

101 Ways to Encourage Volunteers, Parents, and Staff

Encouragement is the fuel your volunteers, parents, and staffers need to power their service. Have you checked their “fuel gauges” lately? Fill ‘em up with affirmation that’s creative, surprising, and memorable. Give them:

Gifts and Notes

1. A birthday hat: “In appreciation for the many hats you wear.”
2. A magnet: “Thanks for attracting kids to God.”
3. A frozen TV dinner: “Thanks for all the meals you ate on the go to get to our church on time.”
4. A Jell-O pudding snack and plastic spoon: “You’re a treat.”
5. A candle: “Thanks for letting your light shine.”
6. A packet of seeds: “Thanks for the seeds of faith you sow.”
7. An eraser: “My blues are erased when I think of you.”
8. An inexpensive compass: “Thanks for pointing kids in God’s direction.”
9. A jar filled with jelly beans or soup beans: “It’s ‘bean’ fun working with you.”
10. A basket of fruit: “To a person who’s filled with the fruit of the Spirit.”
11. An apple: “You’re the apple of God’s eye.”
12. A plastic baggy filled with miniature marshmallows or muffins: “Small tokens of my appreciation.”
13. A package of Kool-Aid: “Thanks for coming to our aid.”

14. An inexpensive wooden glider: "Thanks for your light-hearted humor."
15. A loaf of bread (or cinnamon rolls): "Thanks for being yeast in God's kingdom."
16. A juice pack or bottle of sparkling grape juice: "Thanks for your refreshing ideas."
17. After an absence or vacation, attach a note to sandpaper: "It's been rough without you."
18. In your computer, type memories throughout the year. At the end of the year, print, photocopy, and collate the memories in booklet form. Give to all who've helped. Attach a note: "We'll never forget you."
19. After a snowy winter retreat, save a few snowballs in the freezer. In the summertime, place a snowball in a plastic bag and attach a note: "Remember the winter retreat? Because of you we had a ball."
20. After a camping or retreat weekend, make individual S'mores (chocolate, marshmallow between two graham crackers) placed in plastic bags. Attach a note: "Thanks for the sweet memories."

Simple Gifts

21. Fill a plain or sugar cone with M&M's. Cover with clear plastic wrap.
22. Inexpensive Christian music tape samplers (purchase these at Christian bookstores).
23. Favorite poem enclosed in a handmade card.
24. Instant-print photos of them in action. Write a thank-you message on back of the photos.

25. Inexpensive buttons and pins with funny sayings (purchase at bookstores or coffee shops): "It's been lovely, but I have to scream now."
26. Coupon for a free ice-cream cone or frozen-yogurt treat.
27. Coffee cup filled with granola or raisins.
28. Gift certificate to a local restaurant.
29. T-shirt or sweatshirt (have kids decorate it with colorful permanent markers).
30. Blank journal to record memories throughout the year.
31. Basket or bowl filled with an assortment of coffee or tea.
32. Small plants or flowers in a bright-colored vase.
33. Cloth tote bag to carry their church "stuff" (have kids decorate with fabric markers).
34. Coupon for kids to clean their home or classroom.
35. "Relaxation bag" filled with candles, soaps, and lotion.
36. Spiral notebook to use as a prayer journal.
37. Favorite devotion book or calendar.
38. Coupon for a free video rental. Attach a bag of microwave popcorn or strand of licorice.
39. Apron signed by kids. Give to a person who cooked for a retreat or who supplied snacks for an event.
40. Inexpensive wreathes. Personalize by attaching symbols for the person you want to encourage, such as pencils, erasers, and Post-it notes for a Sunday school teacher (purchase supplies at a hobby store).

41. Cloth-covered blank book. Have kids each design a page in the book, with words of appreciation, illustrations, and signatures.
42. Audiocassette tape filled with compliments. (Tape record compliments, memories, and comments from kids and other people who work with them.)
43. Book lamp, night light, or pocket flashlight in thanks for burning the midnight oil at a retreat or lock-in.
44. Gifts for birthdays:
January--Mug with packets of hot chocolate
45. February--Candy hearts or anything red, such as carnations, candy or fruit.
46. March--Anything green, such as Jell-O, suckers, grapes, or popcorn balls made with green food coloring.
47. April--Tiny paper umbrellas: "God showered me with blessings with your help in the ministry."
48. May--Flower-shaped stickers.
49. June--Sunscreen or sunglasses: "In appreciation for showing kids the 'Son.'"
50. July--Anything red, white, and blue, such as highlighting markers.
51. August--A refreshing can of pop or jar of iced-tea mix.
52. September--Back-to-school items, such as notebooks, Post-it notes, or paper clips.
53. October--Miniature pumpkins.

