

Building Community Meeting of the Joseph Priestley District (JPD)
Breakout Session: “Volunteering”
Sat., 22 Sep 2018
Patricia Hall Infante, Congregational Life, Central East Region

Pat Infante also screened a good slideshow, which we can obtain from the UUA. She began by telling us something to keep in mind, that church volunteering is a sacred mission. The emphasis of her talk and the slideshow is that 21st century volunteers are different from those during most of the 20th century. There needs to be a difference in recruiting approaches. She said the secret to getting and keeping volunteers lies in knowing what age groups are looking for and how to reward them. The Depression and WWII Generation (1929-1945) members are growing quite old, and now UU churches draw most adult volunteers from the Boomers and two younger generations. There are some personality differences among these three.

Boomers: born 1946-64, mostly to parents who regularly attended church, so they acquired churchgoing as a habit. They came of age from the 1960s to early 80s and are now beyond or nearing retirement. If retired, they have more free time and are easier to recruit as team leaders and members, but some may have out of date attitudes held more rigidly. Many are upset by the changes in social mores and economics in their lifetimes, but they often become the primary church lay leaders. Some keep on too long and are hard to dislodge.

Generation X: born 1965-80, and when they came of age in the 80s-90s many of the liberals dropped out of church altogether to pursue secular careers. Some are now retiring early or because of economic distress have been laid off, and seek something worthwhile. They can be recruited as team leaders or members, but some get impatient with those who aren't as conscientious. Because this age group often takes on too much, especially if they are still working full time, they can burn out.

Millennials: born 1981-2000, and the last born are just now coming of age. They have different values, including more tolerance of diversity. They are adaptable to rapidly changing culture, but there is also disillusion and fear of the future. They are often working below their educational level and raising families. Many are grasping for values and realize that society lacks clear positive morals. They come to church to find spiritual meaning and a sense of mission, and can find those by volunteering.

How not to recruit volunteers:

1. Avoid giving clear directions, then adding, “By the way, there’s one or two other things...”
2. Don’t ask volunteers to do the work of the paid staff, even of those who work part-time.
3. Never give volunteers “busy work.”
4. Don’t forget that all church work is sacred work, and never forget to praise and thank for a task well done.

Good ways to advertise for volunteers:

1. Communication Cards should be included in every order of service. (Ours no longer are, and are often missing from the pews.) There needs to be one Volunteer Coordinator who receives the Communication Cards of new attendees every Sunday to find any who wish to volunteer—and for what. That person’s name should quickly be added to a list of names, addresses, phones, emails, and talents. Having this list, and keeping it updated rapidly, is essential. After the info is extracted, the Volunteer Coordinator should give the card to whoever is in charge of the appropriate task, who will do the actual recruiting.
2. Always have the committee chair (or equivalent) write a job description of the volunteer task(s)—no more than 1 page. Include the task work, the approximate time it will take, how often, need for any special equipment, whether they can do tasks at home and whether they need to come in once or twice a month, or week, other than on Sundays. Let volunteers work at home as much as possible, especially those who provide care for young children.
3. At the beginning of the church year, or the first big church meeting, make posters of the major committees and other vital activities, but don’t overdo it. A smaller church has a limited number of members and can’t do everything. Each poster should have a list of what needs to be done. Post on easels or walls, provide sign-

- up sheets with info like that of the Communication Card. The recruiter must be nearby to speak to interested members or newcomers, and will give them copies of the job descriptions. If there is interest, read the tasks aloud, answer questions, and include the spiritual value. The more they know, the easier for volunteers.
4. The recruiter must promise to train a new volunteer until s/he feels certain of the tasks—and keep that promise.
 5. To keep volunteers, they must be told how much they are appreciated. Thank them publicly in a service where all volunteers and supervisors come to the front—and ask for further volunteers for certain tasks, including leadership, if needed. Do not do this at the end of the current church year! (Pat Infante was emphatic about that.) The thank you service must be at the beginning of the next church year. Any time between Ingathering and November is okay. Give each of last year's volunteers a certificate for framing signed by the minister, and something to attach to the name tag or otherwise wear on clothing for display.

Good ways to approach potential volunteers:

1. Give each prospective volunteer a copy of the pertinent job description(s), then read it aloud and discuss, answering questions that arise.
2. Explain that our church tasks are spiritual tasks—even the less interesting ones like folding orders of service, cleaning up the pews or washing dishes after coffee hour. Use the church's Covenant or Mission and the UU Principles to show how a task helps fulfill a spiritual dimension.
3. Ask what they do well, what they enjoy, and try to fit tasks to those needs. Use their talents and knowledge and explain preliminary requirements, if any. If they are volunteering for the choir or instrumental music, the Music Director will be the one doing the recruiting and may ask a volunteer to audition. Other recruiters may ask for similar evidence from artists, building inspection experts, tasks that require typing, etc. and make sure they are told if there's a need for special equipment like a car, a portable computer or smartphone.
4. When their tasks are underway, get feedback from each new volunteer. The recruiter will give new volunteers her/his easiest access phone number and email, and make sure they know they're welcome to call. The recruiter should also phone the volunteer a few days after a task begins. Ask if there's a problem. Does the volunteer have any ideas about relieving it? The recruiter should help cure a serious problem—such as, for example, contradictory task information passed informally by a former volunteer or supervisor—even if it needs a visit to the minister or the Board to discuss it.

Pat Infante did a splendid, enthusiastic job of conducting this session ex tempore, without even referring to notes, and I thanked her. More details will be gained from the slideshow and UUA websites.

--Sandy Fulton