

LET'S CELEBRATE VOLUNTEERS

by Carole A. Kriebel

"Merci." "Gracias." "Danke schon." "Mange tak." How seldom "Thank you" in any language has been a consistent part of the church's vocabulary, particularly in relation to volunteers.

Yet we know how important the volunteer is to the church. As an organization the church's life and ministry require the time and talent of many volunteers, who provide for the church's effective and faithful functioning. Volunteering is also related to the daily ministry of Christians as they carry on their lives at home, work, school, recreation, and in communities. This pamphlet, however, deals especially with recognizing volunteers as they serve within the church's organized structure.

Volunteers are usually people whose caring, concern, and interest go beyond their immediate family. The lifestyles of many people place extraordinary demands upon them. Therefore, these people will volunteer only where they feel their efforts are most meaningful.

They will shift from one volunteer commitment to another to find fulfillment. Volunteers need to know and to feel that their efforts are worthwhile.

Volunteers are not always given that message.

Volunteers in the church have been taken for granted for many years. After all, we often think that volunteering in the church is serving God.

Isn't that reward enough?

Or, we're all working together in the church, so why should we thank ourselves?

According to philosopher William James, "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Whether we

totally agree with that observation or not, we can recognize that James has made an observation which contains much truth. We do want to be appreciated, to be

recognized for being part of our communities, to have our efforts and accomplishments noticed and valued. This observation applies to church volunteers as well as to all other human beings. Volunteers deserve and need recognition and gratitude.



Jean-Claude Lejeune

MOTIVATION – A KEY TO RECOGNITION

To be effective recognition must be meaningful to the person receiving it. One way to recognize and retain volunteers is to be aware of what motivates them to participate in ministry. If we know why Mary Jones likes to make evangelism calls, we can find appropriate ways to recognize her. We need to know well our volunteers to involve them wisely.

People operate out of a variety of motivations. We recognize today that there is much more to motivation than the carrot-and-stick approach.

We have some clues about motivation from Frederick Herzberg¹. He wanted to know what satisfactions people got while working. Through his research he identified that job satisfaction is often linked with challenging work, increased responsibility, opportunities for growth and development, achievement, and recognition for achievement. He also found that some factors—such as policy, office climate, work space, compensation, and security—will not cause most people to work harder or better; but lack of them will cause dissatisfaction and may lead to a person's giving up a job. For example, a volunteer typist who has been asked to type but who has not been given an adequate typewriter may become dissatisfied and quit.

Learning from Herzberg's discoveries, we can

build motivating factors into the tasks given to volunteers. We should offer them:

- Challenging work, which allows the volunteer to develop new projects from their inception.
- Increased responsibility which provides opportunities for leadership roles. (Be sure though to inform, support, and nurture volunteers as new roles are assumed.)
- Growth and development which includes opportunities and funds for volunteers to attend workshops and training events.
- Achievement. There is satisfaction in knowing that goals were reached and that you helped make good things happen. Acknowledge accomplishments and encourage volunteers to make known what they are doing as a way to witness to the volunteer's ministry.
- Recognition for achievement. Do something specific for each individual, such as
 - spotlighting the volunteer in the church newsletter,
 - giving a small gift,
 - writing a thank-you note.

It is not a violation of the Christian faith to allow persons to feel as though they have made a contribution. Peter Rudowski points out that recognition says, "We love you, you count to us!"²

Another helpful way to give recognition relates to the motivational theory of David McClelland.³ His research led him to identify the needs for achievement, for affiliation, and for power as three distinct motivations. No person is purely achievement oriented, affiliation oriented, or power oriented. Each individual is a combination of the three, and that combination changes.

The following chart shows how recognition can vary for those who are motivated in each of McClelland's three ways.

