



VOLUNTARY SERVICE, GRATUITOUSNESS, HUMILITY

In general a volunteer is a person who performs a free activity for the benefit of those who are in needs both as individuals and as a group.

Volunteurope (International Organisation of European Volunteers) defines as a volunteer a person who does not receive any salary, who carries out his action within an organizational context, and whose actions have a social purpose. It is important to emphasise the not economic remuneration for the services of the volunteer together with the necessity of an organisational and coordinated context.

It has been written a lot about the volunteer and his ethics.

Pr. Luisa Ancín (Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid) underlines the alternative position of the volunteer in comparison with the consumer mentality, taking more into account the importance of the "being" than the "having". It's like a cry of brotherhood against the criterion of profitability and technology that generates poverty and marginalisation. Being a volunteer means to be sensitive before what happens in his environment, indeed not only for himself, but in cooperation and coordination with the social and religious professionals and with the community, especially in the case of the believer who must regard himself as being sent by his local or universal church. Sent = Missionary.

Carmen Fures, Director of Barcelona's Voluntary service states that "some deficiencies can be dealt with money (food, clothing, hygiene etc ...), and that is fine; however there are other needs that can only be attended through a free and fraternal approach. You cannot bargain when you offer friendship, support and understanding, or when you attend to someone with love and affection. These needs are more important to me than the lack of food, clothes, money".

The social voluntary works within a coordinated association, formed by people who have freely chosen to provide their services to different social institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, childhood centres, centres for physically or mentally disabled patients, etc. The volunteers work in collaboration with the staff of these institutions to improve the care of the patients and their families with attention to their different fundamental needs, as physical, social or spiritual ones.

Some of the volunteers will be appointed to be responsible for organizing and coordinating the association. They look after the selection of suitable candidates for the voluntary service, and they are responsible to offer them a proper and complete training.

There will be a regular supervision of the concrete actions proposed. In addition, they will be in touch with the professionals of the centre to provide the best possible service.

The voluntary service has always existed as a "human" response to suffering, marginalization, and poverty that, unfortunately, have always been present in the world.

Why the voluntary service?

- Because the industrial civilisation and the agglomeration of people in big cities have contributed to increase the cases of isolation, loneliness, anguish, worry, depression, stress etc.
- Because the professional must obtain some benefit from his work and cannot stop to act as a friend, while the volunteer can. This is his specificity it is a faster and more flexible and independent job. It is made for that.
- Because there are many activities that only a volunteer can do.
- Because the task of the volunteer is to offer companionship, closeness, understanding, affection, friendship. These things do not have an economic value, however, they can only be



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carried out by those who possess them. The volunteer must be open to the person whom they accompany in whatever service he is asked to do.

- Because the volunteer may find out deficiencies in the system; those must be reported to whom they are accountable to, and in doing so they will help to promote a better service.
- Because it will always be a service to the person in need, although in each case the function can be different, focused on welfare, promotion, advocacy, etc..
- Because unfortunately there will always be problems such as loneliness or anguish, which will never be solved by official or private institutions, nor through remunerated performances.
- For these and other reasons it is necessary to provide support and assistance to people who, because of age, illness, misfortune or lack of means and recourses are alone, marginated and without anybody's help.

What a volunteer is not

- He is not manpower at low cost. It would be easy to fall into the error of remunerating the service provided by the volunteer so that their work save obvious and necessary jobs. This would be totally unfair because the volunteer would receive a small retribution and the opportunity to get a job would be taken away from people who have been waiting for it.
- He does not "replace" a professional nor intrudes into his activities. The volunteer shouldn't do the work on behalf of professionals. On the contrary, it would be important that all jobs were adequately assigned to regular employees. It is necessary that we all claim for it.
- The goal of the volunteer cannot be to obtain personal merits to secure a job within the institution.
- The volunteer cannot be a maverick who does his job according to his taste and his whims. Instead he will have to follow the leader's instructions.
- The volunteer will not accept a financial reward for the services provided and he shall notify the responsible in case he receives any gift.
- The service provided will never be a hobby to occupy his free time, or an escape from his personal problems, nor a way to soothe his conscience.

Who is a volunteer?

A volunteer is a person who sees and experiences the world's problems, knowing that there are people who are suffering, and he generously decides to do what is within his power to help them.

