

Engaging Volunteers as Partners in Ministry

Perhaps you've discovered that bulletin announcements don't do much good when it comes to recruiting volunteers. What else can you do? Here are 12 ideas that have worked for congregations who engage partners in ministry with persons with varied abilities:

1. Ask your pastor and church board to pray for you as you search.
2. Look for people in the congregation that may be overlooked by others. Hint: they may be back-row sitters, drift toward technology, or have not volunteered for many other things.
3. Ask them to come to one meeting or event, just to visit. Or to help once a month doing a very specific task, for a set number of months. Low commitment and involvement can lead to more later, and most importantly, to relationships.
4. Tell stories. Share the gift of inclusive ministry in your experiences, the families in your congregation, and stories like those in [Body Building: Devotions Celebrating Inclusive Community](#) by Barbara J. Newman.
5. Once you have one partner within your congregation, ask that person to bring in another ministry partner. And so on. Perhaps their family or friends would like to join them!
6. Visibility = volunteers. Write about what your ministry is doing in your church newsletter, blog or e-blast.
7. Be an agent of connecting people. As you notice individuals who may sit alone or are not engaged in community, ask a family to sit with them or invite them to join their small group. You can offer training for small groups, and [tips for adapting based on a person's area of difference or disability](#) (free resources from Friendship

Ministries). The family will get to know the person, and then you can ask them to be more involved--or they may beat you to it and volunteer!

8. Is there anyone in the congregation that is a Special Ed teacher, occupational therapist, or social worker? Ask them to brainstorm with you and ask whether they have ideas for volunteers in places your ministry needs more support.
9. Be enthusiastic. If you act like this is a great opportunity (which it is!), someone will catch your vision.
10. If someone comes to your ongoing events from another church, ask that church to find a consistent person to help at these events. Their familiarity with individuals and their support needs can inform your ministry, or vice versa.
11. High schoolers can make great ministry partners. Emphasize the importance of attending faithfully and offer to write them a letter of recommendation for school or a job if they volunteer.
12. Recruit people for particular roles that use their gifts: musician, storyteller, arts & crafts coordinator, snack server, organizer of materials, event & party planner, transportation coordinator, and so on. This will help you avoid leader burnout, too!

Many of these ideas came from or were inspired by Nella Uitvlugt.