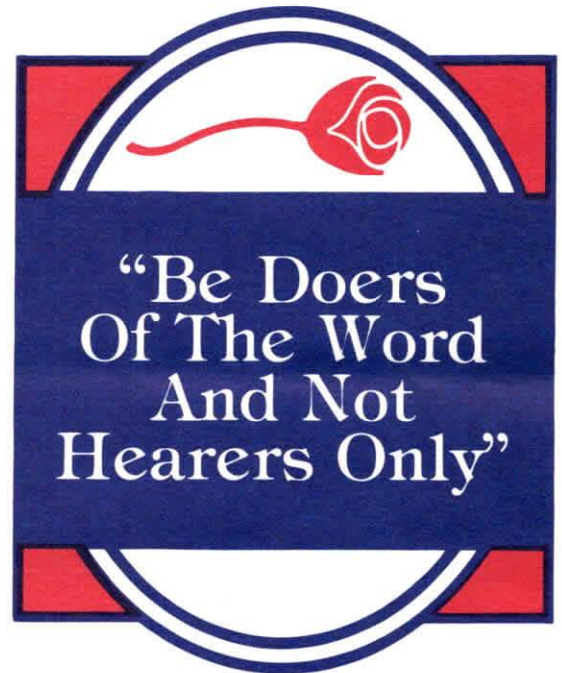
ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTED	AFFILIATION ORIENTED	POWER ORIENTED
Goal: To achieve success in situations that require excellent or improved performance.	To be with others and enjoy mutual friendships.	To have impact or influence on others.
Characteristics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is concerned with excellence. 2. Takes a personal responsibility for finding solutions. 3. Has a desire to achieve unique accomplishments. 4. Is restless, innovative. 5. Wants concrete feedback 6. Is a better organizer than maintainer. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is concerned with being liked and accepted. 2. Needs warm, friendly atmosphere and interaction. 3. Is not a loner. 4. Likes long meetings with time to share experiences and feelings. 5. Enjoys food and social time. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is concerned about reputation and what others think of his/her influence. 2. Gives advice (sometimes unsolicited). 3. Wants ideas to dominate. 4. Needs to influence others. 5. Is verbally fluent, sometimes argumentative. 6. Is seen by others as forceful, outspoken, even hardheaded.
Assignment Options: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is best at organizing new programs and solving problems. 2. Is more goal- than task-oriented. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shows care and nurture. 2. Is more task-oriented. 3. Enjoys being with people. 4. Makes a great caller, greeter, host/hostess, listener. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is one of the movers that every organization needs to have to stay alive. 2. Makes policies, raises money, and negotiates with the hierarchy.
Ideas for Recognition: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attach the volunteer's name to the specific accomplishment. 2. Give tangible awards which can be displayed. 3. Clearly define assignments. 4. Do not waste her/his time. 5. Request her/his input. 6. Involve the volunteer in decisions that affect her/him. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize in the presence of peers. 2. Use the name and photo in the church newsletter. 3. Write personal notes. 4. Express affection. 5. Share needs on a personal level. 6. Ask about family, vacations, illness, etc. 7. Talk with him/her. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use as a consultant. 2. Involve in decision-making for the church. 3. Provide broad-based, far-reaching recognition. 4. Publish newsletter story telling the impact of a job well done.

FAITH AND MOTIVATION

It is not possible to discuss volunteer motivation within the church without including faith. Faith is the most powerful motivator of all. We are motivated by the news of what God has done for us in Christ, by the presence of God in our lives, by the freedom we are given to focus on the needs of others, and by the obligation to show love. We serve because we are responsible members of Christ's church.

Most church volunteers are looking for ways to live out their beliefs and to follow Scripture, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22, RSV). Ideally, a person's gifts from God are matched with the jobs that need to be done. It is our task as leaders to help volunteers put their faith into action by providing opportunities for ministry and then by celebrating it!

Knowing the importance of faith and being responsible Christians does not minimize what was said earlier about motivation and the need to understand people. Rather it helps keep in perspective what it means to be a volunteer.



WHO SHOULD GIVE RECOGNITION

Recognition is the task of everyone working with volunteers. If the congregation has a Director of Volunteer Ministry (DVM), the director can be the overseer of recognition events. If not, this responsibility usually falls to the pastor. In addition, other volunteers can recognize and affirm the ministries of fellow volunteers.

Whatever the organizational structure within your congregation, it is helpful to show in a pyramid diagram the responsibility of leaders to recognize volunteers. By dividing the recognition tasks, one person is saved from "doing it all" and others are given the opportunity to take part in yet another type of volunteer ministry.



HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE GIFTS OF VOLUNTEERS

Effective recognition is

- both formal and informal,
- continuous,
- constantly evaluated and changed in order to meet the needs of the individual,
- a stimulus to the growth of the individual,
- planned,
- unique.

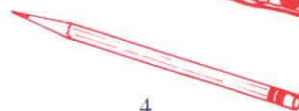
Keeping these characteristics in mind, it becomes evident that affirmation of our volunteers and their talents can be done in both abstract and concrete ways.

