

“10 plus 10 is 20.” “10 plus 20 is 30.” “Then 10 plus 30 is?” Though I thought my question was clear enough, he didn’t offer an answer. He seemed ... concerned. As I was about to help him get the basic pattern, he threw a question at me. “Why do you look so sad?” His unexpected question caught me completely off guard. Now, I was the one who couldn’t provide an answer. I was simply amazed that Tae-Woo, an six-year-old boy, was able to see through the smiley face sticker I had slapped on my face to hide the problems I had been facing that day.

“40.”

And Tae-Woo presented me with a beaming smile – one that I read as, “It’s ok. You’ll figure it out.”

This wasn’t the first time that I learned a thing or two from my "students." I vividly recall my first day at Christ United Methodist Church. Though I prepared my lesson plan, I was nervous. Seeing me standing stiff as a chopstick, the children took me under their wings and took me through the basics of being a teacher. The exact words escape, but the essence remains. They taught me to “be myself,” “not to take things too seriously,” and “have fun.” These little philosophers, pranksters, and punsters have, through their words of wisdom, zest for life and laughter, changed me as a person and enabled me to rethink the meaning of serving others.

Today, people often feel obliged to perform community service because it is the “good” thing to do. However, does this vague term truly encapsulate the genuine meaning of volunteering? I firmly believe that there are many benefits (both tangible and intangible) of community service than the term “good” can capture. Whether it is nursing a wounded animal, taking care of an ailing elderly, or cleaning a dirtied beach, something far beyond “good” invariably remains.

For me, it is those magical moments when I witness a smile on someone else's face. I've had the distinct pleasure of experiencing these moments by teaching children, performing in concerts, cleaning an arboretum, and designing posters for a public library. Whatever the occasion, in the end, I am filled with ineffable happiness. Receiving a warm smile for whatever I have done encourages me when I'm exhausted by the fast pace of life and helps me reaffirm that I am needed in society. This feeling, possibly our *raison d'etre*, is the invaluable gift I get from volunteering.

Some people may think that serving the community is a one way track that involves a clear distinction between the "benefactor" and "beneficiary." However, we, the volunteers, receive priceless gifts through volunteering. These gifts are especially more valuable because we don't anticipate any rewards for our services. Of course, no one knows for certain what gift awaits us. However, one thing is for certain. It is one that changes people's lives, one that defies simple arithmetic: 1 plus 1 actually is far greater than 2.