

FORM OF CHARITABLE WORK

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Abstract:

Volunteering represents an important social phenomenon that strengthens civic engagement and counteracts social withdrawal in contemporary European societies. Despite the growing bureaucratic pressures that limit public participation, many individuals continue to demonstrate altruism, creativity, and responsibility through charitable work. The interdisciplinary nature of volunteering—analyzed by fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, and theology—contributes to the complexity of defining it. In this study, volunteering is understood as professionally organized, selfless, and regular service provided to individuals or groups in need, independent of familial or personal ties. The text further examines the demographic and social characteristics of volunteers and highlights key forms of engagement, including volunteering in NGOs, sports volunteering,

and hospice service. Finally, the study reflects on the motives and benefits associated with charitable work, noting that although volunteering is unpaid, it may still bring reciprocal or developmental benefits to those involved.

Keywords: volunteering, charitable work, social engagement, NGOs, hospice volunteering, sports volunteering, altruism, civic participation

Introduction

Saint John Paul II stated directly that volunteering, when lived in its truth as selfless service to others especially to those most in need and forgotten by social welfare structures should be regarded as an important expression of apostolate in which lay men and women play a leading role.¹

Volunteering is one of the social phenomena that prevents European societies from sinking into heartless apathy. Europeans, overwhelmed by a sea of sometimes absurd legal regulations, are now drowning in bureaucracy. Many, fearing bureaucratic barriers, withdraw from various spheres of social life and confine themselves to the safe space of their private lives. Fortunately, not all citizens of the contemporary world are so fearful, timid, comfortable, or socially withdrawn. Today, European societies lack neither people who take seriously the truth about the social nature of the human person, nor those who, through engagement in volunteer work, reveal their talents, creativity, and pro-social and altruistic attitudes. In the Euro-Atlantic cultural sphere, volunteering is one of the most dynamically developing social phenomena, giving democratic societies a truly civic character.

Defining let alone scientifically defining the phenomenon of charitable work presents many difficulties. The task is not made easier by the fact that reflection on forms of charitable activity is undertaken by representatives of very diverse academic disciplines, such as: cultural anthropology, sociology, social psychology, political science, pedagogy, legal studies, pastoral theology, and others. Despite differing methodological approaches and the variety of aspects explored within these fields, it is possible to outline a certain conceptual scope of the term *volunteering*, without claiming to set strict boundaries an understanding adopted in this study. Charitable work refers to professionally organized social service offered to individuals and groups in need, characterized by voluntariness,

1 Baumann, K. (2021). „*Deus caritas est*“ – Programmschrift für eine missionarische Kirche. In *Zeichen der heilsamen Nähe Gottes. Auf dem Weg zu einer missionarischen Kirche*. Steinfurt; Ostfildern.

selflessness, continuity and regularity, and independence from family, collegial, or friendship ties.

In describing the studied group of volunteers, it is worth paying attention to their demographic and social characteristics. The first include gender, age, and marital status. The latter encompass place of residence, social background, profession, and education.² Some of these characteristics will be treated in the research as independent variables that differentiate knowledge, views, and attitudes concerning the reality under study.

The Essence of Volunteering as a Form of Charitable Work

The contemporary form of volunteering is consistent with the communal and missionary nature of the Church, which is why it increasingly receives strong support in the official statements of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*. A vast area of engagement for Christian volunteers is the charitable service performed by the Church since its very beginnings. Modern volunteering, however, is not only a balm for the wounds of those suffering from material poverty or other hardships, but also an important form of Christian apostolate, especially the apostolate of lay Catholics.³

Types and Forms of Volunteering

When deciding to begin volunteer work, it is worth becoming familiar with its various forms and types. Below are the most commonly used terms describing areas in which volunteering is developing, as well as places where conditions for cooperation with volunteers are created. This is neither a scientific classification nor a closed list of institutions that benefit from volunteer support. However, we hope that the terms listed below will help you better navigate the volunteering opportunities presented on our website.

1. Volunteering in NGOs

The most common type of volunteering is volunteering in non-governmental organizations. Most foundations and associations readily cooperate with volunteers who engage in activities aligned with the organization's mission.

2 Przygoda, W. (2001). *Podstawy teologiczne i kierunki rozwoju wolontariatu charytatywnego w Polsce*. In *Miłość na nowo odkryta* (RNC 5). Wydawnictwo RNC.

