
ATTRACTING VOLUNTEERS

Managing your churchyard in a way that is sensitive to both wildlife and people brings with it tasks that are varied and interesting. These may range from creating compost heaps, putting up bird and bat boxes, finding out what species of wildflowers there are, scything meadow areas, dry stone walling and tree pruning etc.

Although taking on the overall responsibility of managing the churchyard is more than what many people can take on, often they are happy to volunteer for work parties.

In order to get a healthy team of volunteers together and maintain enthusiasm and momentum it is helpful to understand 1) some of the barriers to people volunteering, 2) how to attract volunteers and 3) how to keep them.

1) Potential barriers to people volunteering

- Lack of confidence
- Lack of time
- Have dependants
- Work commitments
- Don't know about it
- The churchyard is not their problem if they are not part of the congregation
- People may think they have nothing to offer
- Lack of awareness of the interest the churchyard has to offer

With the right publicity and planning, many of the above barriers can be overcome.

2) Attracting volunteers Planning

- You need to know **how many volunteers are needed**, for what, when and how often.
- For work in one location it is best to look as local as possible, and offer transport for prospective volunteers.
- Decide on the task **day and the time to suit the majority of** people who might volunteer – may be weekday, evening or weekends. Will it be for a whole day or just a couple of hours?
- Be prepared to find **something for everyone** who volunteers, no matter what their abilities. As well as very physical jobs there are others such as: making tea, bringing cakes, taking photographs, recording plants and wildlife, making bird and bat boxes at home, sweeping, raking or barrowing.
- For volunteers coming from further away you will need to think about **transport**, for example sharing lifts. Put offers of help with transport on publicity.
- Do a **risk assessment!** See Health and Safety section.

3) Finding Volunteers

- Try as many angles as possible. **Word of mouth** is often the best.
- **Posters** in the church porch, village halls, village notice boards and flyers so that people can take information away.
- Put work party details in the **village news of the local paper** or issue a press release.
- Have you got a **village website?** Friends of...?
- Start publicity a month in advance.
- **Register** with your local **Voluntary Action** office.

- You will need a **point of contact** and someone to speak to prospective new volunteers in an enthusiastic way.
- Arrange a **regular programme** so that volunteers can convert interest into action as soon as possible. A regular day is easy to remember. For example you could have a working party on the first Saturday of every month. Avoid clashing with other events/activities nearby.
- Could someone do some **activities for children** while the adults work?
- See Activities for Children section. You may get many more volunteers if it is family friendly.
- **Engage people** and show them what a wonderful resource they have on their doorstep. Hold slide talks/guided walks in the churchyard.
- **Run some training** – ask around for what skills local people have – identification, building compost bins etc and put on a training morning.
- Approach the local council to see if there are any small pots of money for projects that involve volunteering and training so that you can pay experts if needed.
- **Make it appealing** – ‘cake and rake’ days or a ‘scything Saturday’ with food.
- **Link in with national initiatives** – makes people feel it is for them, opens more doors for funding, gets more publicity. Local papers and radio will pick up on national initiatives and give it a higher profile. e.g. wildlife week for grassland management, compost week for making compost bins etc.
- Cherishing Churchyard Week – check our events for dates. See www.countmeincalendar.info for details of national initiatives.

4) Keeping Volunteers

- Find out **what individuals like to do**, what their interests are and help them achieve what they have come along for. This could have been to meet people, gain skills, look at wildlife, have peace and quiet, or get fit.
- Have a **structure to the day**. Let people know when tea breaks are, and when it will finish, making it clear that they are also welcome to stop at any time!
- Have **information available** about the church, churchyard and the wildlife.
- You may find someone to do a quick tour and point out features of interest.
- Think about **toilet** facilities, hand washing etc. A camping port-a-loo with a small tent is adequate.
- **Welcome** people at the beginning and **thank them** at the end of the day, giving information about what happens next and when.
- Have a person who **keeps an eye on everyone** to make sure they are happy, and to introduce new people.
- Once your group is going, **recognise special events** like birthdays, anniversary of the group etc.
- Compile a **scrapbook of tasks** with pictures of people and projects, wildlife seen, who attended etc for everyone to look at. It can be used as a basis for display or left in church, which may attract new volunteers.

For any help and information contact Caring for God's Acre

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