54. November--Thanksgiving scroll. On a sheet of paper, write all the ways you're thankful for them. Roll up the paper and attach a ribbon.
55. December--Christmas tree ornaments.
56. Construction paper print cards. Use ink pads or fingerprints and get fingerprints and signatures of each child.
57. Especially "foil" you card. Spell a thank-you message with Alpha-Bits cereal. Glue to aluminum foil cut in a heart shape.
58. Personalized paper towels. Have children write or draw a note of appreciation, one child per square. Roll it back up and give it to the helper.
59. Make new cards from cut up old cards or wrapping paper.
60. Wrap any gift with handmade wrapping paper (paint designs on paper sacks and add stickers).
61. Visit craft fairs for inexpensive, unique gifts. Give a gift to fit a personality.
62. A-Z personalized note. Write a note saying what you appreciate about a volunteer or staff member from A-Z (Arrive early to events, Best guitar player, Cheerful...)
63. Keep a list of favorite candy, flowers, music, and movies. Once in a while, give an unexpected favorite treat.
64. Give a wisdom book. Ask each volunteer, parent, and staff one bit of advice for maintaining enthusiasm for God's work. Compile the bits of wisdom, photocopy, collate, and give them away.
65. Design a computer-generated certificate of thanks. Photocopy and frame with colorful pasteboard or inexpensive wood or plastic frames from local hobby stores.

66. Colorful card. Melt a thank-you message out of crayon shavings between two sheets of wax paper.

67. Each Sunday, recognize a person or two who've contributed to the ministry. Invite them to the front and "pin" them with inexpensive religious lapel pins (purchase at a Christian bookstore).

Gatherings/Receptions

68. Carpool kidnap volunteers and take them out for pizza.

69. Invite them to your home occasionally for a snack--just to talk.

70. Videotape photographs of all the children's functions you've had throughout the year. Add background music. Record kids' voices saying "Thanks for all you've done." Host an end-of-the-year banquet and show the video.

71. Call the volunteers and staff for a meeting. Have kids bring in a box of party decorations. Have everyone decorate the room for an instant surprise/appreciation party.

72. Host a Thanksgiving Dinner any time during the year--in thanksgiving and appreciation of all volunteers. Serve turkey, mashed potatoes, corn, and pumpkin pie.

73. Attend community events they may be involved with, such as a theater production or concert. Show your support beyond church.

74. At a church service, give each volunteer, parent, or staff member a book of matches. Have them each strike a match, then turn out the lights. Look at all the people who help light the way for children.

75. Take your kids "caroling" anytime during the year. Have them sing their favorite songs as they serenade the volunteers and staff.

76. Set up two fans on either side of a meeting room. Have kids hold bubble wands up to the fans so bubbles fill the air. Sing a song to celebrate the volunteers and staff.

77. Host a "Blue-Ribbon Barbecue." Make 1st-place ribbons out of blue fabric and fabric paint. Serve blue food, such as blueberry pancakes, muffins, or pie.

78. Cut star shapes from aluminum foil or disposable pie plates, one for each volunteer. Write their names on them with black marker. Hang the stars from the ceiling along with a banner that says: "You're stars." Host a fellowship time for the stars.

79. Host bimonthly training sessions on topics such as discipline, ideas, ways to use your gifts, and so on.

Other Ideas

80. Pray for them. Let them know you're doing it.

81. Call them on their birthdays. Have kids join you in singing "Happy Birthday."

82. Paint the words "THANK YOU" in big letters on foam core. Cut out and attach to a bulletin board for a 3-D effect. Attach photos of all volunteers, parents and staff.

83. Notice ways they reach out to kids, then call them the following week and voice your appreciation.

84. Acknowledge their contributions during conversations with other parents and church members.

85. Learn and use their names.

86. Ask them about themselves and how they're doing beyond what you do together at church.

87. Let them know you value them and their time by helping them set boundaries. If you feel their plate of duties is overflowing, help them say no to something, or give some duty away before they take on another duty.

88. Share their excitement and affirm them when they want to begin new programs or activities on their own.

89. Notice when they're absent. Call them or send them cards.
90. Notice their God-given gifts and make sure they're using them.
91. Let them know times you're available for when they need to talk.
92. Be willing to admit a mistake and say you're sorry.
93. Help them solve discipline problems. Let them know they're not alone.
94. Join in when they lead an activity. Have a good time along with them.
95. Be relaxed when you're with them. Leave your stress-filled thoughts and worries for another time.
96. Keep your comments positive. Don't gossip.
97. Design a colorful-chalk thank-you message on their classroom chalkboard. Surprise them when they walk in the room.
98. Have kids help make life-size replicas of volunteers out of snow (if you have it), or stuffed clothing, like a scarecrow. Attach to each replica a name tag and cards with affirming words.
99. Offer to reimburse for gas expense or other expenses from church outings.
100. Cut construction paper into footprint shapes. Write names of volunteers and staff, one per print. Tape the footprints to a wall leading up to a huge banner with "THANKS" written on it.
101. Smile and laugh often with them.