

TRANSFORMING VOLUNTEERS FROM SOCIAL WORKERS TO KINGDOM LABORERS

Tapping into America's All-Time High Volunteerism

by Krista Petty

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American volunteerism is at an all-time high. During the 2005 National Conference on Volunteering and Service in Washington D.C., famous rock musician, Jon Bon Jovi, declared, "Volunteering is hip. I've done it all. But I got more of a rush when I went to the Northern Home for Children in North Philly and built a playground." During his keynote speech at the event, he said, "I'm here to applaud all of you who volunteer...You can start a revolution one soul at a time, in your community."¹

Beyond Bon Jovi's declaration, statistics show that people engaging in community service

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activity is at an all-time high in the United States. According to the Points of Light Foundation, in 2004, 64.5 million Americans volunteered—an increase of nearly 5 million since 2002—and they provided an estimated \$272 billion worth in services to non-profits around the country.² One can only imagine the 2005 and beyond statistics given the outpouring of volunteers to help with natural disasters around the world.

Indeed, the topic of community volunteerism is expanding in both the secular and religious circles. Just a few months

following the National Conference on Volunteering and Service, another conference across the country focused on "Community Transformation." That was the theme of the November 2005 **National Outreach Convention** in San Diego, CA (www.outreachconvention.com). This gathering of over 1,500 church leaders from different denominations was a church leadership conference, but with workshop topics that echoed the topics of the Washington D.C. conference. Both conferences asked the same question: how can leaders train and empower people to serve more and better? In the main session, pastor and author Robert Lewis said that the church should "equip to be a launching pad, not a holding tank." With a theme like community

transformation, it is clear that one of the new measurements for successful churches is not necessarily attendance, but how their communities are changing.

Beyond the religious and secular focus on community service are the everyday, water-cooler conversations taking place about community engagement. In the workplace, large corporations are encouraging employees to engage in acts of community service—even giving them time off for involvement. Maxtor, based in Longmont, Colorado, is one such company. Program Manager Kevin O'Brien has been with Maxtor for six years and volunteers in the community every year on the company dime. "Maxtor allows employees to accrue paid community service time," says Kevin. In December 2005, Kevin celebrated over six years of serving with Maxtor and even more years of service with the Holiday Basket Program (HBP). "Even though I've had a number of different supervisors, they have always been willing to let me serve with HBP,"



Kevin O'Brien, Ann Jennings and Tricia Richardson

he continues. The Holiday Basket Program is a public-school based project assisting needy families in Longmont during the holidays. Each year he helps hand out toys, refurbished bikes and holiday food baskets to over 1,000 families in the school district. And the big distribution day happens during the middle of a busy workday. According to HBP's volunteer director, Ann Jennings, "HBP is a 100% volunteer-led project that would not be possible without the longstanding involvement of local businesses and corporations."

Does Community Volunteerism Impact the Church?

What does this interest in community service on a national, government, church and corporate level mean for church ministry leaders? When churches engage in community work, there is a high probability church workers will have the opportunity to meet others who care for the

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community, but have not yet engaged in a journey of faith. Finding purpose in life through serving others is no longer reserved for the faithful churchgoer or the social activist of the neighborhood. In the wake of great national and global tragedy, people watching CNN have been called to act and give—no matter their faith, how they vote, or economic status. As people are looking for an outlet to serve, they may see the church

community-based projects as a viable option of engagement.

Rolling Hills Community Church in Tualatin, OR (www.rollinghills.org), found this to be true during its 2005 Community Food Drive. People from outside the church membership were more than willing to participate. In a twist to the regular church food drive, the Reach Ministry Team at Rolling Hills did not ask church members to bring food for the drive. They asked members to *go ask others* to participate in the drive. Through this effort, they were able to engage their church members and the community in performing good deeds and providing good will. Monte Schmidt, Reach Ministries Pastor explains:

Our food drive had two distinct components. The first was the “gathering” phase, where we asked every person in our body—even our kids—to take three empty grocery sacks provided by the church. We asked each person or family to take their sacks out into their community and ask their neighbors, co-workers and friends if they would be willing to fill a sack. We worked with our statewide food bank to find the most needed items and printed them on the sacks. We stressed in this “gathering” to ask others to fill the bags, as opposed to our people simply going to the store to buy the needed supplies.

With the goal of engaging many people and collecting food, Rolling Hills and the community responded with great enthusiasm. Armed with these specially printed bags, church members

did, in fact, gather a harvest of food for their community.

The second phase of their endeavor was “partnerships.” Working with various social service agencies, Rolling Hills identified well over one hundred areas around the Portland area that were in need of food. Most of these places identified were low-income apartment complexes. “Using this information, we pre-qualified each location to ensure the need, and a willingness for us to come,” said Monte.



