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# Volunteers in the Service of the Gospel

**Abstract:** Volunteering in pastoral care is not simply an optional activity; it is a vital expression of the Church's missionary nature and the corresponsibility of all the baptized. Although volunteering has its limits – conditioned by personal motivation, availability of time, and the environment – it also offers unique and irreplaceable opportunities for joy, evangelization, community building, and effective pastoral outreach. The development of a supportive environment, intentional accompaniment, and the fostering of authentic missionary conversion are essential tasks for the Church's leadership at every level. When rightly understood and supported, volunteering becomes a living sign of the Church's journey toward a more synodal, missionary future, where every believer is invited to bear the Gospel to the world.

**Keywords:** volunteering, corresponsibility, motivation, limits, possibilities, mission.

## Introduction

*Evangelii Gaudium*, leaning on the concluding homily of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in 2012, outlines three areas of pastoral care. First is the care for the faithful who live with true and sincere faith; pastoral care is meant to serve them, so that they may respond more deeply to God's love. The second focus is on those who are baptized but do not live according to their baptism and do not feel themselves to be part of the Church. Finally, pastoral care must also include proclaiming Christ to those who have never heard of Him or have rejected Him[1].

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1 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, Vatican City 2013, §14.

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The Church assumes responsibility for this threefold mission in response to Jesus' promise and commissioning: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:26-27).

The Holy Spirit works in the Church and helps her overcome the fear that holds her behind closed doors, so that she may seek new paths and renewed methods of pastoral care.

Michel de Certeau expressed that by remaining faithful to this mission, the Church continuously turns back to God. To be "missionary", he writes, means that the Church speaks to new generations, to foreign cultures, and to emerging human desires, saying, "I miss you" – not as a landowner covets his neighbour's field, but as someone in love. When the Church is called "Catholic", she is defined by the bond between God's uniqueness and the plurality of human experience. This calling compels her to continually turn toward God by turning toward new cultural contexts, new histories, and people who have yet to encounter God's revelation[2].

In the following pages, we will focus on pastoral labourers, on those individuals that are called to bring the good news. Among numerous agents of pastoral care, we will give special attention to volunteers – those individuals who serve in their free time without expectation of material reward.

In general, this text seeks to contribute to the ongoing reflection on the role of volunteers, in the above-mentioned meaning, in pastoral care, especially within the context of the Church's common mission. In the first section, drawing from Scripture and Church teaching, we will explore the roots of the invitation to shared responsibility. The second section presents responses and interpretations from our survey titled *Volunteering in the Service of the Gospel*. The third section reflects on the elements that support – or hinder – pastoral volunteering. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the limits and opportunities of pastoral volunteering in the service of the Church's shared mission.

## 1. Volunteering in the Context of Shared Responsibility

Pastoral care takes place according to different age groups, in different contexts, spaces and in very diverse ways.

Followed Jesus promise in the Gospel of John, we see in the Acts of the Apostles, Holy Spirit took decisive role in the spreading the Gospel (Acts 8:29, 10:19-20, 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6-7).

Among the human labourers, the great commission was first addressed to the apostles: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15) and was then passed on their successors and their collaborators. As we will see later, the invitation goes to all members of the mystical body of Christ.

[2] M. de Certeau, *Glaubens Schwachheit [The Weakness of Faith]*, ed. G. Greshake, J. Werbick, Stuttgart 2009, p. 105.

Among individuals, there are those who proclaim the Gospel and live by it, be it as full-time or part-time employment, and then there are those who create or collaborate in creating pastoral opportunities without material recompense in different circumstances and extent. Our attention is focused on this second group.

We would like to start with question: „Why should they, in addition to caring for their own livelihood or their families, dedicate effort and time to the field of pastoral care?" In this group, an important motivational factor – material reward – falls away. Therefore, it is crucial to seek the true sources of their motivation. In doing so, we will reflect on two passages from the New Testament.

Matthew 25:31-46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will separate the sheep from the goats and say, 'Whatever you have done to one of these, my least brothers, you have done to me'".

This pericope connects service to the needy with service to Christ himself. At the core of pastoral volunteering lies not only the goodwill of the individual but also the sense of responsibility for which one will one day be held accountable by the King who will come in his glory and gather all nations before Him.

In this parable, Jesus speaks about his "least brothers". Traditionally, this has been understood to refer to people in material need – those who are dirty, hungry, homeless, sick in hospitals, or imprisoned. However, some commentaries suggest that Christ's "least brothers" are His messengers, those He entrusted with the Gospel to carry it to the entire world.

Manuel Siebel explains that Jesus refers to those who do the will of His Father as His brothers, sisters, and mothers (cf. Matthew 12:49)[3]. Later, He calls His disciples brothers (cf. Matthew 23:8), meaning that those who fulfil His will are bound closely not only to Jesus but also to one another. Siebel also points to Psalm 22:23, where shared responsibility for proclaiming the Lord's name among the brothers is expressed. He continues, explaining that before the end of the world, the Gospel will be proclaimed across the earth, despite many sufferings, through His disciples (cf. Matthew 24:9-14), whom He had already called His brothers.

Similarly, Samuel Prod'hom, in his commentary, states that besides the nations present at the final judgment, another group – the "least brothers" of the Lord – will also be present. These are the messengers who proclaim the Gospel to the nations that, during the present age, have not yet heard the Good News[4].