Intangible Recognition Ideas:

1. Give constructive feedback to volunteers regarding their work. Provide both positive and negative comments. Feedback gives the volunteer the opportunity for growth, which tends to help him or her feel more satisfied and therefore participate longer.
2. Provide opportunities for the volunteer to give feedback regarding the organization, task force, or committee in which she or he is involved. Listen to the feedback and try to incorporate the ideas. When volunteers are included in the planning, the programming is more meaningful and the ministry is carried out with increased enthusiasm.
3. Describe the job to be done. Provide clearly written job descriptions which describe how a volunteer's task is part of the total ministry. Include the purpose of the job, responsibilities, qualifications, support, training, orientation, and length of expected service.
4. Challenge volunteers. It is said that when you purchase a goldfish and keep it in a tiny fishbowl, the fish stays small; but when you provide a larger bowl, the fish grows to fill the space. So it is with many volunteers. It is necessary to provide opportunities for increased responsibilities and expansion of their ministry as well as to nurture them as they grow.
5. Give credit where credit is due, privately and/or publicly. It is human nature to want credit for a deed well done. Allowing the volunteer to have visibility for work done is another key to motivation. Let your volunteers shine! You may shine with them or behind them, but never shine in front of them. This may seem risky, but volunteers will stay where they are recognized and rewarded.
6. Little things count, too.
 - Notice when a volunteer is absent and say that she or he was missed. Ask how the vacation was. If the volunteer does not come back, find out why and discuss the issues involved with the volunteer.
 - Say thank you and mean it.
 - Keep volunteers informed about meetings, schedules, changes, and events.
 - Provide funds for training, supplies, child care, and transportation.
 - Publicize information concerning the recognition a volunteer may have received elsewhere.
 - Accept the volunteer as a valued member of the team.
 - Regard each person as a unique human being.
 - Keep good records.
 - Maintain an open-door policy.
 - Tell others about your volunteers' good works.



THANK YOU!



Tangible Recognition Ideas:

1. Celebrate volunteer ministry as a theme of a worship service.
2. Reimburse monies spent by volunteers.
3. Write a special litany or a prayer for use in a worship service.



4. Donate a book to the church library in honor of a specific volunteer.
5. Give calligraphers a bottle of india ink.
6. Make and display a giant jigsaw puzzle showing how all areas of volunteer ministry fit together in your congregation.
7. Publish "Why I volunteer at _____ Church" statements in the church newsletter.



8. Give a Bible or devotional book to the volunteer.
9. Give free tickets to church dinners.
10. Write poetry for the volunteers.

11. Hold a volunteer fair. At Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota, the fair included a worship service centered around volunteer ministry. Time and talent survey cards were distributed, completed, and returned during the worship service. A representative from each area of ministry within the church manned a display or booth highlighting that particular area and explained the ministry to the parishioners.



12. Photograph volunteers and send copies of the pictures to family members.

13. Decide on a theme for recognition, and choose a gift item appropriate to the theme.

THEME	
"Volunteers are the salt of the earth."	Seasoned salt.
"Volunteering is a picnic."	Have a picnic.
"Volunteering is the key."	Key rings.
"Getting right to the point, volunteers are the greatest."	Special pencils or pens.
"Volunteers are the heart of the church!"	Gift with a heart motif.

14. Distribute candy kisses to volunteers. At Trinity Lutheran Church, Lansdale, Pennsylvania, kisses are regularly given to volunteers as they go about their ministries. On Volunteer Recognition Sunday a coupon for a candy kiss was included in the bulletin and was to be redeemed immediately following the worship service.



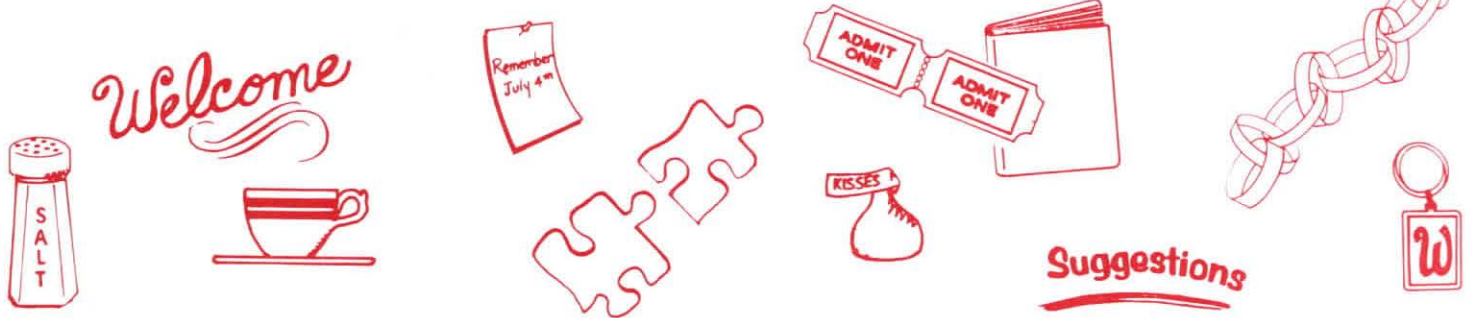
15. Present calligraphic certificates of appreciation.
16. Near Valentine's Day place construction paper hearts in the sanctuary and have parishioners write thank-you notes to the volunteers they would like to affirm.

