

Seniors Volunteering for Kingdom Service¹

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For many seniors the retirement days of thumb twiddling are history, far behind us. There are many challenges and ways of Kingdom Service out there waiting for us to be tapped, both at home and abroad. It's downright exciting, a lot more than the unproductive snow-birding tradition some of us have been following. In this article we emphasize the "abroad" thing, without suggesting that there's not enough to do "at home." One of these days, the Lord willing, we'll do an article on the home side of it.

Exciting? Yes. Productive? Again, yes. Having served as a long-term missionary in Nigeria for many years, I've seen senior volunteers come and go, almost without exception full of energy; rich with experience; eager to serve; at the end of their service, brimming with gratitude for the opportunity they were offered; and enthusiastic about relations established with local people and about their foods. Now that's a crowded sentence, reflecting exactly the crowded and satisfying time they went through. They return home changed and most are eager to do a repeat. In fact, for some it becomes a new career either full or part time.

Two concrete examples:

Bruce and Sylvia Waine have done a lot of volunteering in different countries in their lives. Bruce writes:

Broadway Church Missions teamed with Pacific Academy in their development of a training centre for girls in Uganda – I jumped at the opportunity to serve. The tasks were labourous. However, the fellowship we had working alongside our African brothers was inspiring.

I strongly recommend that all retirees seriously consider spending quality time sharing their wisdom and love with people in some country. Retirees have so much to offer and so much to gain by taking six months, a year or even a few years making a difference for the Kingdom.

There are many formulas for covering the expenses of volunteers in missions. We, in the main, sponsored ourselves. Our organization covered housing and utilities.

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Yes, it is financially possible; it comes with great personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

(2) My own brother Jim Boer and his wife Wilma. Jim spent all his *paid* working life with the Royal Bank. Upon his retirement, the couple started volunteering for their (and my) church, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Jim was recruited for his accounting skills and served half a year in Guam to work at the Pacific Island Bible College. Subsequently, the couple spent seven half-year stints at a Christian school in Rehoboth NM that caters to Aborigines, Jim again as accountant. All these times Wilma served in various capacities: teacher's aid, school library, book store, Sunday school.

Financially, their church held a few collections, but the major expenses, including travel, were theirs, while the CRC provided them with housing and a car. They highly recommend this life style for seniors—for a few years. They joyfully look back upon that period with a strong sense of satisfaction.

Now both the Waines and Boers were engaged in activities sponsored by a *church*, but churches are not the only ones to “do” mission. Christians also organize themselves around specific purposes not necessarily related to a church. Habitat is a well-known example. If you're into construction, they will have a place in many countries for experienced senior volunteers. Another alternative is Global Scholars that places retired Christian academics in secular universities in over 25 countries. What could be more strategic than investing in the lives of the future leaders of nations around the world? Wherever disaster has struck, organizations like World Renew, also CRC, recruit seniors to volunteer in quick order to help people in desperate situations, many of them volunteers experienced in every possible occupation. O'o, I'm back in church country! Well, you get the picture.

Sometimes we stare ourselves blind on Christian churches and organizations, but even some non-Christian organizations provide opportunities for Christian volunteers to serve in the nooks and crannies of this world. The *Red Cross* and *CUSO* are among those that come to mind. Check out their websites. You likely can picture yourself incorporating many of their goals and projects into your Christian world view and *voila*, you join and become a Kingdom agent. The Red Cross reports,

Research strongly supports the notion that volunteering not only contributes to the *personal growth of individuals* and the growth of organizations but acts as a multiplier for healthy community development that contributes to civil society.

Don't² count yourself out before you try engaging in the world of missions. I know that many of us would consider our skills or gifts of little significance, but life's lessons should never be undervalued. As seniors, our lives can be a testimony to the grace of God. We can encourage, pray and bring practical wisdom to bear.

Is it all worth it? Just ask the Waines and Boers!

²This paragraph was contributed by John Hall, Executive Director of Missions Fest Vancouver, under whose auspices and request. I submitted the rest of this article.