

Five Responsibilities of a Volunteer to a Parish

1. The responsibility to ask for help

Feel like volunteer work isn't meaningful? Not what was hoped for? Or just bored and ready for something else? Talk to the volunteer manager or priest, providing specifics about dissatisfaction and at least a few suggestions of ways to make it better. If they don't know that a volunteer is not getting from the experience what they had hoped to receive, they can't work with to improve things. Similarly, don't hesitate to let them know if there is a need for additional tools, training, or support; if they can't provide it directly, they should at least be able to signify the right source or direction.

2. The responsibility to follow through on obligations

There is a pervasive myth that volunteers are unreliable. While of course this isn't true across the board, there are some volunteers who reinforce such negative perceptions. A volunteer needs to help improve the reputation of volunteers in the parish by doing what was agreed to do, whether it's honoring the volunteer role and schedule, providing ample notice if it isn't possible to perform tasks or responsibilities agreed to or stepping away from volunteering when necessary.

3. The responsibility not to promise what can't be delivered

This one is worth singling out as it's fairly easy to unintentionally promise too much when one is excited about making a difference. This is especially important to avoid if working in a task where the volunteer is especially needed. An example: say the volunteer promised to accompany the youth group to a concert. The he forgets or gets busy and is unable to go. By not following through with the promise, not only can potential disappointment be felt by the youth group but, more importantly, the volunteer could unintentionally do harm by giving the youth group a reason not to trust him.

4. The responsibility to honor the parish's trust and investment of time in the volunteer

Another pervasive myth about volunteering is that volunteers are free. In fact, nonprofits and some parishes invest quite a bit in their volunteers via staff time, tools, training, and so on. This is why it's important to research the volunteer position first to determine if it's a good fit. Once in the role, if the volunteer is unsatisfied, they first should try re-negotiating volunteer role, rather than just suddenly leaving.

5. The responsibility for self-care

This begins with the daily self-maintenance of the volunteer's spiritual condition – attending to prayer, meditation, sacramental life, fellowship with friends and fellow believers. The volunteer also has the responsibility to make sure that they aren't overextending themselves, burning out, or causing themselves physical, mental, or emotional harm by taking on roles

that aren't a good fit or that they are not prepared for. While some stress and burnout may be inevitable depending on the project it can be significantly reduced by seeking out support (talk to the volunteer manager, priest or fellow volunteers), taking a break (either while volunteering or stepping away from volunteering altogether for a while), injecting some fun into the service portfolio (even if it's just a one day gig on the side), and having realistic expectations about what can be accomplished and when.

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