MONTE SCHMIDT

The results of the gathering and partnerships were staggering. Over 77,000 pounds of food were donated and 5,017 bags were collected and distributed throughout three counties. One of the most amazing statistics is the fact that 1,672 church attendees collected food from the community, but the estimated number of people who participated was 7,047—proving that this project had a two-fold external focus. The community helped the church collect the food and provide good will; and the community was a recipient of the good will, as well.

LifeBridge Christian Church, in Longmont, CO, (www.lbcc.org) finds that many volunteers serving in their annual A Time to Serve opportunities are not connected to the church at all. A Time to Serve is a month-long, intense community engagement opportunity for church members and beyond. There are over 40 service projects and thousands of hours worked by volunteers. “Many of our church attendees look at the service opportunities we coordinate at the holidays as an opportunity to invite their non-Christian friends or family members to serve with them,” said Tricia Richardson, Director of Involvement at LifeBridge. Rather than inviting friends to church, people may find it easier to invite them to serve alongside them. To further facilitate community involvement, LifeBridge made sign ups for the project available online. “We wanted to take away any barrier to serving with the church. Having sign ups available through the Internet allowed co-workers and friends to sign up together online.”

It’s no surprise that some people are on a journey to connect with a community before they connect with God. Like Rolling Hills and LifeBridge,

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church leaders see service as an entry point to the church, just like Sunday morning worship or a special outreach event. Serving with a church project for the benefit of the community is not simply provided for those with a religious conviction. Many people are now serving out of a *compassion conviction*.

"You have Christians and non-Christians serving with one another, presenting a great opportunity," notes Todd Christianson of **Hope Church** in Oakdale, MN (www.hopechurchoakdale.com). Hope Church currently partners with 10-12 community agencies throughout the year and engages over 200 people in those partnerships. The partnerships range from schools, city agencies, and a variety of non-profit community organizations and include both community and church-related volunteers.

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- Todd Christianson
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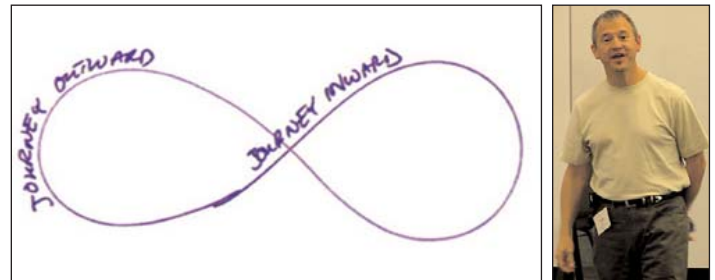
Churches like Hope, LifeBridge and Rolling Hills are modeling Jesus' example of both sharing truth and showing compassion. Preaching and performing miracles were Jesus' primary ways of communicating and building relational bridges to people. "Jesus went through the towns and villages,

teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." (Matthew 9:35). People were attracted to Jesus' teaching *and* his acts of service. He also invited others on the journey with him, "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness." (Matthew 10:1) With volunteerism a popular trend, people may be attracted to serving with Christians before they are attracted to the truth of the gospel message, just as the crowds were often attracted to Jesus' ability to feed and heal them before they understood the truth of his life and message. "The

good deeds paved the road over which his good news traveled," write Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, co-authors of *Externally Focused Church*.³

Like two converging circles, people are sometimes at different points of the same journey. Peter Morin, Lead Pastor of **Faith Lutheran Church** in Golden, CO (www.faithgolden.org), created a visual of this concept to share with other externally focused church leaders. "There is an inward journey and an outward journey," says Morin. On one side of the figure eight visual, there stands a person attracted to the community service and social awareness. On the other side is a person on the journey to become close to God through the study of his word and the search to find truth. Both places on the journey are valuable in the Kingdom and both people must be moving closer to each other to a point that they find God and find a sense of community and sharing.

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Peter Morin, Faith Lutheran Church, presents a model of a person's journey to finding a sense of community with others as well as with God.

Do Your Volunteers Have an Optimum Experience?

While this new wave of American volunteerism presents a great opportunity for churches, it comes with a great responsibility as well. "We must build relational bridges if we intend to carry the gospel to people. Volunteerism is an excellent way to bring people together," writes Marlene Wilson in *Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Church Culture*.⁴ The serving experience could be the beginning of a faith experience. How churches invite, nurture, train and care for volunteers matters. "What kind of experience does a first-time volunteer have with your church?" is a question church leaders are facing. With this new

wave of volunteerism taking shape, church ministry leaders have an extra measure of responsibility to create an optimum serving experience for both church and community volunteers.

This question was a main focus at a gathering of Leadership Network's Externally Focused Churches Leadership Community in Sacramento, CA in the fall of 2005. During the three-day teaching and idea-sharing sessions, volunteerism expert Dr. Don Simmons inspired much thought and discussion on the care and feeding of volunteers. Don has served with a number of organizations including Center for Volunteerism and Community Service in Los Angeles, Mayor's Council on Homeless Issues, United Way, and Point of Light Foundation. He brought a unique perspective, having served with both religious and secular volunteer organizations. With 30 years of experience compiling statistics, performing studies on volunteer issues, as well as personal experience in being a volunteer and leading volunteers, Don posed two main questions: "What motivates people to serve?" and "What keeps people serving?"