3 Sargeant, A., & Shang, J. (2017). *Fundraising principles and practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Volunteers are invited both for long-term cooperation and for short-term, action-based involvement. They perform a wide range of tasks—from simple office and organizational work to participating in and co-creating the organization's social, educational, and self-help campaigns and projects.

2. Sports Volunteering

Sports volunteering usually takes place during the organization of sporting or recreational events such as competitions, tournaments, or championships. Organizers of such events often rely on volunteer support. Volunteers may assist along marathon routes, ensure proper course of the competition, and support athletes and spectators. For enthusiasts of a given sport, it is a valuable opportunity to learn about the organizational background of major sporting, social, and cultural events.

3. Hospice Volunteering

Hospitals and hospices also benefit from volunteer support. In these settings, volunteers may perform office tasks, assist in organizing charity events, support medical staff, and engage in duties requiring prior training, such as providing help to the patient and their family.⁴

Understanding Charitable Work Through the Implementation of Its Forms

When attributing a single Latin etymology to the volunteer as a charitable worker *voluntarius*, meaning “voluntary” or “willing” it is also helpful to refer to another related Latin word: *voluntas*, meaning “will.” This is even more justified since one of the meanings of the English word *voluntary*, from which the Polish term was adopted, also refers to something “controlled by the will.”⁵

Each definition draws attention to the phrase “without payment” or “unpaid,” which I understand as lacking material compensation. However, this does not mean that volunteers do not benefit at all. As the example above shows, mutual benefits are considered standard in evaluating effectiveness, and their level is often measured. Since any benefit may be expressed in economic terms, and

4 Muchacki, M., Sufa, B., & Goc, J. (2020). *Wolontariat w dobie płynnej rzeczywistości*. Wydawnictwo Petrus. In *Motivations for volunteering. In Successful strategies for recruiting, training, and utilizing volunteers*. Rockville, MD.

5 Muchacki, M., Sufa, B., & Goc, J. (2020). *Wolontariat w dobie płynnej rzeczywistości*. Wydawnictwo Petrus. In *Motivations for volunteering. In Successful strategies for recruiting, training, and utilizing volunteers*. Rockville, MD.

since volunteer work may also bring material gains for example, in-kind benefits adding the term “selfless” after “unpaid” remains an open matter.⁶ This is especially relevant because “every interaction is subject to calculation toward potential gains.” Although some volunteer arrangements assume specific benefits for both parties (e.g., summer internships for final-year students in institutions that may become future employers), there are also areas where the most essential element is the will to offer oneself, to give one’s work without prior calculation of “profit” or future advantage.⁷

For defining a volunteer, the key element is the act of expressing one’s will, making oneself available (usually before performing any task) for socially beneficial and selfless activity. Other considerations relate either to the will (such as conscious action) or to the assumption of selflessness and may therefore be set aside. A volunteer may thus be described as a person who expresses the will to act selflessly. Informal groups, associations, and other frameworks gathering such individuals can collectively be referred to as volunteering.

4. School Volunteering

At many levels of education, schools form volunteer clubs through which willing students can take part in activities both within the school environment and outside of it. These may include supporting local state or non-state institutions as well as non-governmental organizations.

5. Employee Volunteering

This increasingly popular form of volunteering is organized and supported especially by large international companies. It is part of corporate social responsibility. Employee-volunteers undertake various tasks for those in need, while the company supports their involvement through available financial or organizational means. Employee volunteering is not regulated by specific legal provisions but is based on general laws concerning volunteering (Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteer Work).⁸

6. Senior Volunteering

6 Payton, R. L., & Moody, M. P. (2008). *Understanding philanthropy: Its meaning and mission*. Indiana University Press.

7 Kramer, R. M., & Tyler, T. R. (Eds.). (1996). *Trust in organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*. Sage Publications. http://books.google.pl/books?id=A_8LbcgrNMC&pg=PA371&lpg=PA371&dq=gambetta+1988+trust&source=bl&ots=VnG3Ep0qz9&sig=QsrfMx5WSsweeFSMCiE9csJCxKY&hl=pl&ei=xbYTStb-GtOusAbgw82ODg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#PPPI,M1

8 Breeze, B. (2017). *The new fundraisers: Who organises charitable giving in contemporary society?* Bristol University Press.

Senior volunteering demonstrates that a volunteer can be any age. Senior volunteers willingly devote their free time, sharing their knowledge, skills, and experience.

