

What do You do in Your Church?

This activity helps any group of church volunteers expand their vision of volunteerism in the church. Allow 15-30 minutes. It can be used with staff or the church governing board, or to open a leadership training meeting or at any gathering of volunteers, such as a choir rehearsal. It's important that someone follows-up on ideas/plans generated in the final step.

1. Hand each participant a sheet of paper. Ask them to write how they'd respond if someone asked them, "What do you do as a volunteer at your church?" Allow 1 minute.
2. Tell the group that the way we name or describe what we do paints a picture of it for the listener and says something about what we think of it. Using something you do as a volunteer, say something like, "Instead of saying, 'I set up the coffee and donuts on Sunday morning,' I can say, 'I make people feel comfortable here,' or 'I encourage people to talk and get to know each other,' or 'I create opportunities for members to welcome guests.'" (If all people in the group volunteer in the same way--choir, for example--do not use that as your example.)
3. Ask the group to think about what they wrote, and to write other ways that come to mind to describe those tasks. Allow 5 minutes.
4. If the group is large, and there is sufficient time, allow an additional 5 minutes for people to share their responses in small groups of 3-5 people. (More people get to speak in small groups vs. large groups.)
5. Encourage sharing of responses with the entire group. This step (and step 4, if used) helps people see more possibilities, so allow it to continue as long as there is worthwhile response and time permits, but be sure to save 5 minutes or more for the final step.
6. Ask questions like, "How would it affect our church as a whole if we described our volunteer tasks in one way or the other?" "How can we influence the way people think about what they do here?" Have someone record ideas. Decide on at least one item that can be implemented and record who will do what by when. (Be sure to follow up later!) If you are suggesting or planning changes to move from a recruiting focus to one that equips people to serve, tie them in to the discussion.

The idea for this activity was sparked by the January 2008 "hot topic" by Susan Ellis of Energize, Inc. (www.energizeinc.com/hot.html) which supports volunteerism in the non-profit sector.