Don Simmons was a guest presenter at the Externally Focused Churches Leadership Community gathering.

What Motivates People to Serve?

Both church-going volunteers and non-church-going volunteers serve to fulfill a need for community and friendship. "Eighty-seven percent of people respond to volunteering because someone asked them," Simmons reported. Other reasons cited for serving in the community are:

- *Compelling need*
- *Personal connection*
- *Gratitude for being served*
- *Spiritual/religious beliefs*
- *Social needs*
- *Job skill/résumé development*
- *Guilt*
- *Boredom*
- *External influences (family members, influential leaders, advertising)*

Civic organizations are finding the same survey results. To better understand Americans' attitudes and behaviors regarding volunteerism, Lions Clubs International, the world's largest service club organization, commissioned a survey of 1,000 people. An overwhelming majority (90 percent) of volunteers report feeling a sense of belonging, or connectedness, to their communities as a result of donating their time. Eighty-five percent of volunteers agree that community work provides a meaningful structure to their lives while 80 percent said they have made friends as a result of volunteering.⁵

While there are many reasons people say they volunteer, churches are seeing some common themes among the people who serve at their churches. Many begin serving in order to build relationships and friendships through their serving. **Rolling Hills Community Church** engaged all people in their church, from kids to senior adults, to participate in their food drive. "It's one of the reasons we chose this project. We wanted something that everyone could be a part of," shared Monte Schmidt, Reach Ministries Pastor. Knowing that people have a desire to serve in teams to find connection, they purposefully designed the project to include small groups as the major workforce in distributing the food collected. "After gathering thousands of filled bags, we moved into our 'distributing' phase where our small groups really came into play," he explained. The Rolling Hills team created distribution packets for all of their small groups. Each small group was then asked to take a packet, which outlined everything they needed to distribute the food boxes. "All 3,196 boxes of food were distributed by our small groups. In fact, we ran out of boxes and had several small groups come back asking for more boxes! Without our small groups catching the vision, we simply would not have been able to have the impact we did."

Monte went on to share three primary reasons serving through the small group ministry has made a significant impact on their church:

In the groups that have adopted a service mentality, we see three primary benefits. One, the groups are reporting that serving is the best thing they have done as a group. Second, we have groups that not only serve

together, but are reaching out to their unchurched friends and asking them to come along with them. As a result, people who are not yet ready to accept an invitation to church are being reached through the advent of service. The third primary benefit is in the power of serving together. We have people now serving specifically because it is in a group format. We have seen and heard of people who would not have done this on their own, but have served, and will continue to serve because it is a much “safer” first step.

Another common theme in people serving in the church is the opportunity to express their God-given passion through action. When ministry and career meet, there is often a big win for the church, the community, *and* the person serving. At age 61, Karen Setzer of Faith Lutheran Church in Golden, CO, is in the midst of her second career. After years of serving as a volunteer in the church, her work life and passion for ministry came together as she took on the role of a parish nurse. As a parish nurse, she coordinates a team ministry including health education, health counseling, referrals, training, and coordination of other medical and non-medical volunteers. Her position with the church came as a result of volunteering to lead a health ministry. “It was a perfect fit!” says Karen. “I have been a very active layperson my whole life, and love nursing, but I couldn't always be who I truly am in all nursing situations. Now I can give good physical and emotional care, but also pray with people and pay attention to their spiritual care.”

Before Karen even knew that parish nursing existed, she says God had been molding her for this role. “I think my whole life has been preparing me. I was a psychiatric nurse when I first graduated from nursing school, then I worked in an elementary school, and finally a family practice clinic. I also have taken numerous classes in both nursing and in theology. I feel all these things, plus being a parent, have been vital.” Being able to combine her passion with serving has motivated Karen to continue her service for over seven years.

Many are simply motivated to engage in serving others out of compassion. Personal tragedy often calls people in a church or community to action. **Hope Church** in Oakdale, MN, recently

participated in a project to raise funds for a young man with leukemia. “It was a little project that exploded and transformed people’s lives,” says Senior Pastor John Larson. Called “Baskets of Hope,” the initial goal was to make and sell 40 gift baskets to raise funds for the family in crisis. “It turned into 150 baskets sold at a wonderful fundraising event,” said Community Service Leader Todd Christianson. The entire project started because one person had a compassionate heart for a family in need.



Karen Setzer, Faith Lutheran Church, serves as parish nurse.

