



# VOLUNTEERS IN CHRIST'S MINISTRY

*Building, Encouraging, Supporting,  
and Recognizing Your Volunteer Team*



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# INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a volunteer? Webster's dictionary defines the word "volunteer" as a "person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task."

Congregations and LWML groups have created volunteer positions for members to be involved in sharing God's love with people in the church and in the community. Some volunteer positions require unique skills and qualifications for specific tasks, while other positions do not.

Volunteers in these church settings are encouraged to share their faith as well as their God-given spiritual gifts while performing volunteer service. Examples of spiritual gifts are teaching, serving, helping, and leading.

*Every good and perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,  
who does not change like shifting shadows  
(James 1:17 NIV).*

Ministry volunteers will learn new skills, find a sense of purpose, connect with others in their community, and find enjoyment in their ability and calling, feeling empowered by the Holy Spirit as they serve.

*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him  
as you have helped his people and continue to help them (Hebrews 6:10 NIV).*

The purpose of this resource is to help you and other volunteer leaders to encourage, support, and recognize volunteers within the LWML and in your congregation. We pray that this basic information will help you to reach others and recognize that everyone can be a part of God's team of volunteers. It's more than simply recruiting people to serve, but rather inviting others to grow in their faith and encouraging them to view their service as a privilege.

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,  
just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV).*

## VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE

To determine the skills and talents which God has bestowed on those who wish to volunteer, you may use special "Gifts and Talents" inventories that are available on various websites. Or simply ask the volunteer about her interests and past experiences. Below are some questions to help you invite volunteers to join your team.

1. What are your gifts and talents?
2. What do you like to do? What is your passion?
3. List past volunteer involvement and projects in which you've participated as a volunteer.
4. Are there things you'd like to contribute to the organization that you've never been asked to do?
5. Would you like to have more, less, or different involvement than you've had in the past?

6. What is your vision for serving the Lord through this group?
7. What is your major concern for this group? How might this be addressed?

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others,  
faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms  
(1 Peter 4:10 NIV).*

## **WHY VOLUNTEER?**

Volunteers are motivated to serve for many reasons: to feel needed, to meet new people, to share skills and talents, to learn something new, to fill free time, to learn to become accountable, or simply to have fun. Christian volunteers often cite reasons such as showing appreciation to God or giving glory to Him. A fundamental reason to volunteer in a church setting is to follow the example of Christ, the Ultimate Volunteer.

Volunteer programs which are carefully planned and well-managed will greatly enhance an organization's capability to recognize and motivate volunteers. Because volunteerism is seen as a key element in faith life, many churches have either a paid or unpaid person who coordinates the volunteer efforts of parishioners within and beyond the congregation. LWML leaders can view themselves as "directors of volunteers" within their groups.

How can we motivate people to serve, including those who find excuses why they cannot serve and become part of the team? Here are some ideas that may help you to motivate and keep volunteers energized for serving:

- Establish a friendly atmosphere. Be honest and set an example for volunteers to also be honest with you.
- Enjoy each person's uniqueness. Appreciating the person as an individual will affirm the person's identity.
- Share your vision with them; inquire about their interests.
- Delegate responsibilities which enable them to participate in the vision of the LWML or the church.
- Encourage them to serve where they find enjoyment and where they can best use their gifts.
- Motivate, don't manipulate. Use your passion, not your position.
- Be specific in your request; provide a job description.
- Share accurate time expectations for the job.
- Offer training for the tasks and keep lines of communication open. Encourage questions.
- Set a start date and an end date for the job's completion. Re-evaluate when the job is finished.

Serving is all about being a witness. We need to be able to look beyond ourselves by helping others. Volunteers are dedicated Christians who want their service to be a blessing to others and to the group.

John 13 tells us how Jesus served by washing His disciples' feet. He also was giving an example of what He expected His disciples to do. We as Christians should make it our goal to become more like Christ to serve and show our love.

Volunteers show God's love as they reach out to the church and to the community. During that process, they become closer with their LWML and/or church family members and enjoy the fellowship that results through serving together in God's ministry.