Thirdly, William Kelly notes that before the glorious throne, the decisive question will be the attitude that people held toward those whom the King called His brothers. The nations will be judged according to how they received the testimony brought by these messengers[5].

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[3] M. Seibel, *Jesus Christ – More Than a King: An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew*, Wiehl 2025, p. 955.

[4] S. Prod'hom, *The Promised King and His Kingdom*, https://www.bibelkommentare.de/kommentare/k-3509/der-verheissene-koenig-und-sein-reich/kapitel-25 (Accessed: April 19, 2025).

[5] W. Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Gospels: Matthew*, Winschoten 1970 (online reprint 2015), p. 143.

On one side are the Lord's brothers, who are willing to fulfil the Father's will and bring the message of the Kingdom to the whole world despite obstacles. On the other side are the nations, which bear the responsibility to make the sharing of the Good News possible. This corresponsibility is so decisive that it determines eternal fate (cf. Matthew 25:46).

From this first pericope, we see that it is not important whether one is paid for their work or volunteers freely. The motivation to bring the Gospel to the whole world, even amid obstacles, comes from the willingness to fulfil the will of God and become a brother, sister, or mother to the Lord.

## 2. Volunteering as a Fruit of Shared Responsibility (1 Corinthians 12)

The willingness to fulfil the will of the Father and the one He has sent comes from faith – faith that Jesus shares the same divine nature as the Father. This faith is the entrance gate for the Holy Spirit. "No one can say, ˊJesus is Lordˋ, except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). This confession itself is already a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His power, which is revealed through various gifts.

The decisive element among the faithful is precisely His presence[6]. The Holy Spirit creates one body out of the faithful and distributes the gifts among them according to His will (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13).

The analogy of the body deserves attention because it shows that the faithful need one another and complement each other – just as, in a physical body, each organ has its own function and importance for the whole. Similarly, in the community of believers, there are different gifts, but all are necessary for the common good (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7). Just as the heart without the lungs would not be sufficient, so too the apostles could not fulfil their mission without the prophets.

Even today, there remains the temptation to consider some members as more important than others. William Kelly points out that such solidarity among the faithful was not self-evident. He observes that the early Christians were often full of human ideas: their attention was focused on impressive individuals – for instance, intelligent Jews or capable pagans – and they forgot that it was God Himself working and acting among them[7].

From this short reflection on Holy Scripture, it follows that the driving force behind investing time, talents, or energy should not be financial benefit, but rather the shared responsibility that comes from faith in Jesus as Lord and from being incorporated into His body through the Holy Spirit. Each person is a part of Christ's body and complements the whole according to their own function and task – a crucial contribution to the health of the entire community.

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6 J.N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Considerations on 1 Corinthians*, https://www.bibelkommentare.de/get/cmt.164.pdf, 32 (Accessed: April 19, 2025).

7 W. Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle: 1 Corinthians*, trans. J. Das, Winschoten 1970, p. 27.

This responsibility has two dimensions: On one hand, each member of the body is responsible for the health of the whole. On the other hand, the whole-body bears responsibility for each of its parts.

In the context of Catholic ecclesiology, we recognize that the Church is not only a spiritual communion but also a visible and structured community. Therefore, it is important to ask: What space does the authority of the Church create for individuals who are willing to contribute to the shared mission?

### 3. The Calling of the Church

The call for all the baptized to take up shared responsibility for the Church's common mission has been clear since the Second Vatican Council. Documents such as *Lumen Gentium* (§33), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI, and *Christifideles Laici* by John Paul II strongly affirm that every faithful Christian is called to work in the Lord's vineyard. To be a Christian means to be a missionary and an apostle[8].

Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in 2010 and convened an Assembly of Bishops dedicated to the theme of the New Evangelization. Pope Francis made this calling one of the key themes of his pontificate, especially through the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the reform of Church structures toward greater missionary conversion, and through the Synodal process[9] and further reforms now being implemented. Thus, over the past decades, the Church's call to shared responsibility has been renewed again and again, taking on new forms and expressions.

The final document of the Synod of Bishops of 2024 reminds us that the Church exists to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ[10]. It calls all the faithful, according to their circumstances, capabilities, and charisms, to respond to

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8 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici: Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, Trnava 1989, §3.

9 Due to limitation of the present text, it is not possible to enter into discussion on the Synodal process here, but brief orientation for the further readings. The theological departing point is the study of Internation theological Commission: Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, available on: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html. Further current authors that write on the topic are: R. Luciani, *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church*, trans. J. Owens, Mahwah, NJ 2024. On page 29, Luciani states that the synodality is not a reform project bud new modus operandi of the whole Church and it is a consequence of the Vatican II. The importance of the current process underlines C. Theobald SJ in his book: *A Council by Another Name? The Synod on Synodality and What Comes Next*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 2025. Christoph Theobald he calls the Synodal Process a council that does call itself as such, he calls synodality as a lab of creative fidelity. Thirdly, S. Noceti, *Reforming the Church: A Synodal Way of Proceeding*, Mahwah (NJ): Paulist Press 2024. She reflects on the pathways to renewed ministries, co-responsibility vs. Clericalims, reforming structures and concludes with a chapter on an ongoing synodal spirituality.