Beyond personal tragedy, large-scale disaster brings a heightened awareness of needs and volunteers step up through acts of compassion. In 2004, more than 140,000 volunteers gave nearly six million hours of their time responding to the hurricanes that devastated Florida that year.⁶ And the numbers of those serving Hurricane Katrina, Tsunami, and Pakistan Earthquake victims continues to rise daily. Unprecedented natural disaster often motivates unprecedented waves of volunteers. In a recent *Advance* newsletter article, externally focused church expert Eric Swanson described the church’s response to Katrina:

One of the outcomes of the disasters brought on by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was the way people of faith mobilized for action in response to the loss and pain in the Gulf Coast. Churches around the country quickly assembled money and materials, concern and convoys to come to the aid of those who were in distress. While politics and policies initially stifled many governmental aid efforts, within hours churches were putting together “first responder” work teams headed for the coast.... In Houston, for example, a coalition of the faith community

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led by several pastors basically said, “The time for talk is over. It’s time to put up or shut up, but if you come to help, check your egos and your logos at the door. This is not about us.” In response, tens of thousands in Houston churches rolled up their sleeves, fed and cared for the multitude of evacuees in the Superdome.⁷



ERIC SWANSON

Even individuals not living near the disaster zone were motivated by compassion to serve. Dorothy Moore and Mark Williams, members of Rolling Hills Community Church, found themselves signing up to go to the affected region to serve. Both journaled about their trip on the church’s web site to share the experience and motivate others to serve. Dorothy drove a delivery truck to Lake Charles, LA, Port Arthur, TX, and Metairie, LA. She also detailed the motor home used by the medical team. “It was 42 feet long and was pretty dirty and disorganized,” Dorothy shared. “How blessed I felt as I left for home, to have been able to help in this small way with such an overwhelming need.”

Having recently been laid off from his job, Mark wrote that the trip to serve Katrina victims was something of substance to take up time, but became a life-changing event. “I looked forward to each new morning and enjoyed every minute of each day. We experienced a great camaraderie within our group...Ministry can be a heavenly experience.”

Along with national tragedy, people are also motivated to respond to community needs. When **Word of Grace Church** in Mesa, AZ (www.wordofgrace.org) received word from the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness that they needed help during the summer 2005 heat wave, the church Outreach staff sprang into action. “About 30 seconds after receiving the email, our team decided to open our doors,” says Sandi Rutkowski. Having never helped with this type of need before, Sandi, and co-workers Katie Murphy, and Karl Mueller began to form a plan to offer the church facilities for a temporary day shelter.

Nineteen people in their Mesa, AZ area had already died when they were asked to help, so the team worked quickly to respond, all the while

honoring church processes and organizational structure. “Our first step was to put together a proposal for the church board and senior leadership team,” says Karl. The team did research, visited homeless centers, answered board and staff questions, refined the proposal and had meetings with the City of Mesa Human Services and Planning Department.

Ten days before they opened the center, staff announced the need for volunteers and supplies to the entire congregation. “The announcement got a standing ovation in all three of our services,” Karl reminisces. The response from the congregation to this local crisis was outstanding. “In two weeks, we had to quit advertising for volunteers and supplies because we had plenty of both,” Sandi adds.

The Word of Grace shelter was open from August 15 to September 30 and saw over 1,000 people visit during that time. “The City of Mesa has calculated that there are 325 different homeless people in our city. Of that 325, over 260 came to the center during the seven weeks we were open,” says Karl.

The organizational team was shocked by the demographics of their volunteers. “We were concerned that during the work day, we would have trouble getting people to volunteer. Instead, we had a plethora of well-equipped, able-bodied men and women in their 40s and 50s finding time to come in to help Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.” explains Katie.

Along with meeting the community need, Katie also noted that it met a spiritual need for their church and volunteers as well. 160 different volunteers helped with the shelter and some people showed up almost every day. One volunteer, Darrell, was experiencing depression after being laid off from his job. He decided to volunteer for a change of pace and spent almost every day at the shelter. Darrell brought a friend, who was also out of a job, with him. This friend, who is not a Christian, was touched by the Word of Grace outreach to heat wave victims. “He told me that he had never seen the church demonstrate Jesus in such a practical way,” says



Katie Murphy, Sandi Rutkowski, Karl Mueller

Katie. “This was a perfect example of how evangelism and social involvement go together,” added Karl.

But what if volunteers don’t have a good experience and fail to return? What if a volunteer’s experience with the church is simply social work and never advances to kingdom work? An opportunity for evangelism can be lost when both church and community volunteers are not properly cared for or appreciated.

Why Volunteers Don’t Return

Why do some people, like Darrell and his friend, come back day after day to serve, while others try it once and never return? As churches look to connect people in service and to faith in God, the leaders of Externally Focused Churches took a deep look at the issues that plague volunteerism. Along with his list of volunteer motivations, Don Simmons also shared the painful truth that not

every volunteer’s experience is positive. “We don’t have a recruitment issue with volunteers. We have a retention issue,” said Don. The following are Don’s top 10 reasons why volunteers quit or fail to perform their services.

