

Candour



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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Volunteer or paid?



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Contents

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Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

Amanda Wells (editor) on
(04) 381-8285 or
candour@presbyterian.org.nz

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How can we value volunteers?

Amanda Wells

This issue is about the distinction between getting paid for your work and doing it for free. Our society tends to draw a clear line between the work of volunteers and that of paid staff, seeing and valuing them in different ways, but often the tasks are similar or the same. We all need to eat, but we need to feel a fulfilled part of our community as well, and skills developed in one sphere often freely transfer to the other.

One of this month's contributors suggests that volunteers may produce lower quality or less consistent results because they do not have the same sticks or carrots as employees. Many people are passionate about their paid work but there are circumstances in which employment can be reduced to a minimum obligation in exchange for dollars, while the fact of volunteering implies an emotional or ethical commitment quite different in nature.

It's true that volunteers can become tired, feel unappreciated, and gradually reduce the extent or quality of their work. But this is nearly always due to absent or poor management. Yes, even volunteers need to be managed. Having proper support, access to training, and the ability to negotiate time off or periods of uninvolvedness mean a volunteer can be a huge benefit to an organisation for many years. If you give people a task when they first come through the doors then leave them to get on with it, they are unlikely to become a cornerstone of your community. But if you give them appropriate opportunities to serve, allow them to say "no" and insist they take regular breaks from rosters or routines, then their passion will provide something that paid staff can never replicate.

Volunteers provide much greater continuity than staff. In New Zealand, the average length of time in a job is just over two and half years. But you might have volunteers part of your church for 10, 20 or many more years. These people store the institutional and people knowledge that makes your church a community rather than a weekly meeting. At its worst, continuity can hamstring you into "the way that things have always been done" but at its best it provides a sense of stability in a world full of frantic change.

However dedicated they may be, paid staff are always aware that their work is their livelihood. They have more at risk in terms of performance, but at the same time they need a demarcation between "work" and "rest-of-life" that volunteers may not always appreciate. For a volunteer, their church service is part of their non-work life: something they do out of the goodness of their heart and without fixed parameters. They may not understand paid staff members' needs for time off, or to have similar non-work components in their own lives. Anyone whose job regularly eats into or interrupts their down time is likely to build up a sense of resentment, while volunteers will have a more elastic view of obligations that necessarily do not comprise their working week.

Volunteering remains hugely popular in New Zealand, with 34 per cent of the population aged 10 years and over doing some volunteering in 2007.¹ We contribute 270 million hours of formal, unpaid work for non-profit organisations annually, and volunteers make up a higher proportion of the non-profit workforce than in any other country surveyed. But the way in which people want to volunteer is changing, and we need to change to meet this. Younger generations don't want to go on a perpetual roster (or even any roster at all). Older generations might sometimes feel the same way - but they crucially possess a sense of duty to the church that is fast fading from our contemporary context. People want the freedom to serve when and as they choose, and to commit to project-based roles (based on a defined, limited-period task) rather than amorphous, committee-style positions.

Paid staff are rewarded in an obvious manner but volunteers can go unthanked. It's important to regularly appreciate those who are the nuts and bolts of an organisation - and perhaps those performing repetitive tasks need similarly frequent thanks.

The September issue of *Candour* will have the theme "How do we prioritise resources" and cover concepts such as setting priorities, budgeting, where your money goes and maintenance versus mission. Contributions are very welcome and can be emailed to candour@presbyterian.org.nz. The deadline is 6 September.

¹ All the statistics in this paragraph are sourced from Volunteering New Zealand, www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/files/pdf_files/Feb10_Facts_figures.pdf

Volunteer or paid staff?

Kewyn Harris, St Andrew's Uniting, Northland

It's a common conundrum when considering the needs and opportunities for ministry both within and outside the Church.

Over the years, there has been a perceptible move toward professional or paid staff in churches. This is particularly marked in larger parishes. It would appear that the presence of staff is virtually a prerequisite, if not the chief characteristic, of the large church. I sometimes wonder if it is always necessary. Perhaps what we are doing is removing the need to recruit and sustain volunteers.

On the other hand, paid staff may be seen as a pragmatic response to organisational imperatives and the difficulties inherent in the operation of any volunteer organisation today. It is not only a challenge faced by churches. Various volunteer groups feel the pinch and any number of elements is given as possible causes. These include the demands on family and the removal of one spouse (usually the wife) into paid employment, thereby retarding the potential for community involvement and networking. Our increasingly individualistic culture, the rise of electronic entertainment in the shape of first the television and lately gaming and the Internet, may be counted among other determinatives.

There is another factor that may be a driver, particularly in the recruitment of paid staff, and which is too easily overlooked: the demand for increasing levels of professionalism and compliance.

I find myself needing the input of staff members like our senior administrator, children's pastor, and youth director. You might suppose their input is the welfare and spiritual development of our charges but you would only be partially correct. Alas, things have changed dramatically since my days in youth ministry and the early days of pastoral charge. Now my children's pastor and our youth directors cannot operate without the knowledge and necessary compliance with this code and that regulation.

Liability fair runs from the operational pores!

Now, it's not that these requirements are particularly onerous. With determination, you can master them and they have their uses in these litigation-prone times. But what I note is their imposition and that this becomes too much for the individual who volunteers their time and energy. Paid staff members find it exasperating enough - but many a volunteer finds it a bridge too far. This whole business of compliance and codes of practice might appeal to some, but not to the many. And it is the many we need. There are risks these days in working with children, and while our codes might appear to be the best response, their effect on volunteerism could provide interesting research questions. It might be meant to provide "safe environments" and uplift the bureaucratically inclined spirit but it does nothing for the average person being asked to head up a children's ministry department.

In conclusion, there may be any number of reasons paid staff become attractive, particularly within the senior ministry roles within a parish. But it would not surprise this writer if we found major influences were lifestyle options, developed expectation of our programmes and ministry delivery, and the effect of increasing levels of compliance.

Placing these influences together you see the attractiveness of paid staff but also the need for a church large enough to sustain them. One appears to feed the other. The church that looks to penetrate its surrounding community will find this worthy goal more achievable by using paid staff with the resources for the job. But the same church needs to have achieved a "critical mass" to allow this to happen. Having met the goal, the longevity of that ministry becomes even more dependant than it was before on paid staff because the operation has moved beyond the point it can be maintained by a part-time worker. This can be approached from a systems point of view as a reinforcing cycle; but however you analyse it does not change its reality.

