



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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My Encounter with a Bird Counter

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on AUGUST 18, 2014

I was walking in a park the other day when I ran into “Bill,” a volunteer who counts baby birds in the fourteen bird houses within the park. I’ve met him before. He’s a friendly, cheerful man who can be seen regularly peeking into the birdhouses and then jotting something in a small notebook. I called out to him, “Are you counting baby birds today?” “Yes,” he replied and strolled over to chat with me.

Bill counts birds once a week. He showed me some of the annotations in his notebook. “BB” stands for blue bird. The annotation “4 E” means four eggs were inside the nest. “BS” stands for barn swallow, and “5 F” means there were 5 feathered baby birds in the nest. So



Five baby barn swallows eager for their next meal.

far this year the park has been the nursery for about 30 baby bluebirds and over 50 baby barn swallows. That’s pretty good, Bill says. The data he collects is sent to a university out East that keeps track of the bird population east of the Mississippi River.

I admire people like Bill who volunteer their time for worthy causes. My sister, Mary Ann,

sometimes volunteers at her local animal shelter where she walks dogs. I’ve gone with her. It’s amazing how eager the dogs are to go outside. They constantly pull on the leash and enthusiastically sniff everything in sight—grass, bushes, trees, me!

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I’ll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we’re all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Sometimes the dogs can be too big or too rambunctious for my sister to handle. So she drags her 6' 2" teenage

grandson along to help with these. On rainy days my sister stays inside and plays with the cats who reward her kindness with their lavish purrs.

My cousin, Ron, volunteers once a week at a local hospital near Atlanta where he wheels patients hither and yon all day long. A retired executive of a major company, Ron says, "Volunteering in a hospital is something I've always wanted to do." I know other people who volunteer by feeding the homeless, writing to prisoners, tutoring kids, fighting fires, answering the phone at the women's shelter, delivering meals to the homebound, or by cleaning their church each week. The husband of a friend does odd jobs and minor repairs for two elderly widows in his neighborhood. And how many grandparents are caring for their grandkids on a regular basis? You see them everywhere—in parks, at the zoo, in restaurants, at the movies, and at ice-cream stands.

If you think volunteers aren't important to society, then just answer these questions:

- * Who runs the parent-teacher organizations in our schools?
- * Who serves on high school and college boards?
- * Who works to preserve national landmarks?
- * Who coaches youth sports teams?



- * Who leads Scout Troops and 4-H clubs?
- * Who donates blood?
- * Who passes out political flyers or works the polls on election day?

In the U.S. alone over 62 million people volunteered at least once last year. That's one-fifth of the U.S. population donating over 8 billion hours to some worthy cause. This volunteering is valued conservatively at \$173 billion dollars!



A volunteer gives comfort at an animal rescue shelter.

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The Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio, belong to an international congregation of more than two thousand apostolic women religious. We are one in mind and one in heart for the transformation of the world in Christ.



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Volunteering is a Biblical thing to do. Moses volunteered (albeit reluctantly) to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. Ruth volunteered generously to go with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. Isaiah volunteered eagerly to become God's prophet. Mary volunteered whole-heartedly to become the mother of Jesus. The Good Samaritan volunteered compassionately to help the man lying on the side of the road. And in one way (of course!) we can call Jesus the volunteer *par excellence!*

Volunteering tends to keep a low profile. But the magnitude and diversity of volunteering is quite amazing. You probably cross paths with volunteers every day no matter where you are in the world. Be mindful of any you run into today. Who knows? You may even meet one in the park counting baby birds!

Are you a volunteer? If so, why do you do it?

Who are some volunteers you run into regularly?

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Kathleen Magiera August 18, 2014 at 5:25 am



Sr. Melannie,

Good week to ask me these questions.

I volunteered to help coordinate our week long Bible Camp for 5 parishes in our rural area last week. We had 50 campers and 27 adults attend. It was amazing ! Thank you for all your prayers.

Volunteering helps me keep in touch with the real world and allows me to show God's love.

Kathleen

REPLY

Therese August 18, 2014 at 9:31 am



I am one of hundreds of people who bring the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to people who are incarcerated in jails and prisons. As with all volunteer work, the experience benefits the giver as well as the receiver.

Therese

REPLY

mary james August 18, 2014 at 9:56 am



Once again an gem. Where would the Sisters of Notre Dame be without "zillions" of volunteers? I specifically thank all those who volunteer to help tutor adults to gain literacy and perhaps a GED. All are welcome, too 😊 if you love and respect the poor. God bless volunteers!

REPLY

Sister Miriam August 18, 2014 at 10:16 am



In high school I had a part-time job working with children in an institution and got paid for 2 years. However, once I graduated and got a full time job my heart was still with the children and then I volunteer longer hours for 4 years until I moved. Volunteering is the most rewarding type of job.

REPLY

anita c August 18, 2014 at 11:22 am



Great topic Sister! This summer I became an adorer at a perpetual eucharistic chapel. I'm usually alone during my designated time there. The hour of silence spent weekly with our Lord has brought unforeseen peace and joy. It's a win-win definitely!

REPLY

Mary Rita Marra August 18, 2014 at 11:49 am

Thanks melannie for all you do. I also volunteer in our health care and assist the elderly with trips, parties and other activities. It is so rewarding and I love it!



REPLY

Patti August 18, 2014 at 1:04 pm



Truly a rewarding gift of 'paying it forward'!! I've volunteered at church for 37 years... Now teaching the 'kids of my former kids!' Doesn't get better than that..

REPLY

Peggy Svoboda August 18, 2014 at 4:51 pm



Since I retired, I've done volunteer work at my parish, starting with the church library, then with our senior outreach programs, and now in the choir, helping hands and prayer shawl ministries. Our parish also does an annual outreach weekend, and I've helped with that, too. I enjoy being able to give to others, and have met many wonderful people.

REPLY

bozo August 18, 2014 at 5:00 pm



I've been doing volunteer work at hospitals since 1988...it's humbling and a reminder of the myriad things I have to be grateful for!! Praise God!

REPLY

Jean Shott August 18, 2014 at 7:45 pm



I volunteer as a Eucharistic Minister at our parish, and go to visit the local hospice to bring communion. In younger days, I worked as a youth group leader. I have always gotten more than I have given. Working with the teens was always challenging, but I was able to go to 3 World Youth Days because of it!

REPLY

Penny Finley August 21, 2014 at 6:50 pm



Delivering meals on wheels to shut-ins is one of my favorite volunteer joys!
What a rewarding time spent; bringing food to those in need. For me it's the next best thing to bringing the Eucharist to the homebound.

REPLY

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