

Give Talents Volunteer Treasures Help Charity
Generations
Time of Generosity
Donate Stewardship Legacy Tradition
Heart Philanthropic Faith
Values Share

Giving. Serving. Loving others. These heartfelt values stay constant, yet each generation acts on them in different ways. BY TERI CETTINA

Ardi Gibbs, a Thrivent member in Byron, Minnesota, has volunteerism “in her blood.” Her mother served others all her life, inspiring Ardi, now in her 60s, to do the same.

“God has given us a lot,” she says. “So it just made sense to put our time and donations toward helping others.”

Ardi and her husband, Jim, have actively served at their church and, for the past 15 years, as tireless Thrivent volunteers. Jim is president of the Olmsted County Chapter—a local group that works to strengthen their community and churches and to advocate for all that Thrivent Financial can do. And Ardi, the chapter’s past president, coordinates many projects, such as Christmas baskets for local families.

Just as she followed her mother’s example, her three “boys,” now husbands and fathers, volunteer

with their wives in ways of their own.

Families can pass down the spirit of giving like an heirloom. But unlike an object, how people use it takes different shapes over generations.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Ardi and her husband join the nearly 22 million Baby Boomers that the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) says regularly volunteer.

“Baby Boomers are definitely our most steadfast group of volunteers. They grew up during a time when social action and community involvement were really important,” says Mark Andrews, vice president of volunteer and institutional engagement at Habitat for Humanity International. (As one of Habitat’s largest corporate sponsors, Thrivent Financial has given more than \$200 million, and



Matures: Born 1925-1945

LOYAL / RESPECT AUTHORITY / STRONG WORK ETHIC



Boomers: Born 1946-1964

IDEALISTIC / SELF-RELIANT / WANT TO BE SEEN AS SUCCESSFUL

its members have donated more than 4 million volunteer hours to this nonprofit organization since 2005.)

“However, we work with volunteers of all ages, and we’ve noticed some interesting differences between the generations,” Andrews says.

Many factors shape how each generation gives back, he says. They range from social, economic or political interests to life phases. Some give money, others pick up a hammer. “No one’s way is better or worse. They’re just different,” Andrews says.

Leslie Mollsen works as chief executive officer of American City Bureau, Inc., a philanthropic development consulting firm for nonprofits nationwide. “Giving—whether time, talent or treasure—varies with each generation,” she says.

MATURES (AGES 69 AND ABOVE)

Older Americans actively volunteer. According to the CNCS, approximately one in four (24.4%) of Matures volunteer regularly. And organizations rely on them.

“If one of my older volunteers says he’ll help out on Tuesdays, he’ll be here,” says Diana Dalsin of Bridging, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that helps people transition out of homelessness and poverty.

Matures’ reliability comes in part, she says, because they have time to spare. They may travel less. Their kids and grandkids have grown.

The social aspect spurs them to volunteer, too. “They really enjoy working with others, and that keeps them coming in,” she says.

This group shows up. It leads. And it offers an example of commitment for younger age groups.

BABY BOOMERS (AGES 50 TO 68)

Boomers make up the country’s largest segment of volunteers—partly because there are so many of them.

However, Boomers often require flexible hours. “Their lives are a virtual tug-of-war: pulled on one side caring for aging parents and on the other caring for children and grandchildren,” Mollsen says.

Bridging’s Dalsin schedules extra volunteers during Boomer-heavy shifts. “I know several of them will call at the last minute and need to do Grandma duty or work some extra hours [at their jobs],” she says.

Often retired from successful careers, Boomers volunteer with intensity. “They want to know they’re using their time well and that the organization they’re helping is using their money efficiently,” says Dalsin.

GENERATION X (AGES 34 TO 49)

The Gibbises’ grown sons—Jason, Nathan and Dan—belong to Generation X. These married-with-children Thrivent members spend lots of time at their kids’ schools and extracurricular activities.

“Our volunteering seems to change depending on the stages of life of our children and also where we see a need,” says Dan’s wife, Danni Gibbs.

The younger Gibbises mirror their generation’s habits. According to the CNCS, the most common place Gen Xers volunteer? Schools.

“The Gen Xers who volunteer elsewhere tend to do so less regularly. They often join corporate, civic or religious groups rather than striking out on their own,” notes Mollsen.

THINKSTOCK, MASTERFILE



Gen X: Born 1965-1980

INDIVIDUALISTIC / VALUE FREEDOM / ADAPT WELL TO CHANGE



Millennials: Born 1981-1995

DESIRE TO BE NURTURED / TRUST PEER AUTHORITY / DIGITAL NATIVES

Bridging's Gen X helpers may come annually with their church groups. Others may recruit a workplace team for a fundraising event. But however they give their time, Gen Xers can boast the highest volunteer rate of any age group (30.1%), notes CNCS.

Mollsen says that Gen Xers and the younger Millennials demonstrate a willing heart for service. "The gift they can offer is their time," she says.

MILLENNIALS (AGES 19 TO 33)

Thrivent member Hailey Winterburg personifies the volunteer habits of Millennials.

The 21-year-old nursing student from Topeka, Kansas, helps her sorority with breast cancer awareness, tutors teens and rides with her nursing program's community health van. When 2012's Hurricane Sandy hit, she and fellow AmeriCorps volunteers used social media to organize a blood drive for victims within hours.

That reliance on technology probably distinguishes Millennials' volunteer habits most. Winterburg says it feels natural for her and her friends to

learn about volunteer opportunities based on local and national events "trending" on Facebook or Twitter. "I actually think we get a better response out of people because electronic methods are so instantaneous, public and social," she says.

Digital Age kids have grown into a generation with a global sensibility, says Habitat's Andrews. And they'll carry the banner of service forward.

That's why Mollsen urges nonprofit leaders to let younger generations "peer under the hood." "If they know how it operates, maybe one day they will want to run it," she says.

A COMMON THREAD

Ardi Gibbs says her and her sons' generations both believe that giving time and money to others has great value. "We get a whole lot back when we give," she says. "Giving back is just what we're supposed to do. And I think God blesses us for it." ■

Teri Cettina has written about personal finance for *Reader's Digest* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Generational Giving at a Glance

Matures

- 13% of U.S. population
- 24.4% of individuals volunteer
- 1.8 billion hours of service per year
- Account for 26% of charitable donations

Baby Boomers

- 27% of U.S. population
- 28.2% of individuals volunteer
- 2.8 billion hours of service per year
- Account for 43% of charitable donations

Generation X

- 20% of U.S. population
- 30.1% of individuals volunteer
- 2.2 billion hours of service per year
- Account for 20% of charitable donations

Millennials

- 14% of U.S. population
- 22% of individuals volunteer
- 1.4 billion hours of service per year
- Account for 11% of charitable donations

Sources: U.S. Census, The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), and Blackbaud, Inc.