To do more than just fulfilling his personal duties, the volunteer devotes part of his time, on a regular basis and selflessly, in activities not for his own profit but for the benefit of others, according to a project that does not end in the intervention itself, but that wants to eliminate or modify the causes that originate the need and social marginalisation.

Being a volunteer is a form of being in the society he belongs to and he wants to contribute to form it. In other words, solidarity is not an optional choice, but an obligation, a fundamental duty of the human being.

Who can be a volunteer?

Any person who has a responsible attitude in providing his services and availability for a specific purpose, who is integrated into an organization and who shares its objectives and commitments without any external constraint.

There are many virtues that the volunteer must possess but we will focus on those two that are essential to provide a good service: those are **gratuitousness and humility**. St. Camillus



excelled in these virtues and Jesus has hinted at them on many occasions in the gospel: "*give freely what you have received freely*". Mt 10:8).

Gratuitousness

Gratuitousness is a personal attitude, it means giving without expecting anything in return. Humanly speaking it could appear as a contradiction: to give money, to give time (this is even more difficult), but especially to give oneself without expecting any reward.

This interior attitude produces the effect that personal life be a constant gift to others, a gift that starts from the dialogue and the availability and that, as a gift, does not require any material reward, not even intellectual, nor of any other type.

With no doubt, the experience shows that we were created in order to give and to receive, we are happy when we give, even if we are not aware of the fact that such things happen because first of all we receive the good we do.

Cannot that be a self-interested giving? No, because the person who gives gratuitously, if she operates righteously, will experience the satisfaction of having done good. On the contrary, for those persons who are shut to transcendence, the words of Jesus: "*There is more happiness in giving than in receiving*" (Act 20:35) make no sense.

Gratuitousness is a sign of transcendence from human nature. Giving finds its origin from self-giving to others. And without the gift of oneself- whatever the gift – even if it is supposed to be gratuitous, can be manipulated by the one who offers it.

Benedict XVI speaks ten times of gratuitousness in his third encyclical letter (*Caritas in veritate, June 29 2009*). The Bible shows how it was God who moved with love towards the people, manifesting His love through Jesus Christ ("Mercy" – or a heart open to misery). For this reason we, Christians, speak of "grace", which is what God gives us "gratuitously". The saints like St. Camillus have given abundantly. Today remains the habit of thanking using the expression "thank God!", especially when we receive something we do not deserve, or simply as a sign of politeness for receiving whatever small favor.

In his last encyclical letter Benedict XVI tells us that everything we possess (starting by the ability to know the truth and to love the good) is a gift of God that we have to manifest, giving ourselves to others: "*God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good, because he is our All, our greatest hope.*" (*Caritas in veritate* n. 78) corresponding to the gratuitousness of God who desires also our generosity to contribute to the unity and communion of human kind.

Both charity and truth are therefore gifts God grants and not the result of human efforts. Even if we think we are able to determine our person by ourselves, in practice we can do it, but only collaborating with God.

Gratuitousness is to convert one's life in gift, service, dialogue, communion and participation.

We shall be "gratuitous" when, animated by the Word Himself, we shall transform our person in a gift for every being that we shall meet in our journey.

We cannot turn our back to a needy person who asks for our help or attention. (see the Parable of the Good Samaritan).

Therefore the root of gratuitousness is love from the side of the one who gives and the one who receives. Gratuitousness originates from love and leads to love. Therefore it constitutes a value and allows us to attain the high ideal of unity. However the loving attitude can require renunciation. To achieve the attitude of unselfishness, a long and hard training is required. Through gratuitousness we obtain the capacity to create relationships of reciprocity. We have to cultivate such a capacity.

Humility



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Humility is not a concept, it is a conduct, a way of being, a form of life. It is one of the most noble virtues of the spirit. The persons who are not humble do not possess the necessary basis to make progress along the path of personal accomplishment.

To be humble does not mean to be weak; but on the contrary, the humble are people of great strength; in the same way, to be superb does not mean to be strong.

Humility is the virtue that allows us to free us from our imperfections so that the Lord can improve our inwardness and deposit his gifts in it.