Paid staff are attractive for other reasons too. It is a fact of working with volunteers, particularly in an environment where the standards are exacting, that performance relies entirely on the individual's good will. While we would wish every worker, paid or unpaid, would be of the same spirit and operate day in and day out from the treasure in their hearts, it is not always possible. Performance is easily expected of a paid employee but it is sometimes too much to ask of the willing volunteer, week in and week out. Payment at this juncture represents a lever: while the employee must rightly

expect their employing church to be a good employer (and a Christian employer at that!), the worker can rightly be expected to perform their ministry responsibilities at a certain level on a consistent basis. And the higher the ministry expectation, the less realistic is this scenario when dealing with a volunteer. Moreover, it is harder to enforce procedures with volunteers for the same reason. They feel they can ignore policy when it suits them and what can the organisation do about it?

St Andrew's recently appointed a youth director and a youth worker. Both are part time. Neither was appointed because we had no other leaders. There is a good team of volunteers working with our young people but they battle stressful jobs and all the demands consistent with careers and growing families. In some cases, these same folk are very experienced in youth work. Others had good gifts in music and teaching. The problem was that they also felt they were not the "point person". They functioned as a team but felt the lack of a single person as the leader of the ministry rather keenly. They were happy to serve, but with regard to their limitations.

Another factor was evident. They had enjoyed the support of a pastoral staff member in the past. This person had provided direction but more important individual mentoring and support for leaders. The departure of this valued paid staff member meant the senior minister was the only possibility left. We consequently found that their organisational "distance" was too far for all our efforts.

The provision of a new paid position has proved a real boost to their moral and the effective running of this ministry department.

Performance is easily expected of a paid employee but it is sometimes too much to ask of the willing volunteer

Up to this point I appear to have been building a case against using volunteers and praising the ambitions of growing churches. I make no apologies in being ambitious for larger churches. The demands and expectations of modern urban life favour them. They can muster resources that people look for and have been conditioned to expect. (I accept this imperative does not necessarily appear in many rural settings to the same level.)

But none of these observations and assertions means volunteerism is dead. A large church is no less dependent on volunteers than a small one. The difference is application; where volunteers are concentrated. The larger church not only has paid professionals running their major departments; they need paid professionals running their departments. The task is generally beyond the energy and time resources of the average volunteer, let alone experience or skill-level expectations. But this understanding does not preclude volunteers nor de-value them as assets. If anything, it provides even greater opportunity for meaningful service.

The staff member who can thereby provide the time and skills for a task not only represents a higher level of performance and raises the probability of success but also can provide a more meaningful environment for the volunteer. Whatever may be certain in this scenario is this one thing: the ministry department and its paid leader are not going to be successful without volunteers. The reason for the staff member is likely to be connected to the size of the operation and the aim of increased capacity. Straight away it represents more than one person can handle, no matter how skilled, even with all the hours in the week. The staff member needs their team. But the team needs their staff member also. They then have a leader who does have the time and ability to see the operation run smoothly and resource them in their service.

It is the equipping function in the relationship between the paid staff member and the unpaid volunteer that to my mind is most important in this discussion. Ultimately any person accepting a ministry leadership position, paid or unpaid, has the development and support of their co-workers as first priority. The team must have first place, even before the ministry itself.

This is where a paid person is able to provide time and expertise whereas the unpaid volunteer may be hard pressed with all their other commitments. Many volunteer leaders find “doing the ministry” is enough: asking them to build teams, mentor fellow workers, manage the risk areas, and relate to senior leaders on a regular basis all together constitutes a bridge too far. However, these elements should not represent the same level of challenge to someone set aside and supported for a particular role in the church’s ministry.

The paid staff person should represent value to their volunteers and not just the church operation as a whole. It is tactically myopic to see their role purely in terms of their ministry area and not realise their wider importance to the people working with them. Being fellow workers is not just about the harvest in others but in the team members themselves. It needs to be part of every contract and ministry description. The supported staff member is to attend to Christ in their volunteers and fellow workers even before the ministry they are set aside for.

The picture is a simple one. Volunteers are no less valuable in a large church with multiple staff than they are in a smaller congregation with no paid staff. The presence of supported “pastoral professionals” does not remove the need for volunteers. It is the reverse. The necessity of having such resources suggests a size and capacity that needs more than what one paid person can provide.

It is also true that the presence of paid staff should add value to the effort and sacrifice represented by the volunteer’s contribution. The pastoral professional must be largely about the volunteer’s support, mentoring, and spiritual development. For this task they are well placed because of the skills, knowledge, and time afforded by their unique situation within the congregation. What may be missing is their expectation and that of their church. They may see themselves as being the authority and the one charged with a special ministry task, instead of seeing themselves as all that but also as a mentor and pastor to those called to work with them.

In conclusion, the demarcation should not be between paid and unpaid volunteers, or, as this article has posed it, (paid) staff and (unpaid) volunteers. It is far more about what we are really asking people to provide in a particular setting. I ask no less of an unpaid head of department, working in voluntary capacity without a seat at the senior staff table, than I do from a member of pastoral staff, paid full or part time, when it comes to the support and development of those they work with. It is really a matter of capacity verses demand. As a ministry area grows, the need for time, energy, and skill becomes more apparent. The volunteer numbers grow exponentially. The leader needs more time and know how to operate effectively. This affects time and demands a re-assessment of what is needed. The answers to those questions generally move us in the direction of time and financial allocation.

A growing church in this present environment will need paid staff. Paid staff are essential to a church’s growth beyond a certain size. But our volunteers are always going to be our greatest asset, no matter how small or large the church. And our volunteers must be treated seriously, with their development and support an operational imperative for any church that takes “making disciple-making disciples” seriously.

Jim Wallis, best-selling US author, Christian social justice activist and one of President Barack Obama’s advisers on religious and ethical issues, will be in New Zealand in September.

His first engagement is in Dunedin on Tuesday 28 September when he will deliver the first Howard Paterson Memorial Lecture in Public Theology hosted by the University of Otago. On September 30, he will speak at The Salvation Army’s Just Action Conference and at a public event co-sponsored by World Vision, both at the TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre, Manukau. In between he will speak at events in Wellington on Wednesday September 29, as guest of the Victoria University Institute of Policy.

Check out www.otago.ac.nz/jimwallis and www.salvationarmy.org.nz for more info.

One team!