10 Catholic Church, *Final Document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: For a Synodal Church – Communion, Participation, Mission*, Vatican City 2024, §14-§84.

the missionary mandate: sharing the testimony of Christ's resurrection within their own environments. The faithful are empowered through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given for the common good, and through attentive listening to the Spirit.

The Synod outlines important steps for discernment: clarity regarding the object of discernment, prayer, listening to the Holy Scriptures, reflection marked by interior freedom from personal preferences, respectful listening to others, and seeking the good of the whole.

From this listening to the Holy Spirit flows the commitment to employ all talents with humility, creativity, and initiative in the service of God's Kingdom. Creativity leads the people of God to discover new times, new spaces, and new opportunities for proclaiming the Good News. Despite the diversity of activities and vocations within the Church, all ecclesial callings are united by a common goal: living out the baptismal vocation to holiness and mission. The Synod emphasizes that every individual bears a personal and irreplaceable contribution to the fulfilment of the Church's common mission. It also calls for shared responsibility to be manifested in leadership positions within the Church.

For better understanding, the Synod uses the image of an orchestra: just as each instrument contributes uniquely to one harmonious melody, so the different vocations and charisms contribute to the unity of the Church. Thus, in a Church that has undergone synodal and missionary conversion, a shared melody arises: the common effort toward holiness and witness.

Maintaining this harmony requires an investment of time, energy, and resources into relational care. The Synod stresses that relational care is not merely a strategy for better organization; rather, it is the very way in which God the Father reveals Himself through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As the Gospel reminds us, relationships are not tools for efficiency but the sacred space where God's presence is revealed[11].

After reflecting on the reasons individuals should contribute to the Church's pastoral mission, grounded in Scripture and Church teaching, we can conclude that pastoral volunteering happens within the context of shared responsibility. This responsibility arises from the believer's intimate union with Jesus, who sends His brothers and sisters into the world, and from the incorporation of all believers into one body through the Holy Spirit. Thus, no member can be separated from the body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:21).

The Church continually reminds the faithful of their vocation to community and participation in the shared mission. At the same time, it is not enough merely to emphasize shared responsibility; there is a danger that the outward work of mission may lose its inner motivation if it becomes detached from personal faith. In guiding volunteers, we must never forget that shared responsibility is the consequence of living faith. Before appealing to duty, we must first lead people effectively to the well of living water (cf. John 4:10).

[11] Ibidem.

## 4. Survey: Volunteering in the Service of the Gospel

The call to shared responsibility, as presented above, is addressed to all the faithful and to all particular churches. However, within the framework of this reflection, it is not possible – due to methodological limits – to analyse the reception of this call across the Universal Church. Therefore, we will continue our reflection by focusing specifically on the context of the particular Church in Slovakia.

The following reflections are not intended as a comprehensive analysis of pastoral volunteering in the Slovak Church, but rather as an impulse for further reflection. Our starting point is the data collected from a survey that was available online from March 30, 2025, to April 6, 2025. We received 299 responses.

It is important to note that, since the survey did not collect information about respondents' towns of origin and was not intentionally distributed across all social groups, the data are not representative of the entire Slovak Church. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the results may offer a snapshot of the situation of the respondents and insight into current trends.

The goal of the survey was to find out: how much free time people have available during the week and on weekends, how much time they currently dedicate to volunteering, and how strongly they feel a sense of responsibility for the Church's common mission.

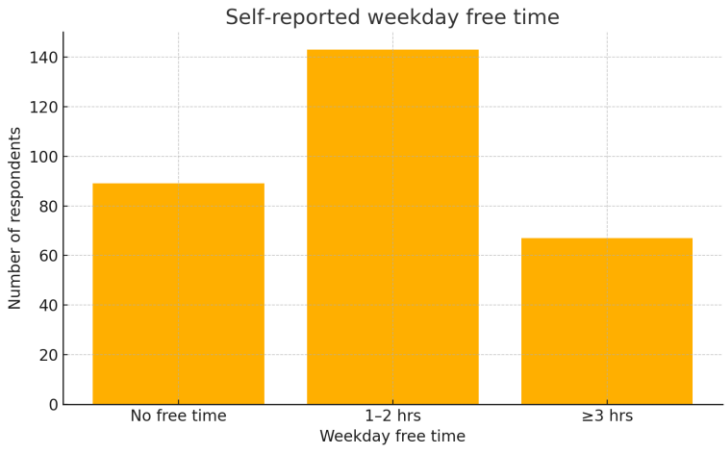
Free time was defined as time that the respondent could freely choose to use without negative consequences. Volunteering was defined as any singular or recurring activity that a person performs without expectation of recompense because they consider it important and want to contribute to it[12]. In another question, respondents were asked, using a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 was the highest), how much responsibility they personally feel for the Church's common mission: to "go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation" (cf. Mark 16:15).

Regarding areas of pastoral volunteering, we offered several options and allowed respondents to select one or more areas of interest or to suggest their own areas. In the section below we present the responses from the survey.

