

To volunteer ... when & where & why

Just recently I have been thinking through what it means to be a volunteer. In thinking through this topic I found some surprising results and along the way have been encouraged and MU Activities challenged I believe Christians have much to offer in terms of volunteering and MU is a wonderful organisation to volunteer with. Importantly it is an organisation that can easily add depth to church communities.

So to answer my questions I looked up various university studies and results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I found that volunteering ranges from informal acts like looking after a family member through to trained positions like surf lifesavers.



Volunteering is incredibly valuable. The University of Adelaide estimated the value of volunteering to be more than \$200 billion per year¹. Of course, this is just the monetary value. Many MU members can testify to the profound impact serving morning tea at court can have on distressed people.

VolunteeringThe number of volunteers isn't as I imagined declining. It isn't increasing in great numbers but at least it isn't going backwards. Given that a lot of the people who volunteer are employed and middle class² it made me wonder how volunteering happens. My guess is that it is often situation driven. For example, your son plays soccer so you join the committee.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the act of volunteering brings blessings to the volunteer. God in his kindness has designed us so that when we volunteer the brain registers this in the same way as when we receive rewards or pleasure.

Researchers have shown that volunteering results in increased skills, improved health and fitness, increase in mental alertness and social connections³ Volunteering has also been shown to help develop resilience in children by building social networks.

Why do we as Christians bother? Fundamentally we bother because our time is not our own. Our thoughts, words and deeds belong to the sovereign God who created us, made it possible to be in a right relationship with him and continues to work in us for his good purposes.

So how do we decide if we are to spend some of our pressured day volunteering? How are we to discern which activity or organisation we should volunteer with? There are so many wonderful activities and groups - both Christian and secular.

Ultimately each person needs to determine how he or she will use his or her time each day.

Some factors to consider when determining what you will do with each day are -

Humbly come before God - acknowledging what he has done for us and our need to live under his rule and authority.

Repent of any thoughts or desires which may be stopping you from carving out time with an activity that may seemingly give no reward.

Consider your circumstances, your resources (both you and your skills and what God has blessed you with).

Have a look around you - what opportunities are in your church and community?

Consider that we need to be active in Christian groups but we also need to be involved in our secular community.

I find MU a great balance - it is a well established, biblically based, prayer supported organisation. It seeks to build up and encourage Christian marriages and families. It is also outward looking as it seeks to support those families under stress. I suspect that all families today could benefit from some TLC and all families need to know that God's plan for marriage and family is the best plan.

I would encourage you individually and collectively to have a constructive look at how we are using the many resources God has blessed us with. Imagine how God could use us if we are willing to spend some time volunteering in what is going on around us.

Compiled by

Ann Cunningham

Social Issues & Action
Coordinator Diocese of Sydney

1. <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news55621.html>

2. https://www.ourcommunity.com.au/general/general_article.jsp?articleId=4983

3. <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news55621.html>