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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Why do people volunteer? It is a good question. Increasingly organisations find that people do not volunteer for tasks and positions. I know our uniformed organisations would love people to come forward and volunteer to be involved in their very important work with the young people of our communities. There are other village groups with aging memberships where there simply do not appear to be younger members coming through. This is not just an Ingatestone problem. Nationally it is increasingly difficult to find volunteers for all kinds of important community initiatives. There appears to be just one organisation where there are many volunteers. You might be surprised, but that is the church.

If we define volunteers as people who undertake tasks without payment, then increasingly the church relies on volunteers. I sometimes find it uncomfortable in the reality that I am the only person in the Church of England here in Ingatestone and Fryerning who is not a volunteer in the sense that I am paid a stipend, for which I am grateful. When I first put myself forward for selection for the ministry over twenty years ago it was assumed that I would continue my teaching career and train for the ministry in a non-stipendiary capacity. I felt that was not to be my path, much to the amazement of those with whom I worked. Yet I think they would have been more amazed if I had tried to continue to hold down a senior teaching role and also undertake training. I have never ceased to be amazed that how people like Sue Cruse and Miranda Seaman and many others managed to do this as the so called part-time training is very intensive and demanding. I always have felt that I had the easier option. Once ordained, there are still substantial demands on ministers that are now called self-supporting. Yes they are volunteers, in the sense that they are not paid, but their commitment and sense of calling is the same as every minister.

The same is true of Readers, who now have to train part of their course alongside those who will eventually be ordained. I have a role with all the Readers in the Brentwood Deanery and I am amazed at the commitment of people like Sue Elliott-Jones and Derek Bevan.

Seeing volunteers in significant positions helps generate in the church a culture of volunteering. The reality is we could not function without wardens, treasurers, secretaries, P.C.C. members, sacristans, musicians, singers and school governors. There are those people who have the vital role of welcoming everyone to the church. The lists go on and on and if you pick up either of the church annual reports you will see just how many people are involved. It is truly amazing and something that I thank God for every day in prayers. For the church simply could not function in any other way.

However, the fact that a church is a volunteer-based organisation does not answer the question, why do people volunteer? What is it about Christians that makes them want to volunteer? This is something many people outside of the church do not understand and do not want to understand. May includes Christian Aid Week. I recall one of our collectors having been very upset some years ago by a strident and unpleasant person who not only refused to give a donation but also refused to believe that she was not being paid for collecting. When she was adamant that she was not, his response was that she should either help herself to some of the collection or she was a fool! How far he was in his thoughts and actions from the woman he left stunned on his doorstep. May is the month when we celebrate the festival of Pentecost or Whitsunday. This festival remembers when Jesus first followers were given strength to undertake more than they thought they could achieve by the power of God's Holy Spirit. That power is available to all Christians. I would suggest it is the Holy Spirit that nudges Christians into action, some of which is volunteering. Understanding Pentecost helps us to understand how God operates in the world through the actions of his people.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick.*