Wayne Matheson, Knox Church, Wellington

As I write this, the football world cup still holds a great memory. Late night or early morning games watching the All Whites play. Seeing a team – a squad of players and coaches and backroom staff - work together to achieve amazing results captured many people. They became heroes. We want to see and touch them, we want our photo taken with them and we want their autograph (I caught up with Ryan Nelsen at Auckland airport recently – and following a conversation asked if he would sign a book I was reading, *More than just a Game: Football v Apartheid ...* and have made sure people know I have this!) Maybe all this has a little more meaning due to my love of football.

Yet I have also noticed the headlines and read the articles that say the success of the All Whites will hopefully lead to a growth in those playing the sport. People are asking who will be the next Ryan Nelsen, or Winston Reid or Mark Paston. Deep down, do we all not want to experience the thrill of playing rather than just be a spectator?

We all make choices around this every day. How we use our one and only life. There are people I know who have made choices; choices not to pursue money and power or pleasure or fame. Their choice has been to volunteer in a variety of ways in their community. They help at the hospice. They help in reading programmes at a local school. They help deliver meals on wheels. They help teach English to new migrants and refugees. They could be out earning money or playing golf. They are choosing to serve. As I listen to them speak about their volunteer work, they describe it as rewarding, fulfilling and say that they were made to do this. They say they can't believe that they get to do this.

There are people I know who have made choices; choices not to pursue money and power or pleasure or fame

In terms of church, we also make those choices. We can come, sit, share in a service, chat with friends and go home. A series of choices that are safe. We could make other choices. We could roll up our sleeves and join a team of people and help together to serve God and play a part in growing God's Kingdom. We do this out of an understanding that we were created to join God in God's mission.

I have the privilege of being part of a church that has wonderful volunteers. I also have the privilege of being part of a church that has wonderful staff. We are one team. It is not always easy to keep that in focus, and our default setting can at times be about this area of the church life or that ministry. We have to remind ourselves of this. One of our volunteers recently got together all the volunteers who serve in our preschool ministries. We have a large Mainly Music team who serve over 90 children and their families one morning a week; two mid-week playgroups that serve about 50 children and their families and our wee worship team that meets on Sunday and serves 30-40 children and their families. They got together to be reminded about each other; the other ministries that happen; the connectedness of those volunteers – about 30 of them and all that reminded me that we are one team.

Yes, we have paid staff. Earlier this year we re-wrote job descriptions for a number of vacant staff roles before we advertised these. The team that worked on this wanted to ensure these reflected something bigger than just specific roles for people in certain areas. While working in a particular area, the integration of the staff team around a set of agreed values and purposes was seen as vital. It is not to be "you in your small corner and I in mine". We are one team. Leading volunteers is a key part of these staff roles. Competencies expected of staff in this area were high; we realised that staff need skills in ensuring volunteers know what is expected and communicate often with volunteers.

Volunteers need to be recognised. If issues arise about poor performance or inappropriate behaviour, staff need to have the skills to attend to these matters. We also expect staff to personally put time into training and mentoring volunteers. The skills staff bring are used across the life of the church as we work together on those things that unite us as a church – worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry and mission/evangelism. One team.

As I stopped and paused, I think I counted over 120 people who volunteer in some way regularly here. That is just those involved in ministry and mission. Then there are others who volunteer, for example, as part of the hospital chaplaincy team; those who make and take meals to others; and those who volunteer in any number of community organisations. At present we have some staff vacancies. Volunteers have stepped up to fill the gaps at this time. They have got together teams to help, plan, think, pray and lead these areas. They have done so with passion, dedication and commitment. I have been reflecting on that and why that might be.

Relationships and community seem to lie at the heart of that. Kennon Callahan in *Effective Church Leadership: building on the twelve keys* writes:

People come to a church longing for, yearning for, hoping for this sense of roots, place, belonging, sharing and caring. People come to a church in our time with a search for community, not committee. We make the mistake of assuming that by putting people on a committee they will develop ownership of the objectives of the church. People are not looking for ownership or for functional, organisational, institutional goals. Their search is far more profound and desperate than that. They are looking for the profound depths of community."

On that same theme, Larry Crabb writes:

The future of the church depends on whether it develops true community. We can get by for a while on size, skilled communication and programmes to meet needs, but unless we sense that we belong to each other, with masks off, the vibrant church of today will become the powerless church of tomorrow. Stale, irrelevant, a place of pretense where sufferers suffer alone, where pressure generates conformity rather than the Spirit creating life – that is where the church is heading unless it focuses on community.

Randy Frazee in the *Connecting Church* sums this up well when he writes:

The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the church.

That sense of community is more than the gated housing or lifestyle enclaves that have developed in our day and masquerade as true community. They are exclusive bands of individuals pursuing lifestyles, and are held together by the weakest of ties. God did not create the church to be a lifestyle enclave, devoted to the comfort and the protection of those who live behind the fence. God made community to bless the Earth, to be a blessing to, and to proclaim the good news of salvation for all people. If there is a sense of the truth of this, then the development of community may have as part of its offshoot, the creating of a volunteer culture. It might unleash the power of everyone. One team.

God did not create the church to be a lifestyle enclave, devoted to the comfort of those who live behind the fence

So where do volunteers come from? Mostly, someone asked them! There are many ways this happens. It could be in written form in the weekly notices. It might be someone speaking from the front in a service about needs in a particular ministry area. It might be through a DVD clip that folk have made and is shared. I personally think we down play, to our own cost, the personal ask. I have also found recent volunteers who are really enjoying where they are volunteering are best new volunteer recruiters! Recruiting volunteers can be done well or not...If someone paints a picture or

tells a story of the importance and reason for volunteering in a ministry, those listening know what is being asked and why. I think they deserve all of that information to help them decide. If someone says we need someone and it is lousy job but someone has to do it, it hardly inspires others!

One of the things I do on Sundays (and midweek) is to try to connect with volunteers. To acknowledge the work they do; to show I appreciate them; to encourage them. I make a point to regularly drop a note to some of our volunteers and personally thank them. I hand write them. It will take me years to connect with them all in this way. New volunteers are fragile and their first experience may determine if they come back. Looking after them is important. In addition, reminding people and thanking them is key.

In all this, I am not sure we are doing as well as we could. I wonder about how well volunteers are looking after themselves – in all areas of life. How is their care of themselves? Time for family, friends, exercise, fun, health. Without all that, how long someone volunteers might be in question. I am not sure that is always modelled well. The pace of life; various expectations; and maybe over-commitment continually threaten.

Maybe in all this, we need to give ourselves regular opportunities to pause and reflect; is this something we should be doing in the year ahead? If we don't have enough folk to help, is God speaking to us through that, rather than expect fewer people to soldier on and get tired and worn out? What is the Spirit saying to the church?