WE DON’T HAVE A RECRUITMENT ISSUE WITH VOLUNTEERS. WE HAVE A RETENTION ISSUE.

1. A sense that their service is not valuable.
2. A sense that they do not matter as a person, only as a “worker.”
3. A sense that their contribution is not as valid as others.
4. A lack of community.
5. A lack of connection with a bigger purpose.
6. Poor leadership and management.
7. Poor communication/direction.
8. Lack of appreciation.
9. Failure to recognize them as a donor.
10. Lack of development of them as a person.

Equipping for Success

There are some essential volunteer management guidelines for growing effective and happy servants. “There must be a clear definition and guidelines as well as an understanding of the big

picture and mission,” Don suggested. Admittedly, there are times when people want to run and hide when they see a church staff person coming their way, afraid they will be asked to volunteer for yet another project. Marlene Wilson writes that there’s no room for coercion or manipulation when recruiting volunteers, but “there’s always room for presenting a vision, dream, or mission!”⁸

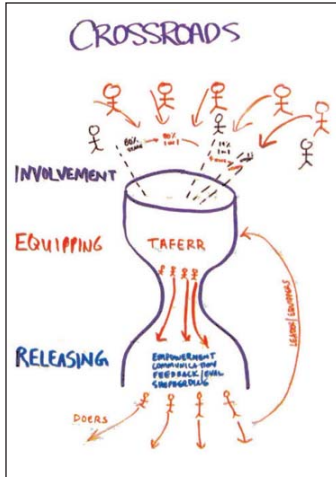
Many churches have a mission or vision statement attached to their community service ministries, helping volunteers and leaders stay focused. The Community Ties Ministry at Rolling Hills offers tips for success to help their congregants stay focused on the reason for their service.

- *Begin! We can never succeed if we don’t start. Serve courageously and continuously.*
- *Invest in your community by building relationships through consistent sharing of your time and talents.*
- *Serve together! Harness the power of your group to impact our community.*
- *Periodically invite non-believing friends to serve alongside your Community Group.*
- *Be willing and prepared to share your faith when someone asks!*

Beyond sharing mission and vision for community service work, volunteers also need tangible items for success. “Ongoing training and guidance as well as a designated place and time to serve are important,” said Don. Giving volunteers the information, tools and resources they need shows dignity and trust. But volunteerism is not all work and no play. “Give people a nurturing support system, a sense of community and FUN,” encouraged Don.

To help church leaders implement strategic and successful involvement ministries, Don has joined forces with Group Publishing and author of *The Equipping Church*, Sue Mallory, to present one-day seminars across the country called Multiply Your Ministry: Moving from Sitting to Standing (www.group.com/cvclive). Don presented some of these concepts to the externally focused churches at Leadership Network’s Externally Focused Churches

Leadership Community. He focused on essential elements to equipping volunteers for full utilization of gifts, passions, experiences and talents.



Crossroads Church's model of equipping volunteers

Properly equipping is vital to the success of a church and a volunteer's experience. Many church staff members are "doers" says Missy Cheeseman, from **Crossroads Church** in Lexington, KY (www.xroadschurch.org). She also notes the need for churches to "equip" people for long-term service success. "We sometimes go from involving people and then releasing them to serve. We skip equipping them. You can't just release people and leave them be.

You need to complete the process," she added.

The modern Christian church is not the only church in history to need a lesson on equipping. Acts 6:1 notes that the church was growing so fast that the leaders needed help:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

What did they do? They involved, equipped and released.

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and

laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:2-7

Tim Steven and Tony Morgan of **Granger Community Church**, Granger, IN (www.gccwired.com), stress the importance of equipping in their book, *Simply Strategic Stuff*. "This is a critical lesson for you and your leadership team. Strive to give your jobs away."⁹

Six Steps for Effective Equipping

Don Simmons highlighted six essential elements involved in the equipping process that any church can implement: Training, Affirmation, Feedback, Evaluation, Recognition and Reflection.

1. Training. "More than just talking and listening. Effective training includes delivering information, but also practice, feedback, and hands-on application," said Don. One church staff member admitted, "We train leaders, but not volunteers." But Don said that's not enough. "If it is important enough to do, it's important enough to have a description and it's important enough to train!" More than filling a spot, volunteers should feel as though they are providing a valuable service. Don suggested calling job descriptions "position descriptions," so that people don't see their volunteering as a task, but an important service. When it comes to the actual training, Don warned, "Training isn't telling and listening isn't learning." Hands-on, practical and timely training works best. "Training happens best when it's just in place and just in time."