### 4.1. Free time during the week

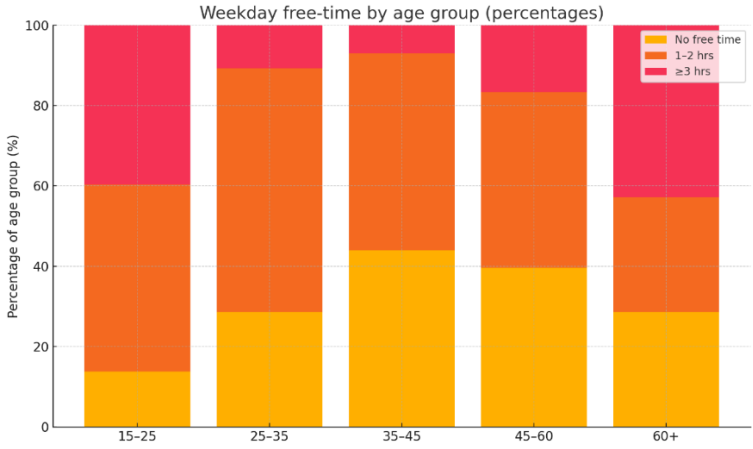
During the survey, the age composition of the 299 respondents was as follows: 116 respondents were aged 15-25 years, 28 respondents were aged 25-35 years, 100 respondents were aged 35-45 years, 48 respondents were aged 45-60 years, and 7 respondents were over 60 years of age. Without distinguishing between age groups, respondents assessed their available free time during workdays as follows (based on their perception): 89 respondents (29.7%) indicated that they had no free time during weekdays, 143 respondents (47.7%) reported having 1-2 hours of free time daily, and 67 respondents (22.6%) reported having more than 3 hours of free time daily.

[12] The definition was inspired in this source and extend by the author: M. Snyder and A.M. Omoto, *Volunteerism: Social Issues Perspectives and Social Policy Implications*, "Social Issues and Policy Review" 2(2008), no. 1, p. 2.




Graph n. 1: Self-reported weekday free time

Analyzed by age group, the distribution was as follows: among those aged 15-25 years, 16 respondents (14%) reported no free time, 54 respondents (46%) reported 1-2 hours of free time, and 46 respondents (40%) reported more than 3 hours. Among those aged 25-35 years, 8 respondents (28.5%) reported no free time, 17 respondents (61%) reported 1-2 hours, and 3 respondents (10.5%) reported more than 3 hours. In the 35-45 age group, 44 respondents (44%) reported no free time, 49 respondents (49%) reported 1-2 hours, and 7 respondents (7%) reported more than 3 hours. Among those aged 45-60 years, 19 respondents (39.5%) reported no free time, 21 respondents (43.75%) reported 1-2 hours, and 8 respondents (16.75%) reported more than 3 hours. Finally, among respondents over 60 years of age, 2 respondents (28.5%) reported no free time, 2 respondents (28.5%) reported 1-2 hours, and 3 respondents (43%) reported more than 3 hours of free time during workdays.




Graph n. 2: Weekday free-time by age group (percentages)

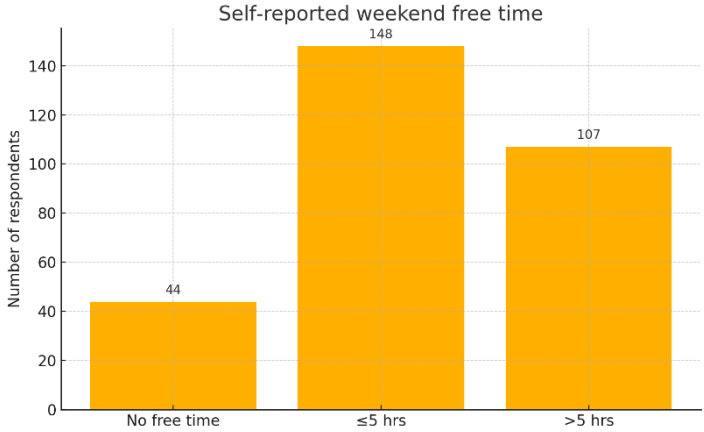
Even though almost one-third of all respondents claimed not to have any free time during the workweek, two-thirds reported that they do have some free time.

The data show that the amount of available free time depends significantly on the age group. In general, younger people have more free time: only 14% of respondents aged 15-25 reported having no free time. In contrast, 44% of people in the productive age group (35-45 years) reported having no free time during the workweek.

Nevertheless, the answers revealed that even among those who do have free time, the amount of time available for volunteer or other discretionary activities remains very limited.

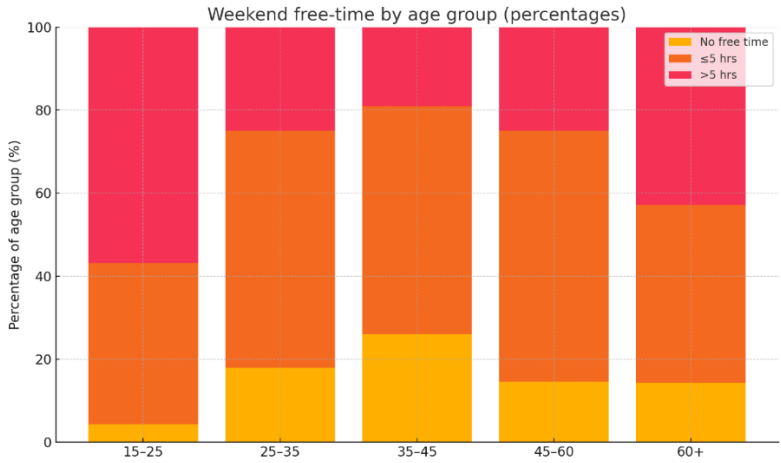
**4.2. Free Time During the Weekend**

Without distinguishing by age, respondents assessed their available free time during the weekend as follows (based on their perception): 44 respondents (14.7%) reported having no free time, 148 respondents (49.5%) reported having up to 5 hours of free time per day, and 107 respondents (35.8%) reported having more than 5 hours of free time per day.