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds  
(Hebrews 10:24 NIV).*

People volunteer for many reasons. Determining the specific motivators for each person's service can be helpful as you engage and recognize each one:

**1. Compassion-oriented motivators**

The majority of service given by Christian volunteers stems from a genuine desire to do something for someone else. God plants that seed in our hearts, and when we see that our actions have had a positive effect, God is honored. Volunteers motivated to action by compassion enjoy the feeling of satisfaction that comes from helping others. Periodic notes of appreciation to this type of volunteer will be very meaningful to them.

**2. Socialization-oriented motivators**

Some people are motivated by the need to make friends, to work with others, and to have fun while accomplishing meaningful tasks. They will feel appreciated by a special time together for coffee or a meal, a personalized gift or note of thanks, or an assignment to welcome or train a new volunteer. They may also appreciate someone showing concern for them personally.

**3. Achievement-oriented motivators**

Having a goal, achieving it, and gaining new responsibilities are what some people seek. They will enjoy planning activities and leading others in successfully accomplishing them. Recognize them by a making a donation in their name, presenting a tangible award or plaque, sending a letter to their family, or offering a position with more responsibility.

**4. Development-oriented motivators**

By being a volunteer, some people can increase their knowledge and use their experiences in future job placement or schooling. Training at a workshop by professional staff members will broaden their skills, encourage them to grow, and will make them feel needed and appreciated.

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,  
for the Lord your God goes with you;  
he will never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV).*

# ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

“Encouragers” can be a real blessing to us and to other volunteers. Out of genuine Christian love, take the time to speak supporting words to volunteers, especially when they appear to feel lost or unsure of themselves and their capabilities. Take time to pray and give thanks to the Lord to give you that encouragement and support you need to give to others.

When we give encouragement, we strengthen volunteers to continue in their service. They will feel lifted up and appreciated when compliments are sincerely given. The Bible has encouraging words that stress the importance of encouraging others:

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged,  
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go  
(Joshua 1:9 NIV).*

Volunteers will continue to serve as long as they feel their efforts are accomplishing something, their talents are appreciated, and they are making a difference.

Training volunteers for their tasks not only motivates them for service, but on-the-job training also encourages them as they move forward. Training takes time and patience, but it broadens their horizons, makes them more confident, and validates their value as a servant for Christ.

Let volunteers know that you are available to help them succeed in what they are asked to do. Let them know that they will not only be a blessing to others, but that they will grow spiritually themselves.

Keep volunteers engaged and let them see the big picture of how their work fits into the vision of the group. Here are some principles and strategies that may help you to keep your volunteer feel encouraged and spiritually alive:

- Set realistic goals that help volunteers know they are successful.
- Periodically take an inventory of the volunteers’ feelings.
- Encourage them to serve in positions they enjoy.
- Help develop their gifts once they are in placed in their positions.
- Ask for their input in planning and decision-making for their positions.
- Encourage volunteers to work together.
- Observe how much work a volunteer can do. Some may work better with short-term assignments than with long-term goals.
- Know a person’s capabilities. Let them be who they really are.
- Compliment with credibility.
- Show people you enjoy your work. If leaders are joyful, others will want to volunteer too!

*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10 NIV).*

At some time or another, we all suffer from discouragement, stress, and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Below is a “TIME” guide to help you to provide strength to your volunteers as we anticipate these struggles:

**T is for touch** – We have all heard about scientific studies proving that human touch can actually improve mental and physical health, boost career performance, and even increase longevity. An appropriate, well-timed touch can communicate love and acceptance; a pat on the arm, a touch on the hand, a squeeze of a shoulder, or a platonic hug can improve a person’s outlook.

**I is for inspiration** – We all need inspiration. We need to know why we are toiling and sweating and sometimes putting up with difficult situations or people. Encourage your volunteers to attend worship services each week. If a volunteer finds it necessary to be absent from worship, consider providing a recording of the service.

**M is for motivation** – Two sources may be used to motivate volunteers: First, train them for their specific role through workshops, books, DVDs, and on-the-job experience. The second source is hearing real-life stories from people whose lives have been positively impacted because of the ministry for which the volunteer is working.

**E is for encouragement** – Listen! Take time to find out about the volunteers’ families, hobbies, and interests. Listen with your heart, which causes people to feel special and valued.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10 NIV).*

## VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

Volunteers make necessary and important contributions to any group, organization, or congregation. Their “pay” comes from fulfillment of individual goals and motivational needs. Recognition is important in their continued motivation as they serve.