17. Bring into the worship service a paper chain with each link representing a different volunteer. (This was done at Trinity Lutheran Church, Havertown, Pennsylvania, as the pastor spoke on volunteerism.)

18. Have an "un-tea party." Include a tea bag with a thank you inviting the volunteer to have a quiet cup of tea on you.



19. Display pictures of volunteers on flowers made of construction paper. The flowers can have headings such as "Volunteers make (church name) bloom!"



WHEN SHOULD MINISTRY BE CELEBRATED?

Throughout the year various times lend themselves to the general celebration of volunteers. Valentine's Day—"We love you from the bottom of our hearts!"

National Volunteer Week (the third full week in April)—At this time of year, much special publicity regarding volunteerism is prevalent throughout the country. This is a good opportunity to recognize the volunteer work done by members in the community as well as in the church.

Church Volunteer Recognition Sunday—The first Sunday in June.

July 4—"Sharing your gifts adds a sparkle to the ministry of this congregation."

Thanksgiving—"We are thankful that you share your gifts with us."

Another method for recognizing volunteers is to coordinate volunteer recognition with the monthly themes of the Lutheran Church in America Calendar of Emphasis. Highlight all of the volunteers and their ministries that relate to each month's emphasis, or plan your own monthly emphases according to the needs of your specific congregation.



Traditionally, we consider appreciation at the completion of an assignment, season, or retirement. For best results, however, appreciation for volunteers must begin at the beginning! New volunteers need and deserve immediate thanks for the effort of volunteering and for the work that they will be doing. To overcome anxiety and learn new tasks, we all need prompt and meaningful reinforcement for new behavior, and volunteering is often a new behavior!

- Write a note or call the volunteer to express your appreciation for his or her beginning the specific ministry. Add a positive note regarding your confidence in him or her to fulfill the ministry.
- Provide orientation and/or training.
- Publish the names of new volunteers in the church newsletter.

All of these gestures show an interest in the volunteer and reinforce her or his decision regarding the new ministry.



Recognition needs to continue during the time of the ministry. Many volunteers within the church provide long-term service; therefore, intermittent recognition is necessary. Helping people feel good during their volunteer ministry adds energy and vitality to the work of the parish.

- Say hello.
- Send valentines at any time of year.
- Express thanks at Thanksgiving.
- Distribute nutritious snacks or penny candy.
- Write informal thank-you notes (by DVM and other paid staff).
- Give on-the-job praise.
- Provide a positive, cheerful environment.
- Plan an annual recognition event, such as a tea.



Even the ex-volunteer, or the volunteer on sabbatical needs recognition for past services.

- Say hello!
- Ask how the volunteer is and listen to the answer.
- Ask for advice or information on a specific topic.
- Send a birthday card.



And, of course, recognition is needed at the completion of a commitment.

- Personally thank the volunteer.
- Provide opportunity for feedback regarding the committee where the volunteer served.
- Assist in any way possible with future plans.
- Present him or her with a tangible item such as a dinner certificate or small gift.



Special recognition of someone who is leaving the limelight often alleviates the negative feelings that can invade a lay leader when she or he is too quickly forgotten. A prime example of this type of person is the church council member who has served for several years. While such volunteer leaders often say that they are looking forward to decreased responsibility within the church, they are often at a loss when it occurs.

- Celebrate their accomplishments with a special dinner.
- Present certificates of accomplishment to them in front of the congregation.
- Conduct exit interviews to get their opinions about their work and the congregation.
- Keep ex-leaders informed.
- Ask them to be part of the orientation committee for incoming council members.
- Invite ex-leaders to be part of a nomination committee.
- Utilize the talents and gifts of former leaders on a consulting basis.
- Have an area of volunteer ministry in which only "retired" council members may serve.