I found a few questions helpful in seeking to discover how things are with volunteers. How are we doing at caring for them well? Are we giving them the training they need? How are we recruiting? What is it that those who are the most faithful volunteers are experiencing? Do they feel part of a team? Are they growing spiritually? And are they encouraged and energised by the overall direction and vision of the church?

And maybe the most important, are we one team? That point is around unity and oneness. I think it is a precious gift of the church. God is so passionate about it that it is difficult to overstate the case. It is God's dream for the human race. Human beings were created in God's image, and therefore it is possible for us to know oneness as God within the Trinity knows oneness. Being one team is maybe the hardest tension we face as we work together for the common goals, hopes and dreams.

Volunteers I know and have the privilege of being involved in ministry with choose to play the game, rather than just watch. Committed to God and to others, they are choosing to exercise their spiritual gifts for building God's kingdom and know they have the power to do good. They serve within the life of the church and in the community. To all of you: way to go team...way to go.

St Enoch's Church Tauranga

We are a smaller congregation
looking to expand.

For the challenging position,
available late 2010, apply to
the Rev Iain Dickson, Te Puke,
iainpres@xtra.co.nz

Volunteers' contribution vital

Lisa Wells*

New Zealanders contribute 270 million hours of formal, unpaid work for not-for-profit organisations annually¹. This figure has remained relatively stable for the past few years and these people make up 67 percent of the workforce in those organisations. We are a country built on volunteer energy and skills – in fact we are a leading nation in the contribution made by volunteers. Schools, churches, sports clubs, art societies, human service organisations, environmental groups and animal charities depend on the work of people who are not paid to provide it.

Presbyterian Support Otago simply could not do what it does without the support of our 600 volunteers. Each one of them chooses to give their time and become involved in a way that enriches the lives of others.

This year a number of our OpShop volunteers have retired. What is remarkable about this is the fact that many of these women have been doing the same job for us for 20, 30 and 35 years. We recently farewelled one volunteer who was serving on the day we opened our first shop, 38 years ago! In the years she had been involved, the OpShop had transformed from a tiny shop run by volunteers; to a three-store retail operation, with a sorting warehouse, employing seven permanent staff. Even now, the work of the volunteers (and there are still about 60 of them) remains necessary and effective.

These were women who started volunteering when it wasn't quite acceptable for a wife to work outside the home, so they looked for involvement in areas that interested them. Many of them worked for a range of other organisations too. These were the women who made up the "women's auxiliary" – the labour force that could be counted on when there was catering to do, a fair to organise, the floral roster to co-ordinate ...

Of course it provided social contact and friendships over the years; but the people who kept volunteering were those who loved what they did. They might have begun thinking that it was about serving other people, but they quickly discovered that in helping others, they were helped also.

As these women have retired, our challenge has been to recruit new volunteers. It's true that volunteers are harder to find and the path to volunteering is a lot more complicated. Just like paid staff, volunteers now have contracts so that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities; Police checks are compulsory and there is an expectation that out-of-pocket costs will be reimbursed. It is unlikely the volunteers we are recruiting today will still be involved in 30 years time; they prefer to undertake a specific task or role, for a defined period of time, with the ability to continue if they are still interested. Some volunteer as a step into the workforce – gaining current experience on their CV and leaving when a job come up; still others are keen to help because the role gives them access to preloved clothing on which to unleash their creativity.

More than 200 of our volunteers serve in our "Buddy Programme". This is where an adult or a couple is matched with a child between the age of 4 and 12 years who is in need of a role model. The term "mentoring" is used, but for the child it's actually about having fun with an adult who can be there for them. It's not arduous, but it does require commitment: after training and being matched, a big buddy will spend two hours a week for at least a year with his or her little buddy.

People who want to make a difference in the life of a child will volunteer to assist on this programme and the rewards they get are tangible. These volunteers come from all walks of life. In the rural areas it is not uncommon for a couple to be joint buddies; whereas in Dunedin city we have a high proportion of students volunteering to be involved. Recruitment of volunteer buddies is ongoing as people move away, their buddy grows up, and work commitments change ... so we are always looking out for new buddies.

The third area in which volunteers are welcome is in our services for older people. As the older generation are encouraged to "age in place", more emphasis is put on providing support for people in their own homes. Those involved in the Enliven Visiting Volunteer programme will visit, read, chat, share activities, drive, go shopping, accompany to appointments – and know that their presence makes a real difference in the life of the person they visit. In the future, we are hoping to

¹ *How New Zealanders Give*, Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector, research 2009

increase both this pool of volunteers and the range of activities they can assist with. Some of this is driven by the recent District Health Board cuts to domestic assistance and the fears expressed by frail elderly people who were deprived of the rare weekly social contact they understood they were entitled to.

Experience has told us that there are key things we need to do if we are to attract and retain volunteers in the future. We need to accept that time is a valuable commodity and that volunteering is an expression of generosity. Everyone needs to know clearly what is expected, when, how and by whom. It helps if we can accept short-term volunteers, because few prospective volunteers are seeking open-ended commitments. When we ask someone to volunteer, don't minimise the task or the skills required. You're not looking for just any volunteer but one particular person who is uniquely gifted to carry out the role you have in mind.

The various Presbyterian Support regional organisations are all supported by volunteers in similar roles to these. Other roles include serving as board members and on committees, assisting with activities in rest homes, packing food in the foodbank, helping with administration tasks and, of course, with fundraising.

Here in Otago we have annual long service awards and it's good to see volunteers take their place alongside paid staff members and be recognised for their service. It is this partnership of staff and volunteers which makes the not-for-profit sector unique.

Lisa Wells is the Director of Communication and Fundraising for Presbyterian Support Otago. She is also an elder at East Taieri Church and the deputy convenor of the Council of Assembly.



Iona Presbyterian Church

Blockhouse Bay, Auckland

www.iona.org.nz

We are seeking expressions of interest for a full time minister

We are a friendly and diverse congregation that enjoys traditional worship. We wish to maintain our present values while encouraging new families into our congregation, and developing new youth initiatives. We recognise the need for change and the challenges ahead of us so that the congregation may develop and grow together.

Blockhouse Bay is a western suburb of Auckland, located on the Manukau Harbour and approximately 10 km from Auckland CBD. Blockhouse Bay is a well-served vibrant centre with many shops, cafes, schools and churches all within close proximity to one another.