Graph n. 3: Self-reported weekend free time

Analyzed by age group, the distribution was as follows: Among respondents aged 15-25 years (116 respondents), 5 (4.3%) reported no free time, 45 (38.8%) reported up to 5 hours, and 66 (56.9%) reported more than 5 hours of free time. Among respondents aged 25-35 years (28 respondents), 5 (17.9%) reported no free time, 16 (57.1%) reported up to 5 hours, and 7 (25.0%) reported more than 5 hours. Among respondents aged 35-45 years (100 respondents), 26 (26.0%) reported no free time, 55 (55.0%) reported up to 5 hours, and 19 (19.0%) reported more than 5 hours. Among respondents aged 45-60 years (48 respondents), 7 (14.6%) reported no free time, 29 (60.4%) reported up to 5 hours, and 12 (25.0%) reported more than 5 hours. Finally, among respondents over 60 years of age (7 respondents), 1 (14.3%) reported no free time, 3 (42.9%) reported up to 5 hours, and 3 (42.9%) reported more than 5 hours of free time during the weekend.

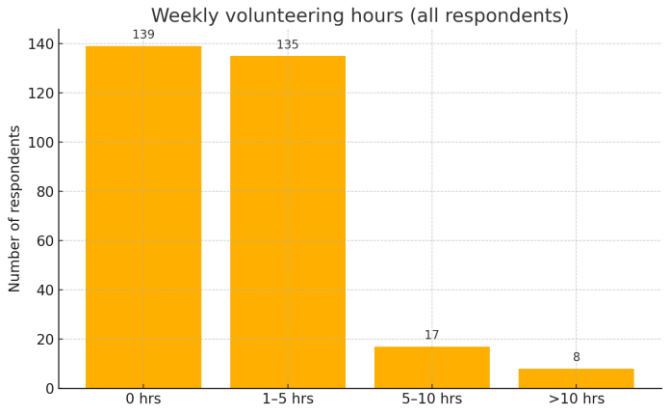



Graph n. 4: Weekend free-time by age group (percentages)

The age groups 15-25 and 60+ have the most available free time during the weekend. Respondents aged 25-35 and 45-60 predominantly reported shorter periods of free time, mostly up to five hours per day. The age group 35-45 experiences the highest time stress, with a significant proportion reporting little or no free time. This distribution forms a U-shaped curve: at the beginning of working life, individuals have relatively more free time, experience the least free time during the middle years, and then gradually regain more free time toward retirement.

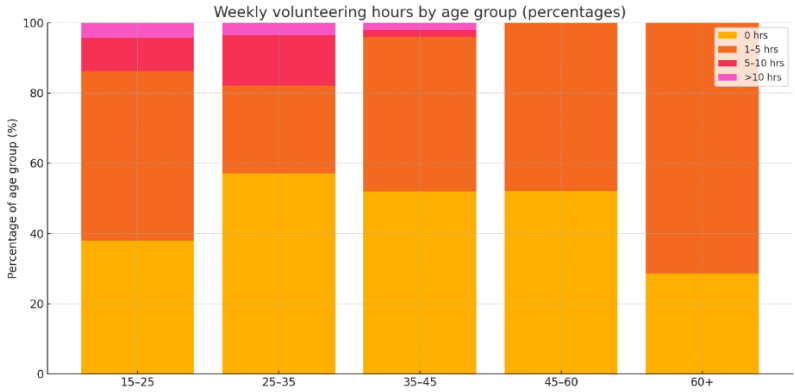
**4.3. Current Involvement in Volunteering**

Without distinguishing by age, respondents indicated how many hours per week they dedicate to volunteering (without specifying the area of volunteering) as follows: 139 respondents (46.5%) reported dedicating 0 hours per week, 135 respondents (45.2%) reported dedicating 1-5 hours per week, 17 respondents (5.7%) reported dedicating 5-10 hours per week, and 8 respondents (2.7%) reported dedicating more than 10 hours per week.




Graph n. 5: Weekly volunteering hours (all respondents)

Analyzed by age group, the distribution was as follows: Among respondents aged 15-25 years (116 respondents), 44 (37.9%) 0 hours, 56 (48.3%) 1-5 hours, 11 (9.5%) 5-10 hours, and 5 (4.3%) more than 10 hours. Among those aged 25-35 years (28 respondents), 16 (57.1%) 0 hours, 7 (25.0%) 1-5 hours, 4 (14.3%) 5-10 hours, and 1 (3.6%) more than 10 hours. Among respondents aged 35-45 years (100 respondents), 52 (52.0%) 0 hours, 44 (44.0%) 1-5 hours, 2 (2.0%) 5-10 hours, and 2 (2.0%) more than 10 hours. Among those aged 45-60 years (48 respondents), 25 (52.1%) 0 hours, 23 (47.9%) 1-5 hours, and none reported more than 5 hours of volunteering per week. Finally, among respondents over 60 years of age (7 respondents), 2 (28.6%) 0 hours and 5 (71.4%) reported 1-5 hours, with no respondents dedicating more than 5 hours per week.