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In his book, *Volunteer Revolution*, Bill Hybels points out the importance of vision casting as a part of the training process. "Some work hard on menial tasks without ever hearing how their efforts serve a grander cause. They're given plenty of work, but no vision. Others have felt overwhelmed by

unreasonable demands for which they've not received proper training; rather than being set up to win, they get put on the express lane to frustration and failure."¹⁰

From the simple to the technical, training for any service position is vital. Anthony Coppedge serves as a church multimedia consultant in Dallas, TX. He has worked as a church staff member and knows the value of proper recruitment and training. In a recent Outreach Magazine article, he writes, "Your team gains confidence when you develop a consistent recruitment and training program. If you don't help your volunteers learn the necessary skills and hold each other accountable, you cannot expect them to get excited about serving."¹¹

2. **Affirmation.** "Affirmation is NOT saying 'Thank You,'" Don cautioned. It is about affirming people for who they are, not what they do. "We often forget that people need to know that they matter more than what they do," reminded Don. Affirmation is about valuing a person's presence, not performance. Just showing up and a willing attitude should be valued, but in a results-oriented and performance-driven culture, affirmation can be a skipped step in leading volunteers.

"Leaders must model affirmation," said Monte Schmidt from Rolling Hills. "We can't simply teach this concept. Leaders must take the initiative to clear off our calendars so we are able to exemplify it as well. In other words, we need to be willing to walk the walk on this one, giving up other responsibilities that will keep us from affirming people."

3. **Feedback.** "Authentic, love-based feedback can do much to develop servants into strong leaders," said Don. But offering feedback can be intimidating and leaders may be tempted to look the other way instead of offering feedback on volunteer performance, however, avoiding feedback is a big mistake. Marlene Wilson suggests that the lack of feedback communicates something in and of itself. "You can't *not* communicate. Even silence communicates something."¹² Instead of silence on difficult matters, she recommends leaders of volunteers follow Ephesians 4:15:

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Feedback usually comes in three forms: compliments, criticism and critique. "Compliments," said Don, "could be best compared to a child's bubbles—pretty to look at, enjoyable for a moment, but difficult to grasp and use again." In general, they do not gain the desired result of enhanced performance, but help to maintain status quo. Criticism is like a weapon and unfortunately it is used in many churches. "This form of feedback is like a strongly pitched baseball! It hurts, even when it is not intended to do so."

Volunteers will retreat or pull away if they are hit with criticism. Offering a critique is the balance between the two—if done at the right time and with the right spirit. "Critique, when given in a timely, grace-filled manner, can go far to develop beyond good to great!" Critique can be used to influence change for

the next time and requires some self-examination—for both servants and leaders. Good feedback should always be a two-way conversation. "Good leaders are brave enough to ask themselves, 'What could I (as a leader) do to make this experience better?'" said Don.

4. **Evaluation.** Sometimes confused with feedback, evaluations should be done in teams and need a guide or measurement for success. Effective evaluations measure success of goals achieved, but are often skipped because of time. "We get too pushed for 'speed' and neglect evaluation," said Don.

In her role as parish nurse, Karen Setzer at **Faith Lutheran Church** helps oversee an annual community health fair in Golden, CO. The health fair is truly a community effort with seven churches from seven different denominations working together to accomplish improved community health.

GOOD LEADERS ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO ASK THEMSELVES, 'WHAT COULD I (AS A LEADER) DO TO MAKE THIS EXPERIENCE BETTER?'

Evaluations are an integral part of the fair's six-year success. "Not only does the board conduct an evaluation following the fair, we also ask for an evaluation from each of the volunteers, and starting next year, we are also asking for an evaluation from all participants," said Karen.

How valuable are these evaluations? "We have made changes each year we have done the fair due to input from those evaluations," Karen added. This year, the health fair offered free blood pressure screening, low-cost blood work, massages, body measurements, pulmonary function testing, toenail trimming, consultations with medical experts, immunization certificates for children, as well as flu and pneumonia shots for those who cannot afford them. "And all of the workers at the fair are volunteers!" she said. The fair served 192 people in the fall of 2005. Karen offered this advice on evaluating large programs with multiple ministry partners: "Make everything open and equal and realize that everyone's input is valuable and worth consideration."

5. **Recognition.** While affirmation is about appreciating people for their presence and willingness, recognition is about performance. Don Simmons expanded that definition, "Affirmation honors people for WHO they are. Recognition acknowledges people for WHAT they do. Recognition says, 'Thanks, we noticed you served well!'"

A recent article in *Journal of Volunteer Administration* indicated that one of the principle reasons that people leave their volunteer positions is that they feel unappreciated and not recognized. 1 Thessalonians 5:12 says, ". . . to respect those who work hard among you." In publicly thanking those who serve well, church leaders show appreciation, validate serving, educate others who aren't serving, and commemorate one of the benchmarks of spiritual growth.

But beware of taking the easy road on recognizing volunteers. "Not all large group recognition is effective," warned Don. In the 2003 blockbuster Disney and Pixar animated

film, *The Incredibles*, the young super hero boy, Dash, laments to his mom, "If everyone is special, then nobody's special."¹³ Nothing could be closer to the truth when it comes to volunteer recognition. "Recognition does not have to cost anything but time. The best recognition is often a written note, a kind phone call that is individual and connects to the person's service specifically," said Don.

