

# Putting Spiritual Gifts to Work

Equipping Saints for Service

Karen Kogler

The Equipper Church Volunteerism Resources

[www.theequipper.org](http://www.theequipper.org)



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The NIV translation is used for scripture references.

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## Introduction

This book addresses volunteerism health in a congregation. It shows how to move away from continual, desperate pleas for more volunteers, to a system and culture that equips the saints for service – encouraging, inviting and supporting people to serve as God has gifted and called them. After discovering our spiritual gifts, the necessary next step is putting them to work. When the church does a good job of helping its people take that step, people enjoy serving, volunteerism is healthy, and the church is mobilized for carrying out its mission.

Many excellent church volunteerism resources are already available; many of them are listed at the back of this book. Why another book? People have told me they wanted “doable” practical helps “in bite-size pieces,” “not a big, elaborate program.” Some current resources are so thorough, they can be daunting to someone new to the field, or who has only a few volunteer hours a week to give to improving volunteerism, or someone serving in a small church. Some other resources oversimplify, or are more general, or offer limited practical help. This book aims to put healthy church volunteerism in a nutshell, to cover all the basics in a you-can-do-this manner, to be simple but not simplistic, to be short enough to read in a few hours, and, above all, to provide useable and practical help.

This book combines what I’ve learned serving four congregations over 15+ years, talking to people from congregations across the country, plus what I’ve learned through books, trainings, and academic study. Hopefully this “keep it simple” overview will



encourage you to dig deeper, explore additional resources, and begin or continue the adventure of helping God's people serve.

Many people have helped me serve. God equipped me through them. I owe them a debt I cannot pay, but am privileged to thank some of them here:

- Carol, whose servant heart set in motion the events that ignited my passion for church volunteerism;
- Claire, whose example encouraged me to pursue deeper theological study;
- Mike Ruhl of the Center for U.S. Missions, whose coaching opened new doors and pushed me through them
- Jack Giles and Gary Norton, regional judicatory leaders who encouraged me along the way, especially during my "tent-making" periods;
- The volunteers at St. Peter Lutheran, Arlington Heights, Illinois, and Christ the King Lutheran, Southgate, Michigan; you are my primary teachers;
- Most especially, Henry, who unfailingly loves me.



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## PART I: THE BIG PICTURE

### Chapter 1: Beyond Spiritual Gifts

#### A. After Assessing, what now?

Since the 1980's, many Christian churches have used spiritual gifts as the tool to improve volunteerism. Through teaching about spiritual gifts, using gift discovery tools, and thinking about the gifts needed by specific ministries, churches have aimed to help people work in ministries that match their giftedness. In some congregations, this emphasis on spiritual gifts has led to the desired result—more people serving and being effective and fulfilled in their service.

But in many, perhaps most, other churches, after the gift discovery tools are scored, little or nothing changes. Leaders either don't know what to do or their efforts don't have the desired results. Other churches shy away from spiritual gift tools due to various concerns.

The spiritual gifts emphasis is a response to certain needs. These needs still exist and addressing them is vital to the health and mission of the church:

- In most churches, 20% of the people do 80% of the work.
- Volunteers frequently get burned out
- A lack of volunteers limits what a congregation can do and limits its impact on the community.
- Churches do not resemble Paul's description of the body of Christ as a body in which "each part does its work" (1 Cor. 4:16)

Certain characteristics of western society today work against healthy church volunteerism. Things are different than they were 40 or 50 years ago.



- People are very busy, often over-scheduled.
- Fewer moms are full-time homemakers.
- People are generally less loyal to institutions, including churches.
- Society is more secular; churches and church work is less valued.

But the most important things have not changed. Biblical truth is still truth, at any time and in any culture. The church is still and will always be God's gathered people, called into a community to worship and to serve together. Jesus Christ remains the head of the church. The ultimate victory of Christ and his church is sure.

#### B. Equipping saints for service = Helping Each Other Serve

To address these realities and to become the church God calls us to be, we first need to establish our approach. Rather than focusing on recruiting volunteers, we need to focus on equipping people to serve, intentionally giving them what they need to serve. Christians are called to serve. In the church, we worship together, we study God's Word together, and we also serve together.

"Together" describes all we do in the church

*If church leaders are not intentionally helping people serve, they're probably unintentionally hindering them.*

"Equipping saints for service" means helping each other serve. It is the scriptural approach to church volunteerism and it leads to healthy volunteerism. It goes beyond spiritual gifts to a more complete stewardship of time and talents, not only within the church but also at home and work and in the community. It not only helps people discover their gifts and find places to serve, but it also supports them in that service. It



sees service as an opportunity to grow in discipleship. If a church does not intentionally help its people serve, it often is unintentionally hindering their service.

Recruitment is our usual volunteerism focus. As it has gotten more difficult to find volunteers, we respond by increasing our recruitment efforts: more announcements, more “pushes.” But that emphasis is self-defeating. The harder we

| Equipping saints for service  | Recruiting Volunteers  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People-centered</li> <li>• Continues after position is filled</li> <li>• Geared toward church as a living, growing organism</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task-centered</li> <li>• Ends when the position is filled</li> <li>• Geared toward church as a hierarchical organization</li> </ul> |

push, the more people resist. We’re so desperate to fill the needs, we take anyone with a pulse. We burn out the volunteers we have; everyone is frustrated. Changing our focus from recruiting volunteers to helping each other serve replaces the desperation and frustration with intentional effort to help people find, and enjoy, the service that God has designed them for and calls them to.

Today’s society provides opportunity, as well as challenge, for church volunteerism.

- A higher percentage of people have advanced skills and training from their jobs.
- Increased wealth often leads to desires for significance and for giving back.
- We enjoy longer, healthier retirements.
- Technology allows more people to serve in more ways

Helping people serve is essential to the church’s mission and purpose. When we help people serve, we help them grow in their faith; serving puts our faith into action





and draws us closer to our Lord. Serving together builds and cements relationships; the need for community is huge in our world today. Serving draws people to the church. When people see our deeds, they are more open to hear our words. When we serve together, we can powerfully impact our communities. People crave purpose and significance. When the purpose of a task reaches the heart of an individual, they will have no trouble making time for it in their schedule.

The need for equipping saints for service is great in one final, most compelling way. The need is great for people to hear about the love God demonstrated for them in Jesus Christ. Since all the work of the church—every last task—involves or supports the sharing this good news, we can do no less than our best to help each person serve effectively.

Helping people serve is rewarding. As you help people serve, you'll see people:

- surprised because they're being encouraged to do what they enjoy;
- thrilled at discovering new aptitudes;
- energized by what they do; and
- creatively expanding ministry in directions you never imagined

Helping people serve is more rewarding than the typical narrow focus on recruiting volunteers, but it's also more work. It includes preparing people to serve, helping them find a place to serve and supporting them while they serve. It affects the whole church, not just part. It's all about people, and working with people can be



“messy.” It includes addressing conflict and problems, not ignoring them. It takes time and energy. It’s a much better way but it’s not easier.

But it’s not brain surgery. You already have most of what you need. Scripture gives us God’s design and motivates us. People in your congregation will have useful skills. Our God-given reason and common sense enable us to come up with systems and practices to reach our goals. Although it takes time, there are positive results from each step along the way. So let’s get going.

