tailspin. The effect was powerful—but not in the way the pastor wanted.

What went wrong? Plenty, but at heart it came down to this: *Most of the drama team was made up of people not gifted for this ministry.*

The pastor did respect the priesthood-of-all-believers theology—everyone was invited to participate in this ministry. But the pastor didn't respect the unique giftings of church members or their function in the body of Christ.

Most of the drama team was made up of people not gifted for this ministry.

SAMPLE