

Dear Volunteer

Steve Argue

Dear Volunteer:

Re: This Year

Hi, It's me, your youth pastor. It's hard to believe that we're already halfway through the semester! As usual, it's been a really crazy start-up to a very exciting year and there are some things I feel compelled to share with you.

Often, in our volunteer meetings, I spend a lot of time telling you what I need from you and you're pretty gracious about considering my latest "vision for the ministry" or crazy idea I get when I come back from a conference. I'm realizing that I often tell you that we need to trust God for our future when, in actuality, you trust God daily as you encourage and remain patient with me.

So I'm writing you this letter, not to tell you what I expect from you, but what you can expect from me as we journey together this year.

I promise to stay connected.

I'll be honest with you. The reason I'm in youth ministry is because I love students. I think about them all the time and I'm constantly looking for ways to connect with them. I'm learning that my natural tendency to think about students often takes my eyes off volunteers. I am sorry for leaving you in the dark, being unclear, and not being there when you need me. I know you want to know what's going on with me and with our ministry. I want to do better at meeting with you, keeping you in the ministry loop, and trusting you with ministry.

I promise to value your person over what you do.

I'm tempted to short-circuit my connection with you, valuing you for what you do over who you are. This year I want to do better at appreciating your presence as much as your activity. While there are things that need to be done in our ministry, I recognize that I need your prayers, your input, your questions, your love, and your friendship even more. I want our ministry together to be more than a one-sided conversation. Therefore, I'm going to work at being a better listener, seeking to discover more of who you are as a person.

I promise to let go of numbers.

I want our ministry together to be more than a production line. You've heard me get too excited over quantity- how many students showed up on Wednesday or how many are going to the retreat. I need your help in valuing each student individually, seeing them as people, not numbers. Help me to use descriptors for our youth group that capture our unique personalities and relationships. Keep me from comparing or trying to be like someone else's ministry.

I promise to remember you're a volunteer.

I sometimes forget that my job isn't yours. You're a business person, a parent, a teacher, a student, and wear so many hats. Your support of our youth ministry comes out of the sacrifice of your disposable time. I want to be more patient, more flexible, and more accepting of the reality that life happens and that your involvement isn't dependent on commitment as much as it is on the complexity of life. I want to navigate life with you as much as I want you to serve in this ministry. Please see me as cheerleader more than your accountability partner.

If things go well, I'll give you the credit.

Correct me if I ever use the term, "my ministry." It's our ministry, given to us by God. I guess these adolescents are God's kids, most of all! God has entrusted us to care for these amazing students and I want you to know that any glimmers of hope come from God who has worked through all of us together. I want to give you the credit, not because I think you crave accolades, but because I know any fruit emerges from a spirit-filled, team effort.

If things go poorly, I'll examine myself first.

I recognize that my role is to care for you, the students, and their families, as we navigate our life-journey together. I'm ashamed to say that sometimes I'm quick to blame others, or circumstances for things that go wrong. I want you to know that I'm committed to asking hard questions to myself before I assume that someone or something else is to blame for the state of our ministry. You may say that I'm being a bit hard on myself, but I want you to know how seriously I want to take my shepherding role and want to be the best leader, shepherd, guide, friend, and fellow-journeyer I can be. I want to lead with my life, not just my words.

I need you.

I hope you know this. Sometimes I wonder if you think I need volunteers to keep the youth ministry running. Actually, I need you to keep me running. I need your eyes to see the blind spots I'm oblivious to in my life. I need you to encourage me when I feel overwhelmed and inadequate (which is often). I need your wisdom to speak into my ignorance. I need your friendship to remind me that I'm not alone. I need your walk with Jesus to inspire my walk with Jesus.

Please share your life with me. Remind me why we do what we do. Continue to give me tangible pictures of the love of Christ through the way you love our students and families. I'll try to do the same.

So, I just wanted to share this with you. I'm really hopeful for this year. I'm believing that our journey together will lead toward a deeper friendship and a shared, impassioned following of Jesus filled with tears and laughter along the way. Somehow, I think that this is what church is supposed to be all about.

Thanks for reading this. I hope we read it together and often, opening up an ongoing conversation for which I will be deeply grateful.

See you next week.

Blessings-
Youth Pastor

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