

Vital Post by Jeremiah Sierra

While I was working at an Episcopal Church in Houston, I'd often spend hours listening. I'd listen to the homeless men and women who came in the door, I'd listen to people who called up with messages for the priests, and I'd listen to parishioners who would stop by my office to chat about one thing or another. There were days, of course, when all this felt like a chore, but there were many when it was my pleasure to be a friendly ear. Most of my days were filled with photocopying and printing, but at times like these I felt like I was ministering to the people around me. I was the voice and face of the church to visitors.

Administrators, especially those who also serve as receptionists, are an integral part of the ministry of the church. Even those administrators who do not share the values of the church are part of the church's ministry of hospitality. They greet visitors, they [answer](#) questions, and ideally they make everyone who enters the door feel welcome.

It is important for church leaders to understand that the administrator, as the first face visitors see when they enter the door and the first voice they hear when they call, is an integral part of the ministry of the church. And you can't welcome visitors to a place you don't want to be. Fake smiles wear off quickly, and patience wears thin easily when all you can think about is when you can go home. Church leaders should take the [job](#) performance and satisfaction of the administrator seriously, because it can have an enormous effect on how welcoming a church feels to visitors.

Of course, much of the parish administrator's time is spent facilitating ministry. While much of this function is comprised of doing the day-to-day tasks like paying the bills and buying office supplies, at the heart of the job is communication. And communication is central to the work of the church.

As an administrator I spent a lot of my time passing along information. I don't know that Jesus had this type of communication in mind when he made the great commission, but it was often been my job to communicate the good news: service times, information about concerts, [directions](#) to a shelter where they served meals. Maybe, for a few, this was a bit of salvation, or a step closer to community.

Occasionally I'd also pass along bad news. I'd let the vestry know about leaks in the roof and have to tell people that we couldn't help them. But even this could be a kind of ministry: helping keep the building - which meant so much to so many people - in working order, and being a kind and pastoral presence even when I couldn't offer [cash](#) to homeless men and women seeking assistance (I wasn't always successful, but I like to think I helped a few by simply being friendly).

Not every administrator will see themselves as a minister, but every church leader should understand that their administrators are doing ministry. An administrator may not be an Episcopalian or a Christian or even be particularly interested in the theology of the church, but the job, when done right, is part of the ministry of communication and hospitality. Without the administrator, the church cannot do its work well.

What does this mean for church leaders? Primarily, it means taking the job of the administrator seriously, and remembering that it is an integral – not simply ancillary - part of the work of the church. As I've mentioned in earlier blog posts, the vestry and other church leaders should make sure that the parish administrator feels connected to the work of the church, and a valued part of the staff. They should make sure he or she is well supervised, understands the expectations of the job clearly, and has adequate tools and [training](#) to do the job well.

Paying attention to these things will not just ensure that the church pays it's bills and documents are filed away, which are of course important for any organization. A church with a competent and happy administrator will also better minister to the community, build the congregation, and spread the good news.