WHAT IF . . .

- The budget for recognition is minimal or nonexistent?

Be creative! Write notes on handmade stationery. Feature volunteers in Sunday bulletins or newsletters. Use the telephone to convey your appreciation. Make bulletin-board displays featuring volunteers. Encourage other members of the congregation to affirm the ministries of their fellow members.
- A volunteer will volunteer more readily for the pastor than for the DVM or lay leader?

Encourage the volunteer by mentioning the pastor's name. At the completion of the task, write a thank-you note and send a carbon copy to the pastor. In this way the pastor can also acknowledge the contribution.
- You miss someone when publishing a list of those who volunteered?

Call the volunteer immediately and apologize. Publish an addendum to the initial list. Make accurate record-keeping a priority in your volunteer management system.
- A volunteer is offended by recognition?

Respect his or her wishes. If the volunteer objects to public affirmation of a ministry, privately thank him or her. If any type of thanks appears to be inappropriate, just continue to show an interest in the volunteer for the unique human being she or he is.
- Recognition is not equal for all volunteers?

You are doing your job well! If recognition for all volunteers is equal when the ministries are not, recognition is meaningless and you are only contributing to the disillusionment that plagues many within our congregations. To be effective, recognition must be appropriate to the task completed and meaningful to the individual receiving it. Thus, it is important to know what motivates the volunteer.
- Someone volunteers with recognition rather than ministry being the motive?

You cannot be certain that you have judged his or her motives accurately, and we all operate out of a mixture of motives. We must still focus toward increased recognition within the church. "As we increasingly call attention to the deeds of others, done out of love and in the spirit of obedient service, we are helping others to see the shape of ministry. They can pattern their lives after the best aspects of the life of those being recognized."⁴
- One person is unable to provide the leadership and direction for the recognition program?

Establish a Volunteer Recognition Support Committee of three to six persons to assist the leader.
- You do not know where to begin with affirming volunteer ministry?

Begin small so that each attempt can be a success. Effective recognition events can be simple as well as elaborate. Choose an appropriate format—one that suits you, your program, your budget, and the personalities of the staff and volunteers.



DON'T FORGET

When recognition activities are being planned, include recognition for the paid staff who work with volunteers. There are times when paid staff may not have the same positive feelings toward volunteers that a DVM may have. Recognition of a paid staff member's work with volunteers provides encouragement and positive growth for them also. Paid staff need to be thanked (1) for creatively using volunteers' skill, (2) for using a variety of volunteers, (3) for affirming volunteers, (4) for appropriately recognizing volunteers, (5) for allowing volunteers to enter into uncharted territory, (6) for allowing volunteers to perform tasks they themselves enjoy, (7) for encouraging volunteers to believe in themselves and their ministries, and (8) for being flexible.

Paid staff can be recognized by a note, an

unexpected card, certificate, proclamation, or even a coffee break picnic. However, some of the best recognition comes from sharing feedback from the volunteers who express appreciation for the staff person.

Not to be forgotten in the scheme of recognition is a very important someone—you, the person in charge of recognition. Often this recognition does not come from outside sources. Take the time to reflect on your own accomplishments, the things that you made happen for your volunteers and your church. You are indeed a witness through this work. Reward yourself with one of your favorite things: a chat with a special friend, an ice cream cone, or an afternoon with a good book. You need to care for you in order to continue caring for your volunteers.



The fabric of recognition is a blend of many threads carefully woven together.

- It is respect made visible.
- It is nurturing.
- It is validation of the importance of the job.
- It is acknowledgement of the quality of performance.
- It is affirmation of the person performing the ministry.
- It is praise and thanksgiving to God for the ministries of his people!

FOOTNOTES

1. See Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara Block Snyderman, 2nd ed. *The Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959).
2. Peter Rudowski, "The Personal Touch," *Lutheran Partners*, (July/August, 1985), 22.
3. See David Clarence McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton, NJ : D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1961) and "Business Drives and National Achievement," *Harvard Business Review* (July-August 1962), 98-112.
4. Thomas C. Rieke, "Volunteers or Disciples?" *Church Management—The Clergy Journal*, (May/June, 1982), 67. Used by permission.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Vineyard, Sue. *Beyond Banquets, Plaques and Pins: Creative Ways to Recognize Volunteers and Staff!* Downers Grove, IL: Heritage Arts, 1981.
- Wilson, Marlene. *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*. Boulder, CO: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976.
- *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983.