

序言 Foreword

今年是聯合國所訂的國際義工年。不少非政府機構也會藉著這個時機，宣揚關於義務工作的信息。義工服務確實有助弱勢社群踏出自力更生的第一步，然而弱勢人士不自助，一切協助也是徒然。

提起義工服務，在一般市民心裡，都會想起探訪老人，協助傷殘人士，照顧病弱者和幫助有需要人士融入社群等。不過，這些工作所以稱為義工服務，共通點是服務者並不收取費用，也是一種無償的勞動。

義務工作的可貴，是施與受雙方的關係，並非建立在金錢上的交易。接受者看似是得益的一方，他們無條件下得到別人的關懷；但施與者，雖非為著金錢的回報，在無私的貢獻中卻可肯定自己的價值，不能說全無得益。

另一方面，有評論認為，義工服務可能導致倚賴文化，因接受者無需付出代價，日久難免養成倚賴，與自力更生的精神相違背。不過，就基督教勵行會的經驗，這看來是過份憂慮了。無論是勵行會職員或義工，都持著助人自助的宗旨。不少義工曾接受勵行會的幫助，在感謝之餘，也願多盡一己之力協助他人，這種連鎖反應，正是義務工作之精神所在，亦是改善社會的催化劑。

香港人的傳統口號是：『有錢出錢、有力出力。』正是『人人為我、我為人人』，雖然這種精神隨社會現代化略有減弱，但只要無私的心仍在，義務工作永遠不會過時。但接受者亦要珍惜他人的協助，自力更生，締造一個和諧美好的社會。

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The United Nations has designated 2001 as International Year of Volunteers. This is an excellent opportunity for NGOs to publicise the benefits and pleasures of volunteering. Volunteers can help people to take a step towards self-reliance. However, in order for this help to be successful, the needy should have the intention to help themselves. Otherwise any kind of support will be futile.

In most people's minds, voluntary work conjures images of visiting the elderly, participating in events for people with disabilities or looking after the sick, helping people integrate into society, etc. Of course, all of these constitute voluntary work, but the true meaning of "voluntary" is any work for which you receive no financial reward, and it can include a vast array of activities.

The real value of voluntary work is that both parties, the one giving the service and the one receiving it, build up a relationship that is not based on the financial aspect. On the one hand, someone in need is being given something free. This makes them feel valued and important and they will give a lot back by way of appreciation. On the other hand, the person giving feels content that they are acting on behalf of others and they will feel a sense of self-worth.

Some people argue that charity work makes the recipients lazy and reliant. They contend that once people know that they can get something for free they will not try to struggle for it on their own. As far as the experience of Christian Action is concerned, this is not true. Their work, both by staff and volunteers, aims to 'help people to help themselves'. Many volunteers are people who have received help in the past, and as a sign of their gratitude now want to return the good deed by helping someone else. This 'knock on effect', passing from person to person, shows the true spirit of volunteering, indicating what a potent force it can be for community cohesion and improvement.

Hong Kong people have a saying, 'If you've got money, use money. If you've got strength, use strength'. It means that we should use the best means available to us to help others, because as another saying goes, 'if others are for me, then I am for others'. This spirit of mutual help has dwindled in modern society, but many, many people still work selflessly for others, ensuring that the spirit of volunteerism stays alive. People in need should accept the help of such volunteers, to become self-reliant, and thus make the world a more harmonious place to live in.

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