Our new minister should be a person who:

- Can effectively preach the Word of God to all age groups
- Is able to relate to people with a wide range of theological perspectives
- Enjoys pastoral care
- Can enter fully into the life and work of the parish

The parish profile can be obtained from Elizabeth Visser at evisserhome@gmail.com

Don't miss out on this exciting opportunity—we look forward to receiving your application by 30 September 2010, addressed to the Nominator, Rev Linda Hope, 38 Donovan Street, Blockhouse Bay, Auckland 0600, Ph 021 155 919, email: lindat.hope@gmail.com

Staff, volunteers and ministers

Simon McLeay, St Peter's Tauranga, Kaimai

St Peter's is a multi-staff church of about 300 in the heart of Tauranga, where we are trying to know Jesus Christ and help others find and follow him. I've been here as senior minister for just over one year, having come from the associate role at St Columba at Botany. We have a mix of staff, elders and ministers, and relationships and accountabilities, that are somewhat complex, but it all works well through conversation, prayer and regular contact.

I guess you can sum up our structure by breakfast, morning tea and lunch. Our elders have a weekly prayer time at 7am every Wednesday morning and most come for breakfast after that. I have never felt more connected or more flexible in a ministry, because we pray and talk about what's coming up and what's going down. Each ministry team has an elder as part of it and so our leaders connect the major ministries of the church. I'm the only staff member that comes to breakfast, and the only minister, so it is our time together as senior leaders.

We also have a weekly staff meeting (morning tea) where we talk about big picture and small detail, where we pray and encourage and ask what's up. We have a care and counselling trust associated with the church, and the manager of that trust comes to morning tea, and we hope that the manager of our childcare might be able to come occasionally also.

This year we have taken on oversight for the Welcome Bay Presbyterian Church (now known as the Light House) and as part of that, Jim Wallace from Bethlehem, Neville Harris (who's retired) and I meet with Mike Uttley weekly for lunch. Over lunch we are able, in a collegial way, to support and hold each other accountable.

I guess it takes a bit of time to have all these different meetings, but these are not business meetings – they seem much more significant because we are meeting relationally to advance God's purposes. Next year, we hope to offer ministry to St James' (a smaller union church to our south) and the minister involved there will also come to lunch.

I think we burn people out when there's no one to talk to and you feel you're doing it on your own

So how do we work with, motivate and empower our volunteers? I think the first thing is a clear vision – we're here to get to know Jesus better and bring people to Christ.

The second thing we do is planning our staffing around coordinating and empowering teams – teams of volunteers. So our children's ministry workers spend time running team meetings, preparing resources and helping the volunteers deliver the children's ministry. That's in tension with a commitment of the workers also to seek excellence in the ministry and to model great up-front leading. I encourage our staff to put their team first, but when it's their time at bat, to "hit the ball out of the park". We aim for the same in our music ministry. We are looking for a music director who will improve the quality of the sound and musical worship on Sundays, but we want to achieve that through coaching and encouraging our volunteers. We are looking for someone with a balance of technical skill and people skills. It's the same in youth ministry. I see a false dichotomy between being an elder-lead church or a staff-led church. Our elders hold the vision and frequently lead teams, but we are also looking to staff to lead and pursue that vision. We do our visioning and retreats together to try and maintain that common vision. I see it as a task of staff to work with their elders and volunteers on common vision and strategy. We know there is a tension here but I don't want to see staff left running departments on their own, nor staff treated as just "workers". I listened to a CD from Willow Creek last year where the speaker talked about staff as DoPs not DoTs; developers of people, not just doers of tasks.

The third thing we are doing is developing a mission plan that spells out our goal to develop mature Christians who themselves will bring others to faith, and so in the preaching and teaching we reinforce our commitment to every member mission. We run events for our members to invite people to, such as Alpha, a Light Party, the Marriage Course and a Christmas Dinner.

To sum up, we are very much a team church – we have teams that run different areas of the church's life. Where we have gifted and skilled volunteers, we give them authority to get on with the mission and we support them. Where we see critical areas that need coordination, skill and time we don't otherwise have, we employ people.

I think we burn people out when there's no one to talk to and you feel you're doing it on your own; that's what we try to prevent. We try to encourage our ministries to operate as a team and we try to support our team leaders. Ultimately we know it is Mike and Karen (under the power of the Holy Spirit) who will grow The Light House – so we just want to support them. It's been exciting this term to run one of our courses (the Marriage Course) at Welcome Bay, as one way of standing with them in that place.

I guess when I look back to when I was involved in the volunteer fire service on Waiheke Island in the early 90s, at that time 80 percent of the service was volunteer and 20 percent professional, and both knew we couldn't live without the other.

Valued volunteers? Priceless paid?

Cheryl Harray, Kids Friendly Advisor, Synod of Otago and Southland

In my role as the Kids Friendly Advisor, I have the privilege of meeting many children and families workers. I also get to hear about their joys and frustrations. For this article I was wondering: does it make a difference if they are volunteers or paid? Are there different expectations from churches? From the workers themselves? What are some of the church practices that help their roles "work" in healthy ways?

To find some answers, I talked to children's ministry workers up and down the country, in small town and city parishes, in paid and voluntary positions, ranging in age from mid 20s to late 70s.

Paid positions

Those who are paid appreciate their church's financial investment into children and families ministry. Being in a paid position means workers feel like they have permission to carry out their role in the church and have credibility within the community. They don't need to check with church leadership on every detail but can get on with doing the job. They also feel more able to establish and work consistently on the vision for their ministry. When a church commits to funding a ministry position, it also commits to resourcing that position. This means paid staff usually have more adequate resourcing than volunteers (such as computer and phone access, attending conference or training events and a realistic budget for resources). While part-time positions tend to be flexible so that they can work around family or other work commitments, this also means people tend to work more than their allocated hours. Formal job descriptions are common in paid positions, but there needs to be a realistic balance between the dimensions of the role and the extent of the funding.

Volunteers

From my conversations with volunteers, some sadly feel that their ministry is undervalued and their contribution is taken for granted. However, where volunteers have good communication channels with the leadership, they feel more valued and that their ministry has an important place

in the church. A number of volunteers acknowledged that communication is helped significantly by being married to the minister!

While volunteering has been a big part of our church culture for a long time, we mustn't forget that it's a big deal for people to take time away from family, or to take time off work to attend a training event. Some people avoid volunteering because of unrealistic expectations: for example, paying for ministry resources out of their own pockets. On the flip side, many baby boomers and members of younger generations prefer to give money rather than hours of volunteering because they see themselves as "time poor". But money can never replace the need for volunteers.