At times we should ask ourselves if we really want to live this virtue that Jesus so depicted: *“Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart”*. (Mt 11:29)

Our abuses, preoccupations, fits of anger, our quarrels generally originate from a pursuit of glory for ourselves, of being comfortable, of receiving compliments, of being recognized as better than others. This is what was usually called “vainglory”, because when a person seeks for her self-glory, at the end she finds herself wounded and in conflict with herself and the others.

The proud man, who is the opposite of the humble, is the one who wants to do everything correctly, and if he does not succeed, he gets angry and disgusted, he does not accept the defeat, to have limits as part of his own life nor of the one of the others; because of that he judges, condemns, criticizes, excludes, he gets angry, damages the others and himself, upsets himself and the others.

Who owns humility owns also many other virtues, provided that it is the door through which many other virtues come in, such as modesty, meekness, patience, prudence, faith, hope, bounty.

Humility is a sign of spiritual progress. The humble is a person who has polished many of his impurities and imperfections.

We should ask the Lord to teach us to have a heart like His, that values and seeks the virtue of humility, knowing that it is not a virtue imposed on us, but an attitude we have freely decided to acquire in life: to be servers, as Jesus did (*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.”* Mk 10:45) and thus to remain behind the others. Thus we think that the greatest prize is not people’s applause but the Lord’s, and that the reward is not the one people can give us for what we do, but the one we already receive here on earth and that we hope to receive in heaven.

In this time, in which the care of our own image, the success, the comfort, are almost obsessive, it can be difficult to remember that the best things are the most silent ones, those less recalling the attention, but being present in our life and have God as our spectator.

The benefits of humility

1. Who learns to be really humble succeeds in living a happier life.
2. To be in harmony with oneself means to be ready to show love and appreciation towards other people. To value ourselves entails to value others.
3. Humility creates serenity, tranquility and tolerance.
4. With humility one develops the ability to admit errors, since he eliminates the fears of being told that it is worth nothing. Once we know that, the eventual criticism will be turn into an opportunity of growth.
5. Through humility it is easy to forgive others rapidly.
6. To be humble means to appreciate what we have, being aware of the fact that everything is a gift.

Let us be helped by some expressions of the Word of God:



1 Cor 1:26-31

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.””

1 Cor 4:7-9

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? “

[Those who attribute to God all that they have received do not want to be praised by others, rather they only seek the glory that comes from God and they want that God be glorified for that." Thomas Kempis.]

Let's dialogue

As Christians and as members of the LCF what does mean for you your commitment towards gratuitousness and humility?

Biblical reading

Mt 10:7-8

"And as you go, preach, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.”

Lk 14, 7-14

"And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. “But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Let's reflect

- When is our life gratuitousness and gratefulness?
- How is gratuitousness granted in your daily living?
- To what extent is your faith a symbol of gratuitousness?
- Where do you learn to share? How do we share our life?



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- If we can, count the gifts that we receive every day.
- What do we own that we haven't received? (1Cor 4:7)
- Let us give back for free what we have received for free. (Mt 10:8)

From St. Camillus' life.

St. Camillus is for us a model of many virtues: self-denial, strength, determination, generosity, justice, charity, and certainly humility. He was so humble that he received the name of Brother Humble. This happened, as tells us Cicutelli, when Father Montefiore accepted him in the Capuchin order and sent him to Triveneto to begin his novitiate. As a novice (knowing that he was ignorant and wanting to serve God in simplicity) he was happy enough to be a lay brother, and gave up to priesthood. Because of his obedience and humility, after a few months, they gave him the name of Brother Humble.

Talking about gratitude and generosity, it is difficult to choose one aspect of his life since he was all generosity, abnegation and love for the less fortunate.

In 1590 in Rome began a severe famine that killed more than 60,000 people because of cold and hunger. Camillus was consumed by grief seeing the poor dying of hunger and cold. He ordered that in the house was prepared a large pot of rice, beans and vegetables, which he then gave to the poor who were in the courtyard, along with a piece of bread and a cup of wine; he considered those things sufficient so that they wouldn't die of starvation on that day. Before leaving them, he would wash the needy, shave them and change their rags with second-hand clothes (but in good condition) that he had in store.

Let's look at our life

We can ask ourselves : Is our life and service towards others inspired and moved by love,