Volunteers can be shown appreciation by a simple “thank you” or by presenting them with a unique and memorable gift. A recognition service may also be a way of honoring your volunteers.

Here are some suggestions to recognize and honor your volunteers:

**Pick up the phone** – Call a volunteer and thank them when you’ve noticed they’ve been doing excellent work or have spent extra hours on a project.

**Write a letter to the team** – Send out a monthly or quarterly team letter highlighting the accomplishments of one or two volunteers in each letter.

**Write a personal letter** – Send a greeting card remembering their birthday, anniversary, or holiday; send a “thank-you” card with a personal handwritten note.

**Reward them** – Include funds in your budget to reward volunteers with gift cards, flowers, chocolates, books, or some other item that you feel they would appreciate.

**Host an appreciation event** – Once or twice a year, hold an event to honor volunteers. This could be a banquet, tea, dinner, or an outing to a play or movie; be creative!

**Invite them to dinner** – Invite your volunteers to your home for an appreciation meal. Go out of your way to make them feel special.

**Tell them** – Look at them directly in the eyes and say “Thank you for your ministry here. I appreciate you.”

**Send out personal emails** – Periodically send an email with a devotional thought and a brief word on how you appreciate them. If you are aware of a specific prayer request, ask the volunteer how the situation is going.

**Informal gratitude** – Take photos of your volunteers and post them on a church wall, in your newsletter, or on your website.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,  
since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.  
It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:23-24 NIV).*

As an alternate form of recognition, consider sending a monetary gift in honor of the volunteer you are recognizing. Here are some ways to consider making this gift:

- Place your monetary gift in your Mite Box with a prayer for your volunteers. Send your volunteers prayer cards letting them know a gift to mites has been made in their honor.
- Send a check for mites to your LWML district financial officer. Your district may have a special honor card or you may wish to send a note saying that the gift is given in thankfulness to God for the volunteer’s service to the Lord and His church.
- Send your check directly to the LWML at P.O. Box 411993, St. Louis, MO 63141-1993, indicating the amount is for mites. You may wish to complete an *LWML Honor Card* (#18100) to include with your gift. Honor Cards may be ordered online at [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org) or by calling the LWML Office at 1-800-252-LWML (5965).
- Go to the LWML website at [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org) and donate online.
- Once your monetary gift has been sent, you may want to send an *LWML Thank-You Card* (#16500) or *Thankfulness Postcard* (#16575), available through the *LWML Catalog*, to the person you are acknowledging or honoring. This is a thoughtful way to let the person know that her service and Christian witness has touched your life in a special way.

## VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION LITANIES

Formal recognition of your volunteers can be accomplished in several ways; prayers and litanies during a service are examples. Your pastor could say prayers of thanks for volunteers at worship services throughout the year, or you could occasionally offer up a prayer like this at meetings and events:

Almighty, gracious God, we thank You for our volunteers who give their time, talent, and gifts. We thank You that they answered the call to serve. We ask that Your grace will refresh

them as they unselfishly help others. We pray for their families and concerns they may have. Guide and lead them to do Your will in their volunteering. In Your abounding love we ask and thank You in Your precious Son's name, Jesus. Amen.

There are many times during the church year when a volunteer litany could be used during the services for recognizing with thanksgiving the many volunteer ministries within the congregation. Good times for using this litany could be late in the Easter season, Pentecost, end of the church year, on Thanksgiving Sunday, or as your programs begin in the fall. Organizations within the church might want to hold their own service or plan a volunteer recognition banquet.

The following litanies may be adapted by your pastor as appropriate for your congregation:

## Volunteer Recognition Litany #1

The body of Christ is made up of many members.

**Not all have the same function.**

We are blessed with many members who care for the body of Christ at (name of congregation or LWML group).

**We thank God for them.**

They give of their time and talents.

**We thank God for their efforts and for the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit.**

Paul writes of the Macedonian Christians who wanted to share in ministry: *They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will* (2 Corinthians 8:5, NIV).

**Their mission and ministry comes from the Holy Spirit as they serve the Lord.**

By the will of God, our volunteers are committed to the Lord and to us. God has worked mightily through them to bless us.

**We thank God for them.**

Our volunteers put a face on Christ's call to us to be the body of Christ in the world.