In many cases, ministry can only grow as big as the volunteer base, especially in the highly relational ministries of Mainly Music, kids clubs, holiday programmes, breakfast or "Messy church" style worship, to name a few. It seems a paid person working alongside volunteers can be a very effective set up. Volunteers appreciate the leadership and communication from the paid worker, while workers in these positions deeply appreciate their team members. Volunteers lighten the load so that more can be done. It works really well when volunteers can share in their areas of strength. However, there can be awkwardness between paid and voluntary workers if roles are not clearly understood and accepted. Good communication is essential!

It is especially hard for volunteers to pull back on previous levels of commitment when there is no regular review process

Expectations

This is where things can get interesting. Some paid workers feel like they should be responsible for everything. They make comments like, "if there are any gaps I feel as if I should be the one to fill them because I'm paid". Sometimes this situation can be exaggerated because volunteers can fall into the trap of thinking, "well, that's the paid leader's job". In some cases, employed people have felt the church expects them to turn a congregation without children into a dynamic family church within a year's part-time contract! (Unrealistic job descriptions contribute to this).

Volunteers seem to have more freedom to say "yes" or "no" to requests to help but can feel pressured to give more time than they actually have. It is especially hard for volunteers to pull back on previous levels of commitment when there is no regular review process. The issue of expectations is compounded when many of our passionate volunteers AND paid workers are wired to say "yes" to most requests!

Leadership practices and structures

Children's workers (paid and volunteer) say that they feel supported and valued when the leadership has a clear understanding of the worker's roles and responsibilities. If a church's leadership is supportive, this will overflow into positive attitudes and sense of understanding from the congregation. An advisory/oversight group (often made up of the minister and two or three other parents/elders) who help to oversee paid staff can be a great idea. They can be a good sounding board and provide guidance and focus on "big picture" issues. They can also be a great "fuse" to protect key ministry personnel from overload! It is often a real plus having the children's worker as part of the session or leadership team.

Passion and pay

I don't think any one I have spoken to does this job for the fantastic pay rate! Most are accepting a low to average pay because of their accompanying passion. Everyone I know works above and beyond what they are asked and paid for. Some volunteers are quite sure they wouldn't work any

harder if they were paid. Quite often, churches offer a paid position for a year at a time, especially when starting a new position. However, if positions can be secured for longer, this can enable a person to get stuck into the ministry with greater job satisfaction and stability. We are blessed to have such dedicated people working with children and families. We need to be careful we don't take advantage of the willingness and passion of these folk, while giving thanks for their eagerness to communicate God's love to children in our churches and communities.

Conclusions

- Volunteers are priceless (and not because we don't pay them!)
- Paid staff are valuable (and not because we do pay them!)
- Honour both regularly. When paid staff are thanked, include the volunteers.
- At least once a year, have a volunteer's morning tea/lunch/supper
- Meet weekly/fortnightly with paid staff (and invite volunteer leaders to be part of this) to share, support and pray for each other.
- Have a system of communication and accountability: a small oversight group, regular reporting and the involvement of paid staff and key volunteers in leadership and strategy meetings.
- A church is a relational organization and therefore money alone cannot be thrown at a ministry and it be expected to flourish.
- We need people (volunteers and paid) who are willing to serve according to their gifts. Relationships between us should not be based on a hierarchy or pay scale but founded on the biblical model of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- Voluntary roles need job descriptions too, including a start, finish and review date. Volunteers need to know what is expected of them and what they are committing themselves to. (Kids Friendly has samples.)
- Many community outreach ministries require teams of people to run them effectively. Team leaders can make voluntary roles more manageable in this busy age with the principle of "chunk it up" and "share it out" while maintaining oversight and vision.
- Join the Kids Friendly network! Access excellent resources and advice to help you review and value ministry to children and families of your church and community.

Learning from the United States experience

Gordon Fitch, Youth Ministry Coordinator, Assembly Office

I lived for several years in the United States. After living there for only a month, Easter was approaching and I heard an ad on the radio advertising Real Life Ministry's Easter Egg hunt. They promised an Easter egg hunt of 10,000 eggs, and we thought our two-year-old twins would love this; so, on a cold Saturday morning, we got the twins into the push chair and started walking to the church. Though we were the only people walking on the pavement, we for sure were not the only people to have heard the ad: the road approaching the church was like a car park, as hundreds and hundreds of cars filled with excited children were descending from all directions. As we approached the official car park, there was a man dressed up as a chicken waving cars into the car park. Then there was a host of people wearing bright orange vests directing visitors into parking spaces.

As we walked towards the fields where the egg hunt was about to begin, there was a band playing on a stage, raffle tickets being given out, and the 10 or so pastors from the church dressed up in fancy dress giving high fives to the children and parents a like. There were also the hundreds of volunteers on the fields protecting the Easter eggs from poachers who wanted to start the festivities early. We found the field for two-year olds, and waited for the gun to signal the start of the hunt. A few minutes later, it was all over; the eggs were found, bags were filled. Now hot dogs were being

put in our hands, bouncy castles were set up, games and activities with prizes to be won were all go, go, go. We went home that afternoon amazed by our first American megachurch experience.

Real Life Ministries, like so many other large (often non-denominational) churches in the US, will have at least 50 members of staff. On top of all the pastors, you would have administrative staff, facilities staff, financial and office staff, website and IT staff, worship and technical arts staff, children's ministry and youth ministries staff. Staff are needed because of the thousands of people they attract, and also to organise the hundreds of volunteers.

This kind of church suits the needs of the modern Christian family. Being offered a first-class, one-hour Christian experience each week, with social activities on a somewhat frequent basis, fits into the modern family's hectic life. It may surprise you, however, that only 1 percent of American Christians attend this kind of stereotypical megachurch. In fact, the average American church is only 75 people in size, and cannot realistically afford such staffing.

This second type of church, the small church, is often a mainline denomination. The planting of these churches was linked with immigration numbers from particular areas. Originally such churches were designed to be small churches, as they used a parish model. Churches would plant new churches as they grew, but more often, they would plant new churches in new suburbs so that there was a church for the new residents of their particular denomination.

The third major type of church in America is the house church; around five million people are attending a house church and this number is growing fast. However, this growth is nearly entirely from membership transference, as often disgruntled traditional church members become part of these churches. They do not rely on paid staff, and would describe themselves as a grass-roots experience that is marked by face-to-face community, with every-member functioning, open-participatory meetings (as opposed to pastor-to-pew services), and a non-hierarchical leadership.

