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Using the Mission Statement to Recruit Church Volunteers

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[Editor-generated] Abstract

The author discusses methods of engaging the time and talent of church members as volunteers with a primary focus on using the organization's mission statement.

[Editor-generated] Key Words: volunteers, church, mission statement, recruitment

Introduction

An enormous reservoir of energy and talent is present in the numerous religious congregations in North America. For the most part, believers are waiting to be called to service, service which will offer them opportunities and enable them to act out their beliefs and convictions. Imagine what could be accomplished by mobilizing these diversely rich talents! Church and community volunteer leaders need only to learn how to tap into this vast reserve of human energy and conviction.

The word "church" is used here in its broadest sense, to include all organized religious groups of any denomination. The "volunteers" are members of the congregation who work without pay to accomplish the mission of their particular organizations (the gathered church) and in the wider community (the scattered church).

Thesis

The purpose here is to develop a method of tapping into the time and talent of members of a religious congregation, with a primary focus on using the organization's mission statement. It is appropriate to recruit church volunteers for both the gathered

church and the scattered church. The same volunteer management principles apply in each situation; however, in this case, they will be treated separately for clarity.

The Mission Statement

A general understanding of a mission statement (or "declaration" or "proclamation" as some congregations call it) is a basic premise for what follows. For our purposes, a mission statement can be defined as a statement of identity and purpose for a community of believers (who we are, and what we are called to do). The written statement gives direction and purpose to the religious organization. It can be as brief as a sentence or two or as long as a couple of paragraphs. However, the trend is toward simplifying statements so that they will be more easily read, understood, and used.

Examples

A.) The church of _____ is a community of believers in association with the church universal, who strive to serve the world in order to prepare the Kingdom of God as proclaimed in the scriptures. We do this by giving mutual assistance in daily life, witness, worship, and service to

those outside our community (Rademacher, p. 177).

B.) We, the community of _____ declare it to be our primary mission to live in a faithful relationship to our God. We are called to be a listening, worshiping, serving, and loving people. We will pursue this mission with the help of God through the gifts and talents of our members (Harms, p. 29).

The mission statement should be drafted by a group of leaders, with opportunity for input from all members, and presented to the congregation for ratification and ownership. The mission statement becomes a cornerstone from which all activity is built. It becomes an essential tool for planning, goal setting, and program planning, including *volunteer participation*. To be of optimum value, it must be communicated often to those who are attempting to accomplish the mission. The statement should be published, displayed, referred to, reviewed yearly, and changed if necessary.

Using the Mission Statement to Recruit Church Volunteers for Work in the Gathered Church

Most religious organizations subscribe to the idea that each member has been created with unique and valuable gifts meant to be discovered, developed, and used on behalf of others (Wilson, p.15). Fortunate are those church members whose leaders (both paid and unpaid) take seriously their roles of vision setting and planning before making an appeal for volunteer participation.

Those who design work for volunteers need knowledge of and a sensitivity to the gifts and needs, as well

as the rights and responsibilities, of the membership in that particular community or tradition. (This supports the selection of a person from the congregation or community as the volunteer coordinator.)

Effective leaders design volunteer jobs to accomplish a part of the mission. They are able to communicate how a job relates to the overall mission, the work of paid staff, and other volunteers. A written description of each volunteer job is a key component in deciding who is needed to do the job.

The members of the church cited above in Example "A" might fulfill their mission in their gathered church by:

1. forming a single parent support group within their membership to "give mutual assistance in daily life,"
2. expanding roles for members with talent and knowledge in areas of worship such as prayer leadership or heading a worship environment planning group.

For most members, at least in the case of adults, membership in the congregation itself is voluntary. Committed members welcome the opportunity to contribute to the life and mission of their church, and they have a right to expect their involvement to be well-planned and related to the mission. Often the Director of Volunteers is the person who raises an awareness of this and begins to create the climate in which it can happen.

Helping an organization to form its mission statement could be the first

step to helping members become involved in the work of their church. In some instances, the attempt to manage volunteers more effectively in a congregation may necessitate some improvements in overall management of the organization. While good administration and good pastoral care are not mutually exclusive, good management practices are often not the primary concern of religious organizations. Remember, it is mission that motivates members to commit their time and talent, not necessarily the task itself. Focusing on a mission statement which reflects the members' values will make a big difference in recruiting volunteers for action in the gathered church.

Using the Mission Statement to Recruit Church Volunteers for Work in the Scattered church

A given congregation can be seen as a group of people who "stand for making a difference in the world. What better place to recruit volunteers for a project which will meet their criteria for mission?

For instance, in the case of example mission statement "B" cited above, members might fulfill their mission to the scattered church by:

1. "listening" and "loving" victims of abuse, by volunteering in a domestic violence prevention center or a rehabilitation program for parents who have abused their children,
2. "serving others by using our gifts and talents" in administration of community organizations which promote

and protect human dignity, such as Red Cross board or a city government's human relations commission.

An important condition for church members using their gifts, in the name of their church, in community or agency programs is the clear understanding that using the volunteer position to proselytize for one's particular tradition is inappropriate and could jeopardize the success of the program. This should be addressed in the training and orientation sessions of both the church and the agency.

Before an agency or project volunteer coordinator considers approaching congregational leaders or members to recruit volunteers, it is imperative that she or he thoroughly understand the mission of her or his own organization or agency. The recruiting coordinator should then:

1. Send a letter of introduction to the religious organization, explaining the opportunities the agency/program can provide the members.
2. Make an appointment with the congregational leader.
3. Inquire about a mission statement. Read, discuss, and make sure she or he understands it.
4. Explore the possibilities for involving the church's members in the work of the agency, program or project to the mutual benefit of each organization.
5. Get the name and phone number of the person in the church with whom to review the situation at length and to

determine if the match is feasible.

A worthwhile nonprofit agency program or project which can relate its needs for volunteer services to a church's mission statement and goals, without compromising the integrity of either's values, could indeed find a treasure in the church's membership. This is especially true for those traditions which place a high value on outreach and positive societal change, looking to make a difference in the world.

Summary

Whether one is attempting to involve volunteers in the work of the gathered church or the scattered church, keying into the organization's mission is the first step to successful recruiting. Upon analyzing the elements critical to effective volunteer involvement, it becomes obvious that efforts which are successful are well managed from the beginning to end, including planning, organizing, designing jobs, recruiting, interviewing screening, orienting, training, coaching, recognizing, and evaluating.

The beginning is a clear statement of purpose—who is involved and what they do, and the mission statement. The end is the evaluation of what was accomplished, assessing whether indeed the mission was carried out and the goals were achieved as planned. This "end" becomes a "beginning" as we begin again our mission-focused planning, thus continuing the cycle of action based on beliefs.

References

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About the Author

At the time of the article's original publication...

Frances Ledwig, Director, had founded Volunteer Development Associates after developing and directing a school volunteer program and a large urban church volunteer program from 1984 until 1988. She enthusiastically shared the knowledge, skills, and experience she has gained, in addition her extensive professional education in volunteer management. Ms. Ledwig holds a B.A. degree from the University of Texas and is certified by the Volunteer Management Program at the University of Colorado. She had worked as a laboratory research assistant, a teacher, and a volunteer administrator. She had 30 years experience as a volunteer leader and follower in community, church, and school organizations.