

VOLUNTEERS *and the* JOY OF SERVICE

BY AMIREH AL-HADDAD



ACS Disaster Response volunteers work at the Alabama tornado warehouse donation center.

Winston Churchill said it best: “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

When I was first asked to focus on a feature about volunteerism, my mind immediately went to Adventist Community Services and the disaster response work that the Seventh-day Adventist Church excels at doing. In the disaster response

arena, Adventists are widely recognized as the “go to” people for warehouse distribution. While we as an organization have this wonderful reputation in disaster response, the truth is that this service could not run without the hundreds of volunteers who show up after disasters to help sort and unload trucks full of needed supplies. In those times of need, people look for individuals wearing a fantastically hideous

shade of yellow — an identifying marker for those volunteers.

As we examine the different ways people volunteer, we cannot leave out the role of volunteers at church. Volunteers are what moves a church. Think about all the volunteer hours expended each week just to get through a single Sabbath morning. Your Sabbath School teachers, the church treasurer, deacons



A volunteer logs donated items at a disaster warehouse.

and deaconess, the pianist, special music, greeters, even the potluck coordinator are all volunteers. Let's not forget to mention the work of our young people in terms of the service and volunteer hours they put in. Pathfinders are one of the largest groups of volunteers in the Church, and the service they give to the community always matters. All these volunteers give of their time and talents, and very often of their own resources to do a job well. We don't normally think of local church leadership as volunteers,

but they are, and the number of man hours they donate is incredible. They all share their special skills by doing something they love without payment or remuneration.

You don't have to be rich, you don't have to be smart, you don't have to know how to drive a car or even read. You can be young or old or somewhere in between. You can be in a wheelchair. You can be shy. You may be someone who has 18 skills or no skills. But, as a volunteer, you need to be someone who cares. As a volunteer, you need to be someone who wants to make a difference.

A volunteer has to have a willing heart. Ellen White summarizes the payoff for teaching children to sacrifice and engage in service for others when she says they will "find joy in service..." *Child Guidance*, page 36. Whether you are a natural-born volunteer or someone who has had volunteerism instilled in them over time, volunteers help out because they have a passion for either the work or the cause.

When it comes to volunteering, most organizations have the same attitude that God has. God isn't worried about your abilities; He is more interested in your

THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A VOLUNTEER:

- **Volunteer with Adventist Community Services** (at your local church)
- **Rake leaves**
- **Shovel snow**
- **Teach a computer skill**
- **Participate in a community clean-up day**
- **Serve a meal** (volunteer at a local soup kitchen)
- **Become a mentor**
- **Read to someone** (volunteer at your local library)
- **Teach the Teens Sabbath School class**
- **Sing to someone** (volunteer at a nursing home)
- **Volunteer to go on a mission trip with Marantha Volunteers International**



Volunteers are recognized by Hamilton and Bradley counties and TEMA.

TRAITS YOU NEED AS A VOLUNTEER:

- **Integrity**
- **Flexibility**
- **Creativity**
- **Professionalism**
- **Team Player**
- **Self-Starter**
- **Emphathic**
- **Dependability**
- **Openness**
- **Humility**
- **Patience**
- **Love**



Volunteers from the North Ashville Church feed the homeless.

BEFORE YOU VOLUNTEER, ASK YOURSELF SOME BASIC QUESTIONS:

- **What are my interests?**
- **What kind of work do I enjoy doing?**
- **What skills do I have?**
- **What is my overall flexibility or tolerance for different things/ideas?**
- **How much time do I have?**
- **How long can I volunteer? Short-term/long term/seasonal/just once?**
- **Can I afford to volunteer? Will there be travel or other expenses I might incur?**
- **Will I have to fill the role as a leader or a follower when I volunteer?**

availability. You just have to be available and show up, let someone know, “here am I...” Volunteers need to have a desire to make a difference. But, a willing heart is not the only character trait you will find in volunteers. Integrity is vital to the process of volunteering. As a volunteer you will be trusted with the resources of the organization. Therefore, your integrity is fundamental to the way the ministry/cause is viewed and respected in your community.

There are other venues for volunteering, not just with Adventist Community Services or in your local church setting. Volunteering in your local community is also of vital importance. It gets us out to meet people and be known by others in our community. As Adventists we often insulate ourselves from other protestant Americans simply because, we have “the truth,” and they ... drink coffee. Another problem that Adventists face in volunteering can be the legalistic approach to Sabbath, and the limited bless-

ing of Sabbath rest. More often than not, we as a people lose out on opportunities to engage in friendship evangelism and witness because we don’t want to break the rules of Sabbath. We forget to look to Jesus as our example and realize that it is perfectly acceptable to “do good” on the Sabbath.

Perhaps you need a challenge to try something new and different. Volunteer for something you’ve never done before.

While volunteers receive no remuneration for the job they do, that doesn’t mean there aren’t big pay-offs. It may be in doing a job well, meeting new and different types of individuals, or sometimes it’s in gaining new skill sets. Volunteering can often lead to positive career changes. In addition, there are also actual health benefits to volunteering. Did you know that individuals who volunteer report better mental health? That’s right. Volunteering helps raise those feel-good endorphin levels, and even contributes to better physical health by getting you



Volunteer donates hair for “Locks of Love.”

VOLUNTEERING PAY-OFFS ARE BIG

- Learn a new skill
- Enhance skills you already possess
- Build confidence
- Discover something new about yourself or others
- Connect to your community/ church
- Meet new people/make new friends
- Expand your horizons on how other people learn/ live/love



PHOTO BY: BRIANA RICHARDS

These children love to color and show their parents their talents. One Sabbath each month, the Knoxville First congregation’s juniors, earliteen, and youth Sabbath School classes volunteer in the poorest inner-city neighborhood in Knoxville at an event called Pancakes and Crafts. They are connecting and making a difference where they are. These Sabbath School volunteers serve breakfast, sing songs, make crafts, and play games in this inner-city neighborhood.

out and moving.

1 Corinthians 13 speaks about love and the characteristics of love. But, it could just as easily be speaking about volunteering.

Volunteerism is a giving of one’s self. Volunteerism is love. It does not hold prejudice, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily discouraged, it keeps no record of wrongs. Volunteerism does not delight in laziness, but rejoices in making changes, even small ones. Volunteers seek out those in need, are conscious of community, work with humility and integrity, always hope, always persevere.

Go find some joy. Go volunteer! 📌

Amireh Al-Haddad is the director of public affairs and religious liberty, Adventist Community Services, and disaster response at the Southern Union in Norcross, Georgia.