



ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

CHURCH PRACTICES SERIES

AUGUST 2022



GTA Region



WELCOME

Over the last few years serving as GTA Regional Director in the Western Ontario District, it became clear that there were some common challenges facing church leaders in the Greater Toronto Area.

As a result, we decided to develop The Church Practices Series to assist our leaders in addressing these challenges in their unique context.

In the following few pages, you will find links to interviews with those with an academic perspective on these challenges and those who have personally worked to address them. In addition, you will find links to resources and a curated summary of what we have seen in our research.

We hope this package helps spark conversation as we work together to see our region impacted for God.

Joel Spiridigliozzi with Jonathan Gallo



INTERVIEWS

WATCH / LISTEN HERE: <https://vimeo.com/wodvideo/gta-region-volunteers>



Melodie Bissell
President & CEO
Plan to Protect
plantoprotect.com



Amitabh Singh
Executive Pastor, Author
AmitabhSingh.com



Jonathan Gallo
WOD
jgallo@wodistrict.org

ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

The importance of building a solid volunteer system cannot be underestimated. The following is a summary of ideas for leading and developing a volunteer system for your church.

WHO CAN SERVE?

There are several perspectives about who should be allowed to serve as volunteers/ministry workers in the local church. Some believe that volunteering should be seen as an outflow of spiritual gifts/ministry and, therefore, should be restricted to those who are followers of Jesus and have indicated a level of church dedication. Others believe that anyone should be allowed to serve who is willing and able to. This view assumes that some people grow more connected to the church and faith as they begin to serve. Finally, some views are somewhere in-between where some roles are open to everyone, and other roles have stricter pre-requisites. Whatever your view, it is crucial to articulate your views so they can be clearly understood. It is also essential to consider the legal and moral ramifications of opening volunteer positions to non-members.

MINISTRY PLANNING

Get an understanding of the number of volunteers and volunteer hours you need to fulfill the ministries of your church. Start by creating an organizational chart of all the ministries you have and the minimum number of volunteer roles required to run each ministry monthly. Then, ensure that you include hours each volunteer serves in-person and in preparation. At the end of the exercise, you will understand the number of volunteers you require for each ministry and the number of volunteer hours you are asking of people in your church.

Ministry Name	Role	Number Required	Weekly Hours
Kids	Sunday School Teacher	10	4 hrs
Greeting	Usher	8	3 hrs
Groups	Small Group Leader	5	6 hrs

This information is helpful in several ways. First, it helps you understand the total number of unpaid serving hours and the corresponding monetary value invested in your church. Second, it helps bring awareness to areas of ministry that are strong and need strengthening with new volunteers. Third, it helps set expectations for your capacity to do more or to simplify. Finally, it helps you plan which ministries need to start, pause, or do differently.



ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

Articulating your expectations for new volunteers is essential for recruiting new volunteers. For example, what does a volunteer get to do? What will a volunteer get to see? What are the frequency and hours required? How often are volunteer meetups outside of serving hours? How long is the commitment for?

Writing out simple descriptions forces you to set appropriate expectations, and the volunteer planning their commitment around their busy lives reduces miscommunication and offers a stronger engagement. As you recruit, this process will also help you understand what roles might be connected to spiritual giftings, skillsets, and generational affinity.

There are several benefits to including start and stop dates as role descriptions. It gives leaders and volunteers a commitment timeline, an opportunity to transfer to a different ministry, and seasons of rest.

RECRUITING

Once you know what you are recruiting people to do based on role descriptions and requirements, you can offer pathways for engagement. Clarity breeds confidence. General asks to obtain general results. Specific asks get specific results. There is no one way to recruit volunteers. If you have tried one method, consider other methods to recruit intentionally:

Campaign – Do a teaching series getting people ready to serve the following ministry calendar year. Combine with volunteer appreciation and offer “after service” information and sign-ups

Newcomers – Offer newcomers 2-3 opportunities to serve in entry-level roles through a newcomer’s lunch. Too many options decrease retention rates.

Spiritual Gifts – Offer a class or online spiritual gifts test that gives individuals a few key roles to activate their gifts. Gift tests must indicate places a person can start serving rather than limit where a person should serve.

Groups – Get kids, youth, young adults, or small groups to serve together at an event as an introductory way to serving.

Database – As a church staff and board, use the church database along to reach out and intentionally invite people who are not serving to get involved. Find roles that fit individual schedules and interests.

Relationship – As you build a relationship with church attenders, you will find ways to invite people into serving individually.



SCREENING

It's essential to have a comprehensive screening process for new volunteers but not overwhelming. In addition, a proper screening process can mitigate legal and spiritual challenges in the long run. Here are a few elements that could be part of your process:

Application – A simple application is a key to screening. Beyond personal information, ask people if they support your statement of faith and core convictions. Then ask questions about their skills/experience. Online application forms that connect with your database help to streamline the process.

Interview – have a conversation with the applicant or an audition in the case of skill-based roles (musician) to see their suitability for the role they are applying for

Background check – some roles (kids, youth, access to vulnerable persons) require a police check.

Outside references – if people are new to your church, getting a reference from a past church or employer can be invaluable.

Pastoral reference – before people are put in roles with a high level of trust (teacher, small group leader), a staff member/pastor should affirm their suitability.

Volunteer Covenant – An application form is the first step to serving. Finalize your screening process with volunteers signing a volunteer covenant. This is extremely important to the overall process.

TRAINING

All new volunteers should receive onboarding or training when they begin. Here are some of the types of training volunteers can receive.

Abuse Prevention – all volunteers should initially and then regularly take an abuse prevention course in person or online to minimize risks in ministry settings.

Role Shadowing – new volunteers, can serve alongside existing volunteers to gain a first-hand understanding of the role.

Skills Based Training – critical roles might require additional skills training if individuals do not have the experience.

Ongoing Training – ministry leaders can help with ongoing training

Training can be delivered both in person and online. As we move into an increasingly mobile society, it is important to consider training through an online portal. Here are some training providers with training courses to help you train your volunteers. Plan to Protect - <https://www.plantoprotect.com> / Ministry Grid - <https://ministrygrid.com> / Serve HQ - <https://servehq.church/>



CARING

While each church structure is different, volunteers in the local church can be cared for by team leaders in various ways.

Connecting – helping people build a relationship on the team through team huddles, fun nights, and meetups.

Celebrating – birthdays, milestones, life events, accomplishments on the team, thank you cards, public acknowledgment

Listening – sometimes, a volunteer simply needs someone to talk to and pray with through a phone call.

Ministry – there might be cases where a volunteer needs additional help, and a team leader can help connect them to resources offered through the church.

Relationship - In churches that focus on groups, volunteer teams are often seen as a group type, and care can also happen in that context.

Limiting – sometimes, volunteers do too much and get burnt out. It's essential to understand how much time a person is volunteering and ensure it doesn't affect their personal life. This includes seasons of rest.

Have a story or experience that you would like to share? Section meetings are a perfect place to debrief. We would also love to hear from you and help pass on what you have learned.

