

CLARIFYING TASKS

Everything done in a church context is an outward sign of Christian faith and values: how a task is done matters as much as getting the job done. The person who serves drinks in a way that makes people feel valued is not only offering refreshment but is also sharing God's love for the world. The converse is also true!

If a task matters enough for someone to give up their time to do it then it matters enough to make sure that the person doing it actually knows what they're meant to be doing and why. It also matters that they feel that they are valued for their contribution.

Starting points

1

What is the task?

What needs to be done? Are there assumptions that you or the volunteer may be making about what a task involves? Are there aspects of the task that are essential, or which need to be done in a particular way? Are there aspects of the task that the volunteer can shape more flexibly?

2

Why does the task matter?

What are the reasons for doing this task? As well as the immediate effect, how does the task contribute to the bigger picture? How might the task, and the way in which it is done, reflect the values of the church or project?

3

Who will be a reference point and provide guidance for the volunteer?

Who will ensure that a volunteer knows what they are doing, answer any questions, and help them feel appreciated and supported? This doesn't have to default to 'the person at the top'. Designating who is to provide support can help share the load and can help develop those who take on the role.

4

Are there things that need to be in place to enable the task to be done, and done safely?

Does the volunteer have access to any equipment that may be needed? Are there particular risks and hazards associated with doing the task? What can you do to help the volunteer minimize potential problems for themselves or others? For more guidance on formalities like insurance, risk assessment and safeguarding see *Managing Formalities*.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDY:

We need someone new for the 'coffee' rota

Someone is going to join the rota for serving drinks at a weekly drop in session or after a service.

What is the task?

The essential task is to serve drinks to people, but does that involve

- bringing fresh milk and if so, can cost be reimbursed?
- setting up beforehand and washing up afterwards?
- leaving the service, or a session, early in order to be ready?
- responsibility for anything additional like washing tea towels?

In addition

- are donations expected or welcome from those who have drinks? How is that handled?
- is there flexibility for any personal touches about how things are done, like bringing in home made cakes, using different coffee etc?

Why does the task matter?

Serving people in this way

- gives them a drink that they otherwise wouldn't have
- makes people feel welcome and valued
- is part of creating an atmosphere where people can relax and talk to each other.

Who is going to provide support and guidance?

This could either be the person responsible for the rota or another specific person. They will

- give practical guidance on where everything is for making drinks
- explain any systems used and answer questions
- explain exactly what they do, and don't, have to do *e.g. do they have to set up, wash up, bring the milk etc or does someone else do that?*
- provide ongoing support, including thanking the person and sorting out any problems

What needs to be in place to enable the task to be done safely?

Who will ensure that risks have been assessed and minimised? For example

- Is the equipment safe – has electrical equipment been checked and does the person know how to use it correctly?
- Are there hygiene guidelines to follow?
- Is there insurance to cover any accidents that might happen?
- Are there any safeguarding issues to consider?

Practicalities

Every time that someone is asked to do something, those four basic questions should be asked and answered but how formally that is done will depend on the context. It's important not to put unnecessary barriers in the way of simple or one-off acts of service.

Below are a some possible ways to ensure that it's clear what someone is being asked to do. The suggestions range from behind the scenes to fairly formal and structured and they are ideas to get you started: you may well have other ideas of what could be helpful where you are.

Suggestions for clarifying tasks

1

Checklists

In an informal situation you may not want to give the volunteer any written information about the task but it can still be useful for the person responsible to use a checklist to ensure that they have communicated all the important information.

Depending on your situation, the checklist could be the responsibility of an administrator, churchwarden or clergy person, or of the person responsible for a group of volunteers.

Follow the link for [Clarifying Tasks Checklist](#)

2

Welcome Card

When someone takes on a role like a Godparent, they are sometimes given a card welcoming them to their responsibilities. A welcome card, also containing some key information, could be given to new volunteers when they take on a role. This could either be given informally or it could be given as part of a service or other occasion when that person's new ministry is prayed for.

Follow link for a [Sample Task Card](#), which can be adapted

3

Role Description

This is the most formal option but can still be kept quite simple and is very useful. It represents standard good practice when working with volunteers. Like a job description, it tells someone what they are taking on, who they report to and what the role involves. Some role descriptions go into more detail, like how often someone is volunteering and on what days but this is not essential. Please remember that although it is similar to a job description, it is important not to stray into the vocabulary of 'job' and 'work' as this blurs the legal boundaries between working and volunteering and can cause problems.

Follow link for a [Sample Role Description](#) which can be adapted

Follow link for [Volunteer-Friendly Vocabulary](#) to use