

Serving in our communities

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In the information age, we are growing more and more self-sustained. With our own computers, telephones, and cars, we live in independent, detached societies.

Still, there are those who need our help, those who cannot fend for themselves, cannot drive themselves to the doctor's office, and cannot make their own phone calls. As Christians, we are called to serve those who cannot help themselves, and one of the best preparations for that challenge is community service in young adulthood. High schools should retain student volunteer requirements because these hours of service prepare the next generation to strengthen their communities. Performing community service hours opens high schoolers' hearts to others' needs. Communities have ups and downs and volunteering deepens people's relationships with each other, preparing them for harder times to come. The Dalton School, a private high school, understands this and in their community service mission statement they express volunteering as "The moral center of a community.

"In fortifying an individual's selfless character and establishing "empathy, compassion, and caring" in young people, volunteering fosters unselfish giving in the next generation. The Willie Grothman club in Virginia further emphasizes this; the high school student-run club organizes community outreach programs to help those in need. Club members do not receive any monetary gain; they are simply teaching themselves to reach out to their community. Since they are beginning young and strengthening unselfish characters, this volunteering is priceless as it opens the door to Christ-like behavior and allows individuals to accept each other. In addition to opening students' hearts, volunteering opens their minds to selfless professions like

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law enforcement, fire-fighting, and nursing. Altruism is an acquired taste that must be introduced at a young age to be appreciated as an adult; thirteen-year-old John Prueter's story exemplifies this.

According to the Detroit News, he regularly volunteers at a near-by nursing home and “ Even after high school, Prueter hopes to continue working with the elderly”; this generosity originates by beginning volunteer work at a young age. Had he not begun helping at such a young age, it is very unlikely that Prueter would have sought employment in nursing the elderly. The same is true for many other students: If they do not start young, it is doubtful that they will start at all. We desperately need our nurses, soldiers, and policemen, and encouraging high school volunteerism can jumpstart those selfless careers, leading to an increase in their numbers. Some – like Arthur Stukas, a writer for Psychological Science, – believe that community service “ can have a negative effect” and discourage adult community service, but this consequence is far outweighed by the gains.

When a student accepts his volunteer hours and develops a caring, compassionate moral core, the community gains a priceless participant. On the other hand, when a teenager resents his community service and refuses to complete any after high school, the community has lost nothing. Since he begrudged his initial participation, the community loses nothing when he drops out of the volunteer forces. The gain of the contributor outweighs the risk of losing an unhappy giver. Furthermore, volunteering expands students' horizons and fosters the acceptance of different backgrounds. I experienced this in late middle school.

My family lives in a secluded area, miles away from anyone my near age. In an attempt to involve me in activities outside the home, my mother decided to register me in a local historical society. I was the youngest member by decades. Initially, I resented this, but as my parents coerced me into participating in more historical society outreaches and community assistance, I became open to working with people of different ages and racial histories. In a world brimming over with diverse languages, cultures, and races, we must learn to embrace differences with the loving arms of Christ.

Few things accomplish this more effectively than youth volunteerism.

Emphasizing our century's self-absorption, a song on Christian radio states: "We've got information in the information age/But do we know what life is/Outside of our convenient Lexus cages?" With our own bedrooms, our own bathrooms, our own worlds, we are growing farther and farther away from each other. Jesus calls us to be servants to each other, so we must venture outside of our comfort zones to strengthen our communities. This begins in youth so we can follow through in adulthood. Thus, schools should retain their volunteer requirements to create a more Christ like, selfless future in America.