

The Top 5 Myths about Volunteering at Church

By Cory Busse

Think of a ministry at your church. One you really value or appreciate. Perhaps it's the parish festival. Or the funeral luncheons. Are you thinking of one? Good. Now name all the people who volunteer to make that ministry happen. If your own name didn't appear on that list, think about the reasons why (and say five Hail Mary's while you're at it).

Myth #1: "I'm not good at anything."

When we think of volunteering at church, we often think of the "showy" ministries like singing in the choir or reading at Mass. But it doesn't take a Julliard graduate to be an extraordinary minister of holy Communion, and there are plenty of people who are really good at being married Catholics who never think to volunteer for the local marriage preparation program. If reality television has taught us anything, it's that America's got talent. Take the basket off your light, and let it shine.

Myth #2: "They don't need my help."

If your faith community is anything like mine, an amazingly efficient staff plus a handful of dedicated volunteers are its greatest asset, and its greatest threat. The problem with parishes where everything seems handled is that everything seems, well, handled. New volunteers don't come forward because it seems as though they're not needed — and sometimes it's hard to feel welcome. But slowly, quietly, staff turns over and volunteers burn out. Do yourself (and your fellow parishioners) a favor and get involved even when it seems like they could do it without you.

Myth #3: "I don't have time."

Saying we don't have time to do something simply means that it's not important to us. And there are lots of people who make time to teach youth faith-formation classes every Wednesday from September through May. Even if there aren't enough hours in the day, there is time to cook a meal for Families Moving Forward or your local shelter. There's time to be one of the first familiar faces new parishioners look for at Mass. It's your faith community; make it important to you.

Myth #4: "I gave at the collection plate."

Don't get me wrong, your church is exceedingly grateful for your financial offerings — especially in economic times like these. But our churches aren't built on money, they're built on people. The three Ts, as the saying goes, are time, talent and treasure. Putting an envelope in the collection on Sunday is a good start, but if money were all anyone gave, we'd gather each week in beautiful buildings with a roomful of strangers. We need to warm up those other two Ts and get our hands dirty.

Myth #5: "I'm too [INSERT EXCUSE HERE] to volunteer."

When the bulletin on Sunday reads "Volunteers Needed," that means us. When the announcements from the pulpit include a call for help, that's us, too. Volunteers aren't expected to be perfect. There's no requirement to be the strongest, the smartest, the best looking, the most holy, or the most "worthy" (whatever that means). As Jesus said when He called His disciples, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mt 9:13). That's us. And if that were qualification enough to be an apostle, it's probably more than enough to serve coffee and donuts on Sunday mornings.