Graph n. 6: Weekly volunteering hours by age group (percentages)

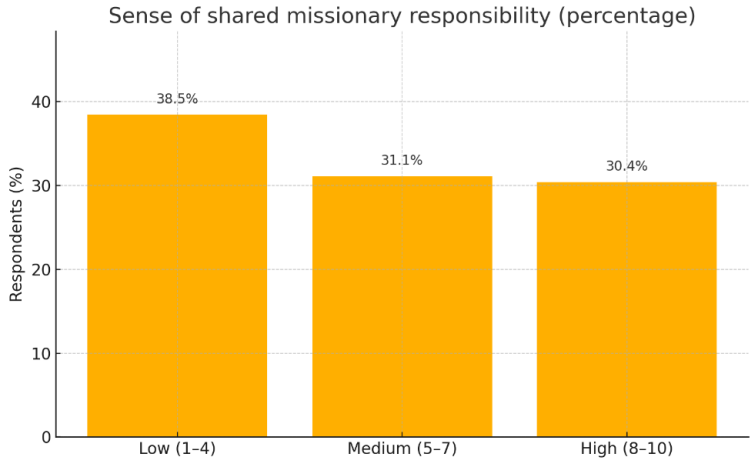
The largest share of respondents reported dedicating only a minimal amount of time to volunteering. The age category 25-35 shows the greatest deviation from the average: between 52% and 57% of respondents in this group reported no involvement in volunteering. This result likely corresponds to the limited amount of free time that respondents in this age group also reported earlier, suggesting a connection between time availability and engagement in volunteer work. Among those volunteering 1-5 hours per week, a notable proportion were seniors. However, it must be noted that there were relatively few seniors among the respondents overall, which calls for careful interpretation of this finding.

The results further show that the groups aged 15-25 and 45-60 do dedicate some amount of time to volunteering efforts. Systematic, regular volunteering – which would typically require at least 5 hours per week – appears to be an exceptional phenomenon among respondents. The age group 15-25 had the highest absolute number of more intensive volunteers: 16 out of 25 respondents who dedicated 5 or more hours per week belonged to this youngest group.

**4.4. Sense of Shared Responsibility for the Church's Missionary Task**

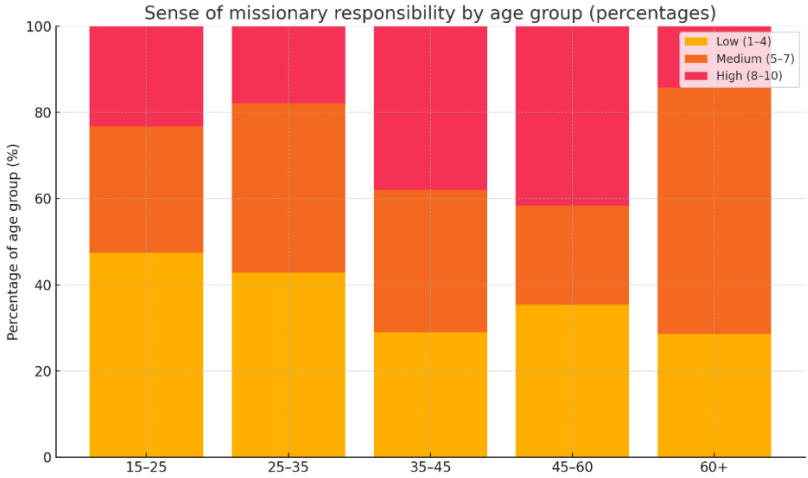
Among all respondents, the perceived sense of shared responsibility for the missionary mission of the Church (rated on a scale where 1-4 = low, 5-7 =

medium, and 8-10 = high) was distributed as follows: Low sense of responsibility: 115 respondents (38.5%), Medium sense: 93 respondents (31.1%), High sense: 91 respondents (30.4%).




Graph n. 7: Sense of shared missionary responsibility (percentages)

Analysed by age group, the results were as follows: Among respondents aged 15-25 years (116 responses), 55 (47.4%) low, 34 (29.3%) medium and 27 (23.3%) high. Among respondents aged 25-35 years (28 responses), 12 (42.9%) low, 11 (39.3%) medium, and 5 (17.9%) high. Among respondents aged 35-45 years (100 responses), 29 (29.0%) low, 33 (33.0%) medium, and 38 (38.0%) high. Among respondents aged 45-60 years (48 responses), 17 (35.4%) low, 11 (22.9%) medium, and 20 (41.7%) high. Among respondents over 60 years of age (7 responses), 2 (28.6%) low, 4 (57.1%) a medium, and 1 (14.3%) high.




