

## **There are no volunteers within the life of the church and neither does the church want or need any volunteers!**

Dear Friends.

I would like to begin this, by citing a passage from Matthew 9:35-38

*‘Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’*

When Jesus said that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, He was not suggesting that there were few Christians and many needing to be saved. Rather, He was uncovering the reality that, in the face of all who state to be people of God, very few have shown willing to pay the price and live the lives of service and mission in the context of His community, the Church. We need to see a shift if our worldview (and therefore in our approach to spiritual and missional formation) is going to address this.

One of the things that you will often see in church notices, either written, spoken or mentioned at our meetings is the call for folk to volunteer for a variety of tasks. We will have a need so we will put out a call for people to help. Only to have very few respond or indeed none. Often it is the same people who come forward, who are already doing a lot in the life of the church; while there are those who never answer the call.

Of course, there are all sorts of reasons that people don't step forward. For some, there is a worry that if we say yes we will be saddled with a task for the rest of our lives. Others are very busy with work or travel or other things in their lives which make offering difficult.

Others assume that someone else will do it. The fact is that if people do not step up to take on the tasks of the church, those tasks simply will not happen.

I believe, one of the things that churches today struggle with is the language of ‘volunteers’ as we talk about carrying out the work of the church, which is of course the work of God's mission. I would like to state that the ‘church’ has no volunteers and neither does the church want any volunteers! We all too often view our involvement in the church community through the concept of volunteering. In other words, we love the vision and reality of ministry and want to be involved, as long as it fits with us and our lives, without impinging on us too much. It may seem many Christians see engagement in church life as a voluntary opportunity or option, which they can add to their lives when it works or is not too demanding. This isn't to say that many people don't live sacrificially.

Jesus Christ didn't envision the church as a gathering of volunteers picking and choosing how they will serve. No, the church is to be the “Body of Christ,” the means by which Christ's work is carried out into the world. The Apostle Paul would go on to teach that using our gifts for building up the body is not optional, but rather an important part of Christian discipleship.

*God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift that is given by Christ.*  
Ephesians 4:7

Let us try to move away from the language of having volunteers, believing that our calling is not to choose when and if we will serve, but rather to be obedient to the call from God when it is offered. Disciples (followers of Jesus) should be ready, willing, and able to exercise their gifts when needs are identified. Yes, we have the free will to choose to be obedient or not, but those who have given their lives to the service of Christ must know that the question is never **IF** we will serve, but rather **HOW** we will serve.

When you hear of a need for a person on a committee or a rota, do not view it as if you were being asked to volunteer: - It is a call to discipleship.

*“To give, and not to count the cost  
to fight, and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil, and not to seek for rest,  
to labour, and not to ask for any reward,  
save that of knowing that we do thy will”* — St. Ignatius of Loyola

In the coming weeks and months as we emerge from lockdown you will see calls for people to help in a variety of ways. This is not a call for volunteers. Volunteering for an organization is optional. This is a call for disciples, which, if we are to call ourselves a true follower of Christ is essential!

While I always understand that “church work” is not necessarily “the work of the church” (think about that for a minute...), the fact is that there are tasks that need to be done to ensure that God’s work is being done and we cannot carry out these tasks without us ALL coming together to ensure they are done. There is no sitting back and coasting for disciples of Jesus. The harvest is plentiful, but we can gather it in if we all work together for the good of God’s church and kingdom.

The mission of the Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

You see while volunteers are great. It is, however, disciples who change the world. That was true for the early church after Christ’s resurrection, and it is still true today. There will be those reading this who do and are fulfilling this responsibility and calling as disciples. Who in turn are a blessing to others and ultimately are themselves blessed. Trust that you are appreciated.

Matthew 25:23: - *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

Every Blessing

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pauline". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.