Church members in these small churches can remember the glory days of high attendance with lots of volunteers

The trend for American churches is a desire to become like consumer-type megachurches, and each denomination will have a few large (successful?) churches. Like the house church, nearly all of church growth is tied into membership transference. As the overarching trend in Americans is an abandonment of their denominational church attendance, the increased number of megachurches only speeds up the closing of smaller churches in the local area.

It is often worth looking towards America for future trends, because like most of the Western world, New Zealand follows in all kinds of trends, whether that is economic trends, music trends, divorce rates or teenage pregnancy rates.

The situation of religion is slightly different, though, as America has trailed the Western world in becoming post Christian. Nevertheless, as we look at the roles of volunteers and paid staff in churches, it has more to do with people's lives rather than faith. And so no doubt in this area, we will follow the US.

The US churches really only started hiring multiple staff members in the 1970s. The '60s had happened, and as culture changed around them, large evangelical churches went from using their large budgets on direct service to people, families and society, to resourcing staff to try to connect and grow their church's numbers. The average American family by the 70s started to have two working parents. A couple of decades later, many smaller traditional churches were left looking backwards to the "good old days", when they had large communities of young mothers who would pretty much run the church midweek; through Sunday School programmes, Bible studies, prayer groups, social meeting, the stay-at-home mothers did it all. As the pool of volunteers dried

up and families became richer, the smaller traditional churches' responses were to imitate their larger counterparts and have a paid staff. Paid staff then went from being considered a luxury item to being essential in a modern church, much like how a washing machine is no longer seen as a luxury item for us. However, in recent years, with the decline of church attendance, and even more recently with the economic downturn, ministry personnel have been losing their jobs left right and centre.

Church members in these small churches can remember the glory days of high attendance with lots of volunteers, and more recently they can remember having a small staff to patch the need. But now more often they feel inadequate, with low attendance, few volunteers, with little or no staff remaining.

I may have been a bit harsh in my analysis of American Christianity and there are pockets of cutting-edge ministry going on, where smaller churches have found a way around having just a few volunteers. I was really interested to come across a church in Couer d'Alene, Idaho, which built a huge swimming pool and community centre as their church; it attracts a couple of thousand users a week. In the centre of the complex, they have their chapel and chaplains. The rest of the organisation (the café, the coffee shop, the swimming pool, etc) is self supporting, and run as a business. For the church it was an opportunity to potentially connect with a couple of thousand people a week without the need of hundreds of volunteers. Needless to say, their church on a Sunday morning and their children's ministry was are growing fast.

I would argue we are in a better place in New Zealand to be evangelising. We have already had the huge decline that America is presently facing; we have taken stock, and I think we are in a place where we can grow. It is easier to challenge people who don't buy the whole concept of God on matters of faith, than it is to share faith with people who in principle believe in a god. As we develop a vision for the future, as we look to see what God is up to, as we dream and think big, perhaps this will include staffing. Staff environments have their benefits and drawbacks:

1. Potentially, having staff members can enable ministry opportunities. There is just no way Real Life Ministries could have regular events on the scale of the Easter egg hunt purely with volunteers. By having a staff, it brings the luxury of having people who are dedicated into finding opportunities to share the Gospel and to shepherd the congregation.
2. For the staff it is a job. This is both good and bad. It means it brings an element of professionalism, meaning things are done when they are said they will be done, and things are done to a good quality. On the flip side, it also means that perhaps they may not have as much of a passion as a zealous volunteer who will drop everything to make it happen. A lay person speaking about God can sometimes be more effective to the unchurched because they are not being paid to say it.
3. Staffs are temporary. Whether staff members leave because of redundancy, burnout, or because they find a better job, staff members tend to move on more often than congregation members. Sometimes a ministry's success becomes dependant on the employee.

In looking at this list, I'll share some staff hiring strategies:

1. Never hire paid staff to replace volunteers: hire to resource volunteers. Current volunteers have a valuable ministry and staff members should multiply the ministry and empower volunteers to make sustainable ministries that can continue without them.
2. Only hire staff if it fulfills the vision and mission of the congregation. Only hire people who are gifted in the area of the job description. Do not hire someone because it seems "trendy". Do not hire part-time staff to save money; hire part-time if the task is specific.
3. Write a strong job description for the position including all expectations (work hours, conduct etc) and not just tasks.

It is interesting how America is behind New Zealand in becoming post Christian, yet we are behind the States in so many other facets of life. As a post Christian nation, we need to think differently. As the church, we are not being culturally relevant, and we need to explore and experiment how we can do this. As we develop our vision, it may well include large staffs as we see in the States. However, we don't want to follow so many churches in the States that have hired staff to replace volunteers, and then had to make cuts and lose complete ministries. First and foremost, we should be looking to set visions that are sustainable, where staff and volunteers together can grow the ministry, and not burn the ministry out.

Captain of the team

Doug Ferens, Lay appointee, Kaikohe Union, Northland

A church is largely run by volunteers. Volunteers are extremely valuable and important for the smooth running of the church, but in most cases they have neither the training nor the abilities to lead the church. In other words, the paid worker is the “captain of the team”.

A paid minister, ordained or lay, as well as having a sense of God’s call to the position they hold (not that the volunteer doesn’t) is trained in the different facets of ministry. This is assuming the lay minister has undergone ministry training through a recognised Bible College or similar.

A volunteer can say, “I will not be available on Sunday,” and someone else has to pick up the slack or organise a replacement at the last minute. That someone, generally speaking, is the paid person.

People tend to look to someone to lead them and when you have, for example, “Local Shared Ministry” teams (LSM) there is no clear leader for the congregation to turn to for direction and no sense of, “that is my minister; that is the person I can turn to in time of need”. In my experience, I have not seen one LSM that has resulted in true church growth, which I define as spiritual and numeric growth.

Each church needs a paid leader, the minister, who has a responsibility to facilitate the growth of the Kingdom of God and to raise up new leaders. Part of that role is to identify and empower volunteers, under his or her oversight, to take ownership and responsibility for different facets of the ministry of the church.

This is where the rubber hits the road. Does it work? Yes, it does.

I have been the lay minister for the Kaikohe Union Parish for two and a half years. There are two churches in the parish, Kaikohe and Okaihau. The parish had not had a paid minister for approximately eight years. There was only one ministry running, a Sunday school in Okaihau. Numbers, whilst stable, were low in both churches.