Michelé Triplett, Pastor of KidsTown Children's Ministry at **Christian Life Center** in Tinley Park, IL (www.clctoday.org) has learned this first-hand. More than a certificate, volunteers want to be personally and specifically noticed. "Following templates is the wrong paradigm. Get God-inspired ideas!" she shared. Having been in children's ministry since 1988, Michelé has developed many innovative ways to express appreciation and recognition of volunteers. Whether it be a homemade plate of a volunteer's favorite cookies, or an original poem, she said, "On a weekly basis we make sure we show them how much they mean to us. We take the time to stop and say 'Hi,' give a hug and, if needed, pray with them. We send them a birthday card that all of the staff have taken the time to sign."

Michelé has also made sure to train her staff to see the importance of recognition. "My right hand lady, Brandy McKenzie, gave each of her teachers and volunteers a gift box that included a survival kit and a picture of the group of kids they teach holding a sign that said 'thanks for being our teacher.'"



Students express appreciation for their teachers (right) Michelé Triplett, Christian Life Center

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– Michelé Triplett
Christian Life Center
Tinley Park, IL

While thoughtful, personal and consistent appreciation of volunteers takes time and sometimes money, it yields great return

on investment. “The results of recognition bring growth and a new vigor for service,” noted Don.

- 6. Reflection.** Serving in the church or in the community can have far-reaching affects, but do those that swing a hammer, or rock a baby ever know what their service meant in the grand scheme of Kingdom work? Reflection helps people connect the dots and links the good deeds they do to the good news of Jesus Christ. It is also a key component to volunteer retention.

Reflection is the “remembering” part of service that looks intently into the meaning of the act. “Reflection always asks two simple questions,” said Don, “So what? And, now what?”

Instead of performing a task or service and walking away, help volunteers reflect on what their service or involvement means to the bigger picture. “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” (James 1:23, 24) Don’t let volunteers forget the value of their service. Give them opportunities to talk about what they encountered.

How can leaders facilitate this kind of discussion? “Ask reflection questions,” said Don. Some good reflection questions to ask following a service project are:

- *What did you learn about the issue you helped to solve through your service?*
- *What did you learn about the people you served with through this activity?*
- *Did you see any link between this service and past experiences?*
- *What did you learn about yourself through this volunteer opportunity?*

“People decide in the reflection whether they will do this again and if they will let it change their lives,” stressed Don. Following an afternoon service project for an elderly couple, Don asked the group of college

students to tell him how they felt about the afternoon of serving. They began with the usual “I’m tired, but it’s a good tired—because I know we did something good.” But then he dug a little deeper. “So what?” he asked. “With that question as the probe,” shared Don, “the students began to talk about becoming more like Jesus, developing a heart for the frail, the helpless, and the disadvantaged. They began to translate service into their future plans, into their discipleship.”

The importance of reflecting on service can’t be overstated.

“Action with reflection multiplies the action by ten. Action without reflection diminishes the action by ten. Therefore reflection adds a hundred-fold,” noted Eric Swanson.

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When the Volunteer Turns into a Laborer for the Harvest.

When churches equip volunteers through training, affirmation, feedback evaluation, recognition and reflection, people begin to see themselves as more than volunteers, but the laborers for the harvest.

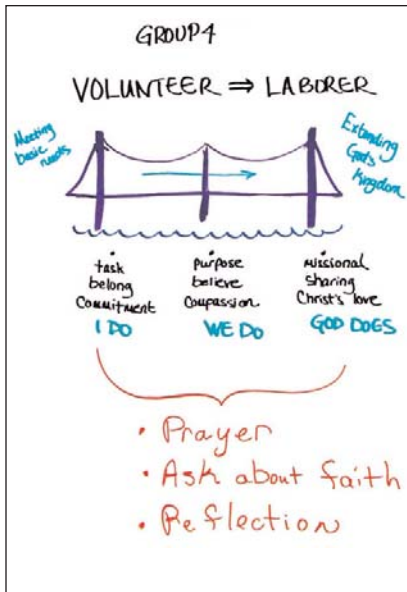
Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” *Matthew 9:35-38*

The United Way has volunteers. The Red Cross and the Peace Corps have volunteers. What distinguishes church volunteers serving in the

community from any other social work? The difference is that externally focused churches do more than social work, they engage in Kingdom work—combining good deeds and good news.

Volunteerism is on the rise, but what makes serving God any different? Volunteers and

laborers both have compassion as a motivation, but a laborer may see their compassion as a way to be the hands and feet of Jesus. A person may volunteer simply because they are available, while a laborer feels called by God to use their talents. Helping people move from the attitudes of a volunteer to a laborer for Christ is a process. The laborer may see his or her service as what 'God does' through them, not what 'I do' or even what 'we do' as a



A model of how volunteers move toward becoming laborers

team serving together. Paul says that it's always about what "God does." "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17)

And look what God does!