Graph n. 8: Sense of shared missionary responsibility by age group (percentages)

### 4.5. Final observations

In our sample, it appears that the highest share of truly engaged volunteers is found among those who have up to five hours of free time during the weekend and at the same time feel a high sense of shared responsibility. Those who have free time but a low sense of responsibility often do not dedicate even an hour to volunteering. It can be said that when a person feels a strong sense of shared responsibility, they manage to fit voluntary activities even into a crowded schedule.

This is demonstrated by the fact that even among those who reported having no free time, 40% of highly motivated individuals still engaged in volunteering (compared to only 6% among those with low motivation).

During the workweek, real time limitations become more evident: only when individuals have more than three hours of free time per day do highly motivated people engage intensively. When highly motivated individuals have time, they almost all engage in volunteering; if they have 1-2 hours of free time, about 50% of them still manage to volunteer.

The data show that when respondents feel a medium or high level of shared responsibility, their engagement in volunteering depends less on the amount of free time available – they manage to find opportunities even within busy schedules.

From the respondents' answers, it can be concluded that inner motivation is the primary trigger for volunteering, while the amount of free time only adjusts how often and how long one engages. If a person is only moderately motivated, the availability of free time becomes critical – without free time, they are unlikely to volunteer. However, if the motivation is strong, free time acts more as an accelerator: with free time, the person participates more, but even without it, they still often find ways to engage.

## 5. Areas of volunteering

After presenting the results of the questionnaire regarding why, how, and to what extent respondents are involved in volunteering, we now turn to reflect on the areas in which they are engaged.

One of the questions in the same questionnaire asked: In which areas of volunteering in the service of the Gospel do you experience greater interest? The available choices included: charitable activities, transmitting the faith, community care, organizational support, family care, youth ministry, music during the Holy Mass, creating media content, and fundraising. There was also an option to suggest additional activities, which 16 respondents used.

Almost half of the respondents (144) chose charitable activities, followed by community care (138), and youth ministry (131). Music ministry was selected by 94 respondents. Lower levels of interest were recorded in family care (84), transmitting the faith (81), organizational support (44), fundraising (26), and creating media content (23).

From the responses, it follows that community care – such as assistance with parish feasts, decorations, and similar activities – and youth ministry rank among

the top priorities for volunteering, alongside charitable activities. Transmitting the faith was chosen by only 27% of respondents, suggesting that this area is not currently seen as a main priority for pastoral volunteering. Similarly, activities like creating media content attracted low levels of interest.

At first glance, it seems that volunteers are primarily drawn to activities within the safe environment of the Church community, such as liturgical service, youth ministry, or charitable outreach – which, by their very nature, often operate asymmetrically (from the Church outward toward those in need).

Aleš Opatrný, in his book *Cesty pastorace v pluralitní společnosti* (*Ways of Pastoral Care in a Plural Society*), describes two directions of evangelization: inward and outward. "Inward" evangelization refers to first allowing the Gospel to orient one's family and professional life; "outward" evangelization means offering an alternative to the dominant lifestyles of society. Where the inward dimension is missing, Opatrný warns, Christians risk losing their "saltiness" (cf. Matthew 5:13)[13].

It is understandable – and important – that the faithful dedicate time and energy to strengthening the Church community. However, the broader results of the questionnaire lead us to ask whether a genuine missionary conversion in attitudes and behaviour is truly happening.

James Mallon, one year after the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium*, addressed this issue in his book *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*, published in Slovak in 2018. Mallon calls for a radical change in mentality, inviting parishes to move from maintenance mode to mission mode. He emphasizes: "The parish exists to evangelize. A parish focused only on maintenance loses its very reason for being". According to Mallon, evangelization must be the foundation of all parish activities. Hospitality becomes the first crucial step in evangelization, creating a sense of belonging and opening people to hearing the Gospel message[14].

Another indispensable key for transformation, he argues, is the formation of a missionary leadership team, composed of priests and laypeople, capable of guiding the community toward true discipleship. This brief overview of Mallon's proposals points toward concrete steps that could support the missionary conversion of the faithful[15].

At the same time, certain doubts remain: despite decades of calls for renewal from the popes and bishops, the average sense of shared responsibility recorded in the survey remains moderate (5.47 out of 10). Observations from *Joy of the Gospel in Slovakia* reinforce this concern: "The laity have not become true partners of the priests in pastoral care, and their voice is often not heard"[16].

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13 A. Opatrný, *Cesty pastorace v pluralitní společnosti*, Kostelní Vydří 2006, p. 103.

14 J. Mallon, *Premena farnosti: Od údržby k misii*, Trnava 2018, p. 35.

15 Ibidem, p. 198.

16 F. Mikloško, K. Moravčík, *Radosť evanjelia na Slovensku: Pokus o analýzu situácie Katolíckej cirkvi*, Bratislava 2015, p. 33.

Considering these realities, intentional and sustained efforts will be required to foster a true conversion – one in which people find the courage to assume responsibility not only for volunteering, but for proclaiming the Gospel itself.

In the following sections, we will dedicate our attention to the factors that inspire a dynamic environment for volunteering – and those that hinder it.

## 6. Environments That Support or Hinder Volunteering

Shared responsibility implies that responsibility is carried by multiple sides. First and foremost, it is God Himself who, through His plan of salvation for humanity, reveals Himself and incorporates people into His divine plan and into His mystical body. Next are the individuals who share the responsibility of contributing to the health and functioning of the whole community. A significant part of this responsibility is also carried by the visible authority of the Church, which guides and supports the community.

