

Volunteers bring vitality

Denise Simeone | Jan. 15, 2014 NCR Today

What organization in its right mind wouldn't love to add excitement, energy and inspiration to its work and its mission? What would it be like to have people who contribute time, experience, passion and energy to your goals and dreams? Invite some volunteers to join you and they will do all that by bringing ideas, commitment and vitality along with service. That's what volunteers have done for us at National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company.

As *NCR's* director of mission and program development, I coordinate the company's volunteer program. We have been delighted by our experience. Volunteers have come out of the woodwork in ways we never imagined. We expected people who had retired but we never imagined having Ellen, an 18-year-old high school graduate, volunteer her services the summer before heading to journalism school. Sam, a young financial analyst between jobs, offered to work on projects both on site and at home. Erin, a recent out-of-town college graduate who moved to Kansas City, Mo., for a job, called to offer her skills as she settled into a new place.

One of our volunteers, Mark, came to *NCR* through Volunteer Match, an organization that offers information and listings in local communities. Mark came to offer his services not knowing much about *NCR*. Yet during a recent tour of *NCR* by a small group of people, I invited Mark, who was in the office researching 1968 issues of the newspaper, to give the group an impromptu sense of his volunteer work. What ensued between Mark and the group was remarkable. He was engaging, articulate and incredibly accurate about those early years of the newspaper and the stories it covered, as well as its efforts to engage readers about world and church issues. We had a great discussion.

Synergy sometimes happens too. One of our volunteers who is unable to drive makes use of a Jewish Family Services volunteer who provides a ride to our office two days a week so he can do research for us. Bob talks with great enthusiasm about the stories he is reading from the 1970s issues. Our volunteers often comment that the stories they read in past newspapers are still a part of the today's cultural, social and political landscape. We could snatch a headline or two from the past and use it in tomorrow's newspaper.

We also have volunteers from Cristo Rey Kansas City High School. Several young students are placed with us to work one day a week. Besides enjoying their energy, we believe we are helping them learn diverse skills, collaborate with team members, and develop personal integrity and dependability in a workplace.

NCR was built on volunteer efforts. The story is often told about the early years of *NCR* when the paper got mailed to subscribers because a pool of enthusiastic volunteers labeled, packaged and mailed the first issues as well as offered assistance with office work and phone calls. From the very beginning, alongside this group of dedicated volunteers were members of *NCR's* board of directors. Today, *NCR's* board members are still among its most long-lasting and passionate volunteers.

NCR built on this legacy to add to those numbers of enthusiastic supporters with a specific outreach for volunteers. We couldn't be more satisfied by the results. They have come to us from ages 13 to 70-plus. They have come from our local community as well as the virtual one of the Web. They work in our offices and they

work in their homes or favorite coffee shops. They live locally as well as all over the country. We constantly and gratefully celebrate their work.

You might take a look around your organization. What kinds of opportunities could you offer? How might volunteers fit into your mission, your service and your work? How could they impact your workplace and staff? What new ideas and spirit might volunteers bring you? And what might you offer them in camaraderie and purpose?

Volunteers will surprise you and delight you. They will challenge as well as offer new insight into your organization's purpose. They will get work done as well as create new work! And they will be an amazing asset to your mission.

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