The following ministries have been established, the majority led by volunteers:

- Home group ministry
- Men’s ministry
- Children’s ministry, Kaikohe and Okaihau
- Youth ministry
- Music ministry
- Prison ministry
- Rest home ministry
- Social life ministry

Are these a success? Yes, they are. Why?

- We have seen the congregation grow from 45-odd to just on 100. There has also been tremendous spiritual growth and this is evidenced in the different ministries and the corporate worship.
- What has assisted this is the fact that there is one message coming from the pulpit, rather than a mixture of messages. The music ministry, which has gone from two pianists to two pianists and four guitarists, is very successful because they are working regularly with one person, rather than several, thus enabling them to closely match the choice of music to the developing message theme.
- The home group ministry teaching tends to complement the message coming from the pulpit.
- Parents of children attending the children’s church are being drawn into the church and they are receiving a consistent message and way of worship.
- The men’s ministry has a men’s weekly prayer breakfast that is empowering them to stand and step out in faith as men of God.
- There is a Corrections Facility at Ngapha just a few kilometres from Kaikohe. Prison ministry is an important part of our church and it is empowering future leaders, as is the rest home ministry.

- The social life ministry is pivotal and brings everyone together to celebrate and reach out.

So, through these ministries we have been able to identify future leaders and, yes, ministers.

One could argue that volunteers could achieve all that has been achieved in this parish but volunteers also have other responsibilities and calls on their time that can distract and prevent attendance. A paid person is committed to working for the church for a minimum specified time each week and is more accountable to the church oversight than a volunteer, and actually has more at stake. The co-ordinator, the paid worker, is as crucial as is a team captain to the success of the team.

From Genesis on, we see that people need leaders who are fully committed to the cause to lead them and show them the way. A paid person is committed; and if not, then should be removed. After all, in the Word we read that God did not hesitate to remove leaders who failed to lead.

Being the minister allows changes to be rung in the way we worship to better reflect the expectations of the wider community, resulting in growth. An LSM could find it difficult to achieve consensus on changes because some members of the LSM might feel uncomfortable with a new style of worship.

In closing, successful ministry is about having the right mix of paid workers and volunteers, the most important criteria being they all sense the call of God to the ministry in which they are involved.

Ministers' study grants

Are you a Presbyterian minister planning on further study? Do you know that you can apply for a study grant from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership?



Applications are invited in March and September each year for post-ordination study grants for ministers in good standing of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. These grants are made possible through the generosity of the Mary Ann Morrison and MS Robertson estates and are administered by the Senatus of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

What are the rules?

1. The proposed course of study will aid the applicant's professional development.
2. There is a potential benefit to the Church and the probability of significant service to the Church.
3. Parish and presbytery approval has been obtained for the study, where appropriate.

In normal circumstances grants do not exceed one-third of the study costs involved and may be held in conjunction with other scholarships and grants other than the Postgraduate Scholarship. Grants are not made retrospectively and relate only to costs to be incurred by the scholarship holder themselves.

How do I apply?

Enquiries to: The Registrar, Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership, Knox College, Arden Street Opoho, Dunedin. registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz. Closing date for the next round of applications: **30 September 2010**

How will our service be seen?

Martin Baker

Recently my wife Sandy and I enjoyed the unusual privilege of representing friends of ours at an awards evening at Victoria University. Our friends, who are currently overseas, have just made a very generous donation to Victoria towards postgraduate scholarships for students from the university to study for part of their degree at China's prestigious Peking University. As well as recognising their generosity, the evening included acknowledgement of another group of people. This group had left money in their wills for the university.

Here we were, surrounded by what appeared to be a quite sane and very gregarious group of people who were thinking about what to do when they were dead. All these not-yet-dead people were named and received a nice little commemorative gift from the vice chancellor.

I doubt that I was the only one in the room who wondered about what was going on here. I have reflected on all the complex personal and institutional negotiations that were represented at an event like this: an acknowledgement and celebration of mortality, wealth, generosity, gratitude.

I have to confess that even with what I consider to be a fairly robust personal faith in the eternal providence of God, I do find that there is a certain existential challenge in updating my own will. To whom will I give those two royal Dorchester porcelain dogs left to me by my grandmother? In fact, why did my grandmother leave them to me in the first place? She wrote the names of grandchildren on the back of various items in her home. Would one of my children think more or less of me if one or other of them were to receive these enormously unattractive dust collectors? (sorry Grandma). The pondering could go on forever.

However, the event at the university went further. Food, drink, and words acknowledging a contribution to a future from which those present would one day be absent. It is not so much a question of "what will we be remembered for?" but perhaps a more difficult and abstract challenge of being able to stand aside from our own ego-centred world and to see ourselves as part of something continuing. Perhaps that wonderful verse in the 12th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews expresses it far better:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

I know that there is unfairness in juxtaposing the mission of the One who created the heavens and the earth against an hour-long committee discussion about trying to resurrect the lawn-mowing roster or whether we will just pay Mr Green \$50 dollars a fortnight to come and trim the Church lawns. But I do wonder if we have got the balance between immanence and transcendence quite right. Too many times to count, I have heard words to the effect that "the first thing we do when they show up at church is to give them a job". As wonderfully common sense as these words are, there is a kind of ecclesiology behind them about which I do wonder.

Let us celebrate volunteers. They give countless hours that are all too often poorly acknowledged and affirmed, and are the lifeblood of any church. Theorists remind us that volunteers are critical not only for the working of organisations in the non-profit sector; they are also responsible for these organisations' integrity. Being a volunteer is a values-driven commitment. If an organisation cannot inspire such a commitment, it probably needs to question its very reason for being. It is not just the fact that people might leave money in their will for Victoria University; the critical issue is that they have faith and hope that the university will continue to fulfil a purpose and function that the donor holds of great personal importance.

I think Scripture is clear that costly service, carrying our cross as we follow Jesus, and bringing Good News to the poor are all part of the essence of Christian discipleship. In this sense, none of these are voluntary propositions. The church is formed in worship, proclamation the sharing of bread and wine. There is a new way of being human within this. A different way of living and dying.

I am conscious as we approach the General Assembly how easy and alluring it is to argue about the mechanics of keeping the wheels on the Church going round and round (the lawn-roster question elevated to a national debate). As we "seek first the kingdom," what will that mean for us as we make decisions about the priorities we place on the use of our money and time, gifts and skills? Affirming that the Presbyterian Church is part of the mission of the God who "so loved the world" seems to me to place many of our other considerations in a different perspective.