This shared responsibility undeniably involves accompaniment and the creation of an environment that fosters growth and development. The quality and health of the environment are crucial for development. By analogy, we see this clearly in nature: if waters or soil are contaminated, life can either be destroyed or severely hindered in its growth and development.

Similarly, in the Church community, there are elements that either support or hinder volunteering. Jakob Schrage and Max Pilgers analyzed the elements that help create inspiring environments for volunteering, focusing on several relational dimensions[17].

In the relationship between the volunteer and the activity, they identified the following key elements: Volunteer work must be meaningful; volunteers need to see the purpose and impact of their contribution. Especially for younger volunteers, it is important that the activity allows them to learn new skills and develop their competencies. Flexibility is essential, considering the individual availability and time constraints of the volunteers.

In the relationships between volunteers themselves, it is important to support social connections and foster the creation of community networks, leveraging the potential that shared projects have for strengthening these networks.

In the relationship between volunteers and Church authority, an inspiring environment requires: a clear structure, empowerment, ongoing support, the possibility of shared leadership, and the active expression of recognition and gratitude from the side of Church leaders.

Conversely, environments that hinder volunteering or create a "contaminated" environment usually result from the absence or neglect of these elements.

[17] J. Schrage, M. Pilger, *Ehrenamtlich Engagierte in der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit: Zielgruppe ihres Auftrages und Mitarbeitende an ihrer Sendung*, "Handbuch Kirchliche Jugendarbeit: Grundlagen Theologie. Für Studium und Praxis", ed. A. Kaupp, P.C. Höring, Freiburg im Breisgau 2019, p. 180-192.

Problems can include: excessively high expectations, a work pace that is too fast, too many responsibilities placed on volunteers, attitudes that treat volunteer work as self-evident and fail to provide recognition, chaos and unclear communication, poorly defined tasks and responsibilities, neglected relational care, absent accompaniment, and no space for education or reflection.

Such conditions can lead to the stagnation of the volunteers' potential – or even to their complete disengagement and withdrawal from service.

## 7. Conclusion: Limits and Opportunities of Volunteering in Pastoral Care

As we reach the end of our reflection on volunteering in pastoral care, it becomes evident that this area has both limits and opportunities within the context of the Church's common mission. Three main factors can limit volunteering in the service of the Gospel:

First, low motivation. Low motivation may stem from a weak personal resonance with the Word of God, leading to a diminished willingness to take responsibility for the mystical body of Christ, to which we belong. It can also arise from environments that hinder spiritual flourishing and personal engagement.

Second, lack of available time. Depending on age, health, personal situations, and various other factors, some individuals are more able than others to dedicate time to volunteering without serious negative consequences. Moreover, volunteering must constantly compete with countless other attractive alternatives for free time.

Third, misdirected investment of time and energy. Even motivated individuals who find time for volunteering may sometimes invest their efforts in necessary but secondary activities – tasks that, while good in themselves, may not contribute directly to the Church's missionary mandate. As Jesus warned in Luke 11:42, it is possible to focus on lesser duties while neglecting what is truly essential. As a result, either no time remains for true missionary engagement, or the courage to step beyond the "walls" of the Church is lacking from the outset.

The consequence of these factors may be that volunteering fails to reach its full potential, happens only in a limited way, or even leaves volunteers with negative experiences.

At this point, it is worth asking: Is the Church's leadership – at different levels and in different contexts – ready to assume responsibility for creating an environment that nurtures motivation and supports the development of volunteering? On one hand, it is important to encourage volunteering, but on the other, it is equally important to set realistic expectations that recognize the true possibilities and limits of this form of service. Volunteering has its boundaries, yet it opens profound opportunities with genuine value and potential. In my view, there are four key opportunities that volunteering offers:

First, volunteering can be a source of joy. As research has shown many volunteers view their work as a natural activity that brings them joy through helping

others, participating in collective projects, developing their talents and abilities, building social connections, and spending their free time meaningfully[18].

Second, volunteering creates opportunities for accompaniment and faith transmission. It fosters environments where the sharing of faith and personal testimony can naturally occur through relationships.

Third, volunteering optimizes resources in pastoral care. The involvement of volunteers makes possible activities and projects that would otherwise be unsustainable if they depended solely on salaried staff. While this pragmatic perspective is important, it must be carefully handled to avoid the danger of instrumentalizing people. Volunteers are not cheap labor – they are brothers and sisters with whom we collaborate in preparing the way for Christ.

Fourth, volunteering strengthens community bonds. Working together on shared projects creates lasting relationships and memories, even when volunteers' life circumstances change. At the same time, this collaboration becomes an explicit manifestation of the Church's common mission for all the baptized.

Volunteering in the service of the Gospel is one of the pillars of pastoral care, especially in communities without strong personnel structures or the financial resources to employ paid staff. It is not – and will not become – the only or strongest pillar of pastoral service. Volunteering must be supported by other structures and pillars. Yet, where it is present and properly nurtured, volunteering becomes a true Simon of Cyrene on the path of the Church's pastoral mission, bearing the weight of service across all its dimensions.

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