7. International Volunteering

As the name suggests, this type of volunteering takes place abroad usually as part of a project or volunteer exchange program. International volunteering can last from several weeks to a year or more. Among the most popular programs are Workcamps, European volunteering under the Erasmus+ programme, and mission trips.⁹

8. E-Volunteering

A special form of volunteering is virtual volunteering performed entirely or partially online. The volunteer completes tasks remotely, from home or any other location. Examples include assisting in managing the website of a non-governmental organization or writing content for the site.

9. Short-Term and Long-Term Volunteering

Depending on the duration of cooperation between the volunteer and the beneficiary, volunteering may be short-term also called event-based. This type is characterized by a brief period of engagement, from one to several days. Volunteers assist during specific events or actions, such as festivals, marathons, or meetings.¹⁰

If collaboration with an organization is planned for a longer period, we speak of long-term or permanent volunteering. This type may last from a few months to several years and is based on regular, systematic task performance.

The State's Involvement in Charitable and Social Assistance

Until recently, the Polish state conducted a weak social and charitable policy. However, over the past few years, the situation has slowly begun to improve.

9 Kubik, J., & Bernhard, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Twenty years after communism: The politics of memory and commemoration*. Oxford University Press.

10 Ekiert, G., & Foa, R. (2012). *Civil society in post-communist Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Rys: Źródło Główny Urząd Statystyczny Polska



Fig.: Source Statistics Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny)

The above figure presents the situation before the introduction of support programs for poor families. In recent years, the Polish government has increased its care and assistance for families in need and those living in poverty through social support and aid programs for large families. This has contributed to an improvement in the quality of life for the poorest individuals and families.

Charitable Work and Social Support for Those in Need as a Form of Assistance

It is also essential to understand the contemporary approach to the phenomenon of charitable assistance, including its new social paradigm and the context of international recognition of the rights of people in need, as demonstrated by the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Poor. The issues addressed in this study are practical in nature, and the main objective is to support social workers in their professional duties by deepening their knowledge about the category of beneficiaries they serve namely, individuals living in poverty and their families. The families of those in need should be treated as microsystems that provide direct support, while also requiring assistance themselves.

The specific problems have been formulated as follows:

- 1. Exploration of the field of social work** with a focus on identifying resources that enable social inclusion (the relational aspect of social work) and generating

systemic change in structures that produce oppression (the radical aspect of social work).

2. **Identification of issues common to all beneficiaries of social assistance**, as well as those specific to persons with disabilities, which create a need for additional support.
3. **Analysis of potential needs requiring social assistance**, resulting from the declared commitment to support persons with disabilities in exercising their most frequently violated human rights, as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
4. **Analysis of methods, forms, and tools of social work** in terms of their practical application in working with persons with disabilities.

The **practical goal** should correspond to the main problem, which is to deepen the knowledge of social workers regarding individuals and families in need of material, psychological, or social assistance. In the theoretical dimension, this goal is accompanied by the need to align the operational model of social workers with the contemporary social model of charitable work, as well as the rights-based model that is currently recognized and promoted in social sciences.

My personal aim is to connect social work with practical charitable activity, drawing upon both community-based and professional experience. This includes gathering and sharing practical knowledge acquired through work for people in need. These experiences relate to addressing their psychological challenges, supporting them in education and vocational activation, and—what I particularly wish to emphasize—drawing inspiration from cooperation with social cooperatives and non-governmental organizations working on behalf of those in need.

Conclusion

The first step for anyone who wants to engage in charitable work is training, during which participants learn to independently analyze situations and propose solutions. This skill is quickly combined with another essential competency effective communication and the ability to work in a group, which is necessary for successful social engagement. As a result, socially involved individuals can find the best possible solutions when carrying out specific tasks together.

In professional life, tasks are often assigned, and responsibility is imposed. In charitable work, however, there is no obligation to participate. If a decision to get involved is made, responsibility for the social work undertaken arises, yet it is

rewarded with the satisfaction of helping those in need.

The work of a volunteer is one of the most wonderful forms of assistance one can imagine: full engagement without expecting material compensation. Yet there are benefits that cannot be measured in money for example, a child's smile when receiving help, or the gratitude of a person in need.

The forms of providing assistance to those in need have changed depending on historical periods, political systems, philosophies, and religions. From the beginnings of Christianity to the Enlightenment, charitable activities were primarily conducted in hospitals, which served as the main and most widespread form of social care.

This study provides a detailed analysis of charitable activities existing in Poland.

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