**They add hands and feet and hearts to our calling to be Christ to one another.**

Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers, confirmation and youth leaders, mentors, and nursery helpers:

**Musicians, readers, those who assist our ministers, ushers, leaders of prayer, altar guild members, acolytes;**

Those who serve through the LWML, mission-project organizers, stewardship coordinators, offering counters, special event planners;

**Quilters, gardeners, artists, bakers, cooks;**

Prayer chain participants, visitors to the hospitalized and homebound, those who prepare funeral lunches;

**Ministers of hospitality of every kind;**

Cleaners, bulletin assemblers, envelope stuffers, office helpers, and so many more:

**We thank God for them.**

*(May be sung.)*

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.**

**Praise God, all creatures here below.**

**Praise God above, ye heavenly host.**

**Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

## Volunteer Litany #2 (Based on Romans 12:1-8)

**Leader:** I implore you by God's mercy to offer yourselves to God: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for God's acceptance.

**People:** We celebrate today those persons in our church who have shown their dedication by their work as volunteers.

**Leader:** Do not be conceited or think too highly of yourself. For as in a single human body there are many limbs and organs, all with different functions, so all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another.

**People:** We celebrate the many gifts, talents, skills, and opportunities of these people who have united in the work of the church.

**Leader:** The gifts we possess differ as they are allotted to us by God's grace, and must be exercised accordingly. If you give to charity, give with all your heart; if you are a leader, exert yourself to lead; if you are helping others in distress, do it cheerfully.

**People:** We celebrate those persons who have given with all their hearts, have exerted themselves in leadership, and have worked cheerfully.

**UNISON:** Praise God for these people, their unique characteristics, and their willingness to serve.

**Scripture Suggestions** – 1 Peter 2:9-10 (chosen people); Romans 12:1-8 (living sacrifice); Matthew 25:14-30 (parable of talents); Matthew 25:31-40 (reward in heaven); 1 Corinthians 12:4-30 (spiritual gifts).

The pastor may be asked to preach on one of these suggested scriptural themes or on another theological theme on volunteerism. An additional suggestion is to have several volunteers share their service experiences with the group. Specific volunteer groups may be asked to stand for recognition. Symbols that recognize each group could be brought to the altar.

## CONCLUSION

God has a plan for each of us. He intends the world to be a place of peace, justice, freedom, and love. Each volunteer we add to the team means that one more Christ-follower is discovering the thrill and joy of serving, and one more need in God's church is being met. It is to God's glory when He works through us to accomplish His will for His church.

Matthew 20:28 tells us that Christ did not come to be served, but to serve. He is our Model Volunteer. He volunteered His life on our behalf so that each of us could be free to serve Him and each other, showing His love to the world.

God's love, expressed through His Son Jesus, motivates us to witness and work for the fulfillment of God's plan and the coming of God's reign. Each of us has a part in that mission. The Spirit has given us gifts which we and the church must discern and affirm. The time is now to offer these gifts faithfully in service wherever we are.

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8 NIV).*

# HELPFUL RESOURCES

## For further study:

Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML); [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org); click on "Resources," then on "Developing Leaders," and scroll to "More Resources Available Here." Documents that may provide additional information on working with volunteers include:

- Mentoring Resource Kit
- Woman to Woman
- Motivation is Contagious
- LWML Servant Resources Kit
- Gifted for Service
- Personal Development
- Welcoming New Members
- Gaining, Training, LWML Members

"The Equipper," an online newsletter; [www.theequipper.org](http://www.theequipper.org)

Concordia Publishing House (CPH); [www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org)

*Trust and Teams*; Jane Fryar

*Servants of the Lord: Bible Enrichment Guide for Women*; Marian Baden, Joan Gerber,  
and Carolyn Sims

*Stepping Out: To a Life on the Edge*; Deb Burma

## For volunteer recognition and "thank you" gifts:

LWML's online store; [www.lwml.org/store](http://www.lwml.org/store)

Three13 Christian Gifts; [www.three13christiangifts.org](http://www.three13christiangifts.org)

Christian Tools of Affirmation (CTA); [www.ctainc.com](http://www.ctainc.com)

Volunteers may cherish a certificate printed in color on parchment paper and signed by an organization's officers. (Many computer software programs offer templates on which to design certificates of recognition.)

## The LWML Pledge:

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.