

Eric Hoffer once said, "The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings." With every difficult mathematical problem I've ever dealt with, the only solution is practice. Practice backwards, inside, and out with different numbers, exponents, and signs. Then you will understand it. The same goes for volunteering. The benefits of volunteering – both for yourself and for people in need – include stronger communities and a greater quality of life.

As human beings, we belong to countless communities and it is important to volunteer in all of them. When I started cleaning bathrooms and washing cars for sick parishioners, serving hotdogs at free movie nights on the lawn, and running a ticket booth at the local county farm fair, I realized how much the smallest act of kindness is worth. When I started cleaning up beaches, working on the public hearing notice for our church's Saturday market, and distributing Krispy Kreme donuts to fundraise for the annual American Cancer Society Relay for Life, I learned that time is as valuable as money. When I went to Oahu with my youth group and fed, sorted clothes, and fundraised for the homeless, I realized how much work there is yet to be done in Hawai'i. And when I spent a week in Skid Row, Los Angeles, feeding the homeless and leading activities with inner-city children, I realized what it meant to belong to a community of a nation. At every level of community, I was shocked yet inspired to learn that the people around me cared so much.

People think that volunteering is exclusively for helping the less fortunate, but that isn't true. I always go in with the intention of helping others, yet come away feeling as though I am the one who has received a gift. Last weekend, our church held a rummage sale to raise money

for an ill parishioner. In between running cross-country, studying for a math test, and working on my common application, I spent ten hours sorting clothes and working as a cashier at the event. Though I found myself covered in sweat and dust at the end of the day, the happiness that I felt was incomparable. The look on Aunty Carrie's face as she found out the amount we had raised was truly priceless. Everyone with the time and means should volunteer because the way you feel after helping others is a greater gift than anything we can possibly give.

It's hard to comprehend how blessed we are with the lives we are given. Dividing part of your day to help out others, in ways large or small, doesn't decrease the sum of your existence. Rather, it exponentially increases the quality and impact of your life.