

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

National Volunteer Week, 20-26 May 2019, is the annual celebration to acknowledge the generous contribution of our nation's volunteers. The theme for National Volunteer Week 2019 was "Making a world of difference." This year Volunteering Australia celebrated thirty years of National Volunteer Week.

Established in 1989, National Volunteer Week was the first collaborative attempt to promote volunteering nationally. It is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia and provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our community and to say thank you to the more than 6 million Australians who volunteer.

<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org>

Below we hear from two members of our diocese who reflect on volunteers.

Frank Sheehan – Ballarat North Parish



Frank Sheehan (photo courtesy of the Ballarat Courier)

The recent week dedicated to volunteering highlighted the vast amount of work done by volunteers in all aspects of Australian life. In many instances the work done by volunteers ensures the continuity of hundreds if not thousands of community organisations in the Australian community. While figures vary, a study carried out in 2012 estimated the contribution of volunteering to the Australian economy to be worth \$2.5 billion dollars. It examined the overall economic, social and cultural benefits to the community.

Take the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat as an example. If the role of volunteers did not exist the various parishes would cease to exist or operate at a very much reduced level. The weekend

liturgies would be less effective but for the volunteer efforts of readers and sacristans and the countless other jobs undertaken by loyal parishioners.

At the wider community level sporting organisations like football leagues and clubs would be lost. Then there is the welfare organisations for people, an example is the volunteers assisting refugees, and the numerous animal welfare organisations like the RSPCA. A recent television program featured the work of a woman who had dedicated her life to the welfare of wombats. After a period of individual work she was joined by other volunteers to assist her. This was a very challenging task for all concerned

The welfare groups assisted by volunteers to the human population are too numerous to be mentioned individually. However, the number of people walking or riding a bike long distances for cancer research are highlighted almost weekly if not daily is a case in point. Then there are reports in news items that showcase the individual efforts of people to help other individuals with life skills and the effort of daily living. The commitment of these people is to be admired.

There is another type of volunteering that does not rate a regular mention in the daily press or media outlets where assistance is given to developing countries. Organisations like the "Australian Volunteers International" previously known as the "Overseas Service Bureau". Originally this organisation was set up to assist University graduates to share their skills within the Indonesian Community. It then branched out to include countries in Asia, South America and the Pacific Islands. The body of skills then expanded to include Trades, Doctors, Nurses and Teachers. Other

organisations like Caritas and PALMS also do this type of work. Typically these volunteers work for the wage, if one exists, of the country they work in.

The role of Volunteer Week brings to the fore the vast number of people who add a usually unseen amount of value to the Australian Community. In 2010 3.86 million women volunteered and 2.85 million men contributed to this aspect of Australian economy. This does not in any way devalue the social and cultural well-being of the effort the volunteers make to our country.

Marie Shaddock – Ouyen Parish

In Portia’s stirring and thought-provoking speech of the Merchant of Venice we are told about “The quality of Mercy” . . . It is twice blessed: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes the thronè monarch better than his crown.” We could also say that of volunteering although it sounds drab and leaden beside the ‘quality of mercy’, yet it is true. I would go so far as to say that volunteering is a blessing that blesses three: the giver, the direct receiver and community as a whole. Speaking personally, there is great reward in self-giving and that is what volunteering is about – it reflects the paradoxical nature of our faith.

In our small communities the need for volunteers has always been there to do the “little” things that have to be done. In reality those communities are a form of “family” where everyone is roped in to help out; sometimes it is with grumbling and dragging of feet and others with better grace. Whether it is the football club, school, or our parish the ‘common ground’ has to be maintained if we want it to continue. The “fairies”, “the angels”, the “little people”, as they are euphemistically known, maintain the things we take for granted, they are the self-givers who receive pleasure and pride in their giving. Their volunteering transcends the material world we live in where we only do something for profit whether it is money, or some other form of gain.

In our parish we are blessed to have so many who give of themselves, they take great pride in the appearance and function of our church and its grounds. I can be found around the young people and their parents or else shackled to the computer and photocopier, but there are thirty others who also help out; each doing more than one job. In a parish with an average Sunday attendance of forty that is pretty good; our numbers may be down, but our heartbeat is strong.

Volunteering raises our world out of its sordidness, into the possibility of God’s intentional beauty – after all Jesus was all about self-giving - it’s up to us to follow. This is how I see volunteering and in the vein of St Thérèse of Lisieux it is the “little way” where we can do simple and ordinary things out of great love. Volunteering brings its own rewards to those who do, but how much more potential does that volunteering take on when we do it with ‘love’! This for me is the real gift that raises a simple act of printing the bulletin, or folding them, to a different level.



Marie (front right) at the Proclaim Conference



Marie (centre right) organised a Youth Retreat