

Volunteering: To give freely



The month of August is, for many, the opportunity to step back from the day-to-day routine and take a break. In our post-pandemic world holidays are now back on track even if the cost-of-living crisis means a 'staycation'. We have regained our freedom to roam. For children in particular there is much to be said for learning more about our local environment, with fun to be had during days out, perhaps with grandparents and friends stepping in to share the juggle of childcare needs. School holidays often mean relatives, friends and neighbours all joining together, giving voluntarily of time and energy to ensure that children are kept fruitfully occupied and engaged, ensuring that the journey of learning never really stops. Indeed, childcare costs, even with government support, is a big item for many family budgets with now more than ever before over the last two decades, parents turning to their parents for help when it comes to looking after children. 82% Of all grandparents now spend some time helping to look after their grandchildren, contributing an estimated £6.8 billion to the economy. So, a BIG Thank You to everyone helping to look after children this school holiday.

A founding principle of Christian faith is that God gives of himself voluntarily in love to humanity. The whole history of Christian faith is focused on God going out of his way to step in to save men and women from themselves when they

fail to love properly - often catastrophically so. This theological understanding centres on following the example of Jesus in serving others and has been a founding principle of much of our modern-day voluntary sector movement. *'I help to look after my grandchildren, not because I always want to, but because I believe it is the right thing to do. If I believe that God first loved me then it is my Christian duty to love others and where better to start than with my grandchildren.'*

July saw village fairs taking place across our communities. Hardworking committees, made up solely of volunteers, pulled together to celebrate the best of who we are and in doing so helped to raise thousands of pounds for those institutions and charities on which we all rely. Without this activity, much of the social and built fabric of our villages would quickly fall into a state of neglect. Our local schools, village halls and our ancient churches are all dependent upon the goodwill and generosity of what is given freely, not just in terms of maintaining bricks and mortar but equally in terms of sustaining relationships and community cohesion. August brings a time of much-earned rest for this group of volunteers. And another BIG Thank You from all of us to them.

A consequence of the COVID pandemic has been to see a dramatic decline in volunteering of all kinds. Some estimates put this at up to fifty per cent, with many not rushing back to pick up on commitments they previously undertook. If the summer holiday period means you are having a think about the possibility of volunteering, rest assured you are needed! The benefits can be hugely rewarding not least for mental health and wellbeing. If you are not sure where to start... You might like to ask if you can help by listening to children read in one of your local schools...

Revd Mark Bailey