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S. Joseph Kidder

Andrews University, kiddersj@andrews.edu

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CHURCH VOLUNTEERS: FINDING THEM, TRAINING THEM, AND KEEPING THEM >PART 1

I hear it all the time: “We just don’t have enough laborers in our church. Those who are serving are overworked, and too many people do nothing.” As an elder, one of the most exciting responsibilities you have is making sure the church is fulfilling its God-given mission to minister and win people for Jesus. The church was designed to be primarily a volunteer organization. The power of the church lies within its members and attendees—men and women, young and old—finding their place to serve and work out God’s redemptive plan.

When your attendees serve the Lord with the gifts He has given them, your church can accomplish all that God has called you to do. It is our responsibility as pastors and church leaders to help our attendees grow in grace and love, see their potential, use their God-given gifts, and develop their leadership and influence.

In the last church I served, we used to say, “We don’t recruit volunteers; we build and release leaders.” Your attendees are leaders with great potential to serve God and make a difference in the world.

This three-part series will be devoted to the subject of finding, training, and retaining volunteers, using ideas gleaned from many growing and effective Adventist churches.

Below are some tips that will help you find the leaders God has placed in your church:

Pray That God Will Send You New Leaders. Enlist a team of members to pray continually for God to send you new leaders; pray before recruiting, while recruiting, and even after recruiting. Your church will have more laborers if you intentionally, earnestly, and strategically pray for more. Jesus taught us to pray for laborers to enter the harvest fields. “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of

the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt 9:37–38). I have experienced the power of this promise many times. Our church was once in need of a music director. We prayed, and in less than three months God had sent us a husband and wife who were music teachers at the community college. They turned out to be terrific music and worship leaders. Another time we prayed for a volunteer youth pastor. About five months later I got a telephone call from one of our young adults who was studying for the ministry at college, telling me that God had convicted him to come home and be the youth pastor for a year. He loved it so much that he stayed there for two years and grew the youth program attendance from three young adults to about fifty, and from no leaders to eleven. Every time we claimed the promise in Matthew 9, we saw amazing answers. Try it; I know God will take care of the needs of your church.

Teach About Spiritual Gifts. Drill deep into the fundamental truths of 1 Corinthians 12: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (vv. 4–6). No believer should be able to read this text and remain unwilling to serve, either inside or outside the church.

Build Relationships. Your goal is not to recruit; it is to build healthy and meaningful relationships. Get to know the members of your church. Ask questions, and listen to their answers. Learn about their families, jobs, passions, and hobbies. Then help them understand the roles in your church that fit their passions, personalities, and gifts.

Be Passionate. Are you passionate about your ministry? People are attracted to leaders with passion and vision, so if that naturally pours out of you, people will want to serve alongside you. Therefore, grow in your love for God and your ministry, because you are contagious! Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

Evaluate Your Current Methodology. Do the same people serve in multiple positions? Do new members know how to get involved? What percentage of members are not involved? Are members serving in the wrong places? Are ineffective leaders permitted to remain in their position? Does the current process reflect a 1 Corinthians 12 understanding of member responsibility? Be honest. If the current process is not working, then something must change.

Use “Disciple” Rather Than “Volunteer” Language. Yes, church members are volunteers in the sense that they do not get paid for their service. However, we are not called to be “volunteers” in God’s

“FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE, AS I FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST”

(1 COR 11:1).

kingdom; we are expected to be obedient disciples of Jesus. We sign up to die when we follow Christ. That is much different than being a volunteer.

Start with People Rather Than Positions. Many churches

start the recruitment process by seeking to fill current *positions* rather than considering the *people* God has brought them. This approach de-emphasizes 1 Corinthians 12, neglects the possibility that God may intend new ministries to begin, and often results in “warm bodies” in the wrong positions. It is better to start by giving seminars on spiritual gifts three or four times a year. Then ask the people where their gifts and passions are, and ask them to serve in ministries that fit their personalities, passions, and gifts. This might even empower them to start new ministries to serve the community and the church.

Require a Membership Class, and Explain Involvement Expectations. Many church members remain uninvolved because they have not understood they must be involved, they assume they are not needed because others are serving, or they do not know how to get involved. Address all these concerns before a new member has the chance to develop a habit of complacency.

Help Members Consider Where They Might Serve. Move beyond simple spiritual gift inventories, and help church members evaluate their life experiences, desires, skills, passions, and spiritual gifts. This holistic approach helps members better understand what God has done to prepare them to serve. A person might have a passion to teach while his personality lends itself to teach children and not adults. Another person might be an introvert who will serve well in behind-the-scenes ministries. Asking members about their spiritual gifts, passions, and desires will help the church put the right people in the most effective ministries. It is also important to create a system of evaluation to take stock of ministry positions every six to twelve months, and move people as needed.

Recruit Face-to-Face. Bulletin notices, pulpit announcements, and email requests are helpful recruiting tools, but they are not enough. Recruit the way Jesus did: face-to-face, voice-to-voice. Use the most passionate, properly placed leaders to recruit others. Ministry leaders who believe in their work are a winning recruitment team. ED

Joseph Kidder is professor of Christian Ministry and Discipleship at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.