



**COURAGEOUS**  
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## **12 IDEAS FOR THANKING CHRISTMAS VOLUNTEERS**

By Robert Carnes

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Let's be honest—we as church leaders would not be able to do ministry without volunteers. Church staff members work hard, but there's only so much we can do. Which is why free labor is crucial for any church. And no time is this more true than during the Christmas season.

Christmas volunteers selflessly give up their holiday time to serve others. They don't do it for the pay (because there isn't any) or the praise (because there's not usually much of that either). These volunteers give of themselves because it's the right thing to do.

Even though they're not in it for the glory, it's still important for us to thank these volunteers for their service. Even though they're not doing the work for the recognition, our gratitude still shows that their hard work is valued and needed.

In the spirit of the Christmas season, here are 12 different ways your church can show its holiday volunteers a little yuletide thank you this year.

### **1) HANDWRITTEN THANK YOUS.**

Most people don't do handwritten notes anymore. Which makes these even more special. Take a day or two with your staff and write a personal message to each volunteer individually.

### **2) SOCIAL MEDIA SHOUTOUT.**

Some volunteers might appreciate some public love online. Find those volunteers who are active on social media and tag them in a post of appreciation. This is also a cool way to introduce these volunteers to your followers.

### **3) SURPRISE SNACK.**

Have volunteers fill out a "get to know you sheet" that includes their favorite beverages, candy, and snacks. Then surprise them one day with a personalized treat.

### **4) VOLUNTEER VACATION.**

What's better than the gift of time? Volunteers aren't staff members, so they don't get an official vacation. But you should still insist that they take time off occasionally. Just make sure not to give all of your volunteers a break at the same time.

### **5) FAMILY RECOGNITION.**

When volunteers give up their time, they're not the only ones making a sacrifice. Their families are also missing out on some time with that person during the holidays. So be sure to do something to recognize those families as well.

## **6) THROW A PARTY.**

Once you've had some time to recover from the holidays, plan a volunteer celebration party. Invite all of your volunteers, get some free food, and let them enjoy the company of one another.

## **7) A VERBAL THANKS.**

Saying thank you to each volunteer is absolutely free. And it won't take but a few minutes per volunteer. But it will go a long way toward showing that you noticed their hard work and that you care.

## **8) GIFT CARDS.**

By definition, volunteers aren't paid—but gift cards don't technically count as a salary, so you can still hand those out as a thank you. These can even be as small as \$5—just make sure they're to places that the volunteers actually care about.

## **9) EXCLUSIVE T-SHIRTS.**

Many churches provide their volunteers with T-shirts that act like an unofficial uniform. Even if you don't do this, you could purchase custom T-shirts for your volunteers each Christmas. That way, they can show off that they helped out.

## **10) PLAN AHEAD.**

Give your volunteers the gift of not being overworked. Do a volunteer request well before the holidays next year so the same people don't have to serve every Christmas. That way, you'll have more volunteers to be thankful for!

## **11) LUNCH WITH A STAFF MEMBER.**

Depending on the size of your volunteer force, you may not be able to treat everyone to a meal. But it would be nice to take at least a few of your hardest workers out to lunch—either individually or as a group.

## **12) SUPERLATIVES.**

A fun way to recognize volunteers would be to treat them like they're in a high school yearbook. Hand out fake awards for “most improved,” “most likely to succeed,” “cutest couple” and other funny titles. This could even be a volunteer celebration.

Try out a few of these different ideas this Christmas—you've still got plenty of time to pull it off. You can even borrow a few to pull off during another holiday season, like Easter or Mother's Day.

The most important thing is that you're showing gratitude to your volunteers. Because you couldn't do this without them.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Robert is a freelance writer and storyteller and has worked for a number of years in marketing and communications for both churches and nonprofits. He currently serves as managing editor at the Orange Group in Atlanta.

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