When people move from an attitude of personal satisfaction as their motivation to a missionary recognition of God's presence, both community and personal transformation happens. With record numbers of people raising their hands to meaningful service opportunities, much Kingdom and social work is accomplished. Operation Inasmuch and Agents of Grace are two service-oriented organizations that work to bring churches together with community non-profits to engage in monumental days and weeks of service.

Operation Inasmuch is a one-day mission blitz by churches in their community. It is an intergenerational, interracial and inter-

Volunteer Characteristics & Attitudes

A Volunteer . . .

- is merely available
- may view volunteering as a duty or obligation
- is a warm body to fill a slot
- has a goal to extend compassion, show mercy, further justice
- sees value in what "I Do" or "We do" as a team in serving
- may serve out of compulsion to do "good works" to remove guilt
- uses service as a way to belong or fit in

Laborer Characteristics & Attitudes

A Laborer . . .

- has a purpose and calling beyond the good deed
- has a heart to extend the Kingdom of God
- sees a relationship between good news and good deeds
- has a goal to extend compassion, share grace, be Jesus' hands and feet
- sees what "God does"
- serves out of gratitude for grace already extended to them by God
- serves with a team for fellowship, builds friendship and has accountability

denominational approach to community service (www.operationinasmuch.com). This initiative began at Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, Fayetteville, NC, in 1995 and has grown to be a popular event held twice a year in that community. Operation Inasmuch has also been adopted as a major community emphasis by about 500 churches in several states and has been conducted by at least one church in England and will be done by congregations in Canada in 2005.¹⁴

Agents of Grace (AOG) was formed in 2002 at Westover Church, Greensboro, NC, in response to the events of September 11th, 2001. The success of their inaugural "Mission Greensboro" event, (a one-day service event) confirmed the great need in Greensboro and the great willingness of the community to serve others. In 2003, AOG became a 501c3 non-profit organization in order

to reach and partner with more churches and the increasing number of volunteers. During their 2005 “Mission Greensboro” event, 2,100 volunteers (200 were walkups) and 36 churches participated at 83 worksites. Twenty-three public schools were served and 50 non-profits were also served. Over 8,400 hours of volunteer service saved the schools and the agencies over \$144,394 in labor costs they would have otherwise incurred (www.agentsofgrace.org).

Transforming Communities, Transforming Lives.

Of course organized community service is beneficial, but serving has an opportunity to change one heart at a time. In her volunteer leadership at Crossroads Church in Lexington, KY, Missy Cheeseman shared that it is the goal of their Externally Focused Ministry to be able to move people from “one-time service, to seasonal service, to forever service.” And she knows just what that journey is like. Missy is an ER Doctor who serves as a non-paid staff member for the church. She moved from being an occasional volunteer to a lifetime servant and laborer for the harvest.

Missy first met the minister of Crossroads, Glen Schneiders, while coaching his daughter’s softball team. “We became great friends, but shortly after meeting, I moved with the military.” They stayed in touch over the years and when Missy left the military, she specifically moved back to Lexington to be a part of Crossroads. “Glen believed in me and gave me a lot of opportunity to serve and lead in the church. His empowerment allowed me to grow in my giftedness.” Crossroads believes strongly in letting lay people lead key areas of ministry. “I function as staff, but our congregation would have no idea I’m not paid by the church,” said Missy.

When she started at Crossroads, she says that missions was a matter of sending money to a couple of places. “There was little hands-on work in the community.” She began to look for ways to serve in the community with others. She shared her experiences:

Service was an area I thought the church could grow in, so a few of us got together to start serving at the Hope Center, the local

men’s homeless shelter. We also started taking our friends with us. We couldn’t believe what God was doing in us as we grew to love people of various socioeconomic levels. I have a heart for leadership more than a gift of compassion. As I came to understand the power of community service to change lives (of the served and the servant), I wanted more and more people to experience that life change. So the natural fit was to lead people into those opportunities, partnered with those who have huge gifts of compassion!

In her time at Crossroads, she has certainly grown from occasional service to being a life-time laborer for the harvest. Missy actually chose her current career path to fit the ever-growing ministry opportunities presented her at Crossroads. “I chose Emergency Medicine because of the flexibility of the schedule. I currently work three days on and five days off. That allows me to spend two to three days a week at the church and then I am able to invest into growing more leaders.”



MISSY CHEESEMAN

Missy has found the secret Bill Hybels writes about in his book, *Volunteer Revolution*, “There is a point of discovery that formal serving encourages informal serving.”¹⁵ Spiritual transformation takes place when a person moves from serving on a project to serving people in the routine, ordinary moments of every-day life. Jesus encouraged his followers to adopt an attitude and lifestyle of servanthood. “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40) As the trend towards volunteerism continues to rise, how will your church lead volunteers toward Kingdom work?

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ENDNOTES

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