



A 1-YEAR PLAN FOR VOLUNTEER

CELEBRATION

FROM OUR ANNUAL VOLUNTEER STRATEGY

BY KENNY & ELLE CAMPBELL



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WHY SHOULD I CELEBRATE MY VOLUNTEERS?

We don't always think about celebrating or appreciating our volunteers as a form of training, but maybe we should! Because here's the thing: **what we celebrate gets repeated.** So when we celebrate our volunteers for being awesome and following through on the vision and expectations we've set for them, we're reminding our whole team about what matters most. Oh, and a little celebration can make our volunteers feel pretty awesome too.



CELEBRATION

A celebration is anything that celebrates your volunteers for what they've accomplished or who they are. If you're following along with our 1-Year Volunteer Strategy, you'll see this icon on your **Annual Calendar** every month.

EVERY YEAR

At the beginning of each year, we recommend doing a quick survey of your volunteers (like the **Annual Volunteer Survey** that you can find in the Volunteer Tools section of Grow) so you can ask about their favorite ways to be appreciated.

Each year, we recommend setting aside two days to simply celebrate your volunteers with a party: **Christmas** and **the end of the school year.** Because your volunteers are worth throwing parties for.

EVERY MONTH

Throwing a party every month would probably be a little over-the-top, **but there are small things you can do each month to let your volunteers know they're appreciated.** Every month, we recommend doing a few things:

- **SEND BIRTHDAY CARDS:** Make it part of your monthly rhythm to celebrate your volunteers. You don't have to do anything elaborate — a text, social media shout out, or a card should do the trick. But to make sure you actually remember

to do it, put a reminder on your calendar to check for upcoming volunteer birthdays on the last week of every month.

- **CELEBRATE A HOLIDAY:** Sure, you know the obvious holidays, like Christmas and Easter and Halloween. But do you know about Unicorn Day? Or Paper Airplane Day? Yeah, that's what we thought. But don't worry. We've got you covered. Follow this guide for 12 creative ways to honor your volunteers (or just have some fun together) every month this year.

EVERY WEEK

You don't have to celebrate every volunteer every week, but you should **celebrate at least one volunteer every week.** Each week (maybe the day after your weekly program), choose one volunteer to celebrate, honor, or thank. Then write them a quick card or send them a text.

Writing weekly thank you notes will do big things for your volunteer culture and it will do big things for you, too. Because when you spend time each week thanking your volunteers, you'll become a lot more aware of all they do for you and your ministry.

AUGUST NATIONAL RELAXATION DAY

WHAT TO DO

August 15 is **National Relaxation Day!** So, this August, celebrate your volunteers (and this very important national holiday) by hooking your volunteers up with a little moment of relaxation right before the craziness of the new school year begins. The possibilities are endless, but here's our recommendation:

First, set up a small room (or corner) with a No Teenagers Allowed sign and create a DIY spa space just for your volunteers. Think soothing music, hot towels, essential oils, hot tea, comfy chairs, cozy blankets, and infused water.

Depending on the number of volunteers you have (and your budget) you may also want to give them a gift of a take-home sheet mask, a pouch of tea, and a quick note reminding them to get some rest during a very busy season.

WHAT TO GET

- Comfy chairs, blankets, and beanbag chairs.
- An [oil diffuser](#) and [essential oils](#).
- Soothing instrumental music.
- [Tea bags](#), hot water, lemons, and honey.
- A water dispenser or carafe.
- Fruit to infuse in the ice water.
- [Paper cups](#) and [plastic cups](#).
- [Hand towels](#).
- A large [crock pot](#) with water for keeping your hot towels warm.
- [Sheet masks](#) (one per volunteer).
- [Tea bags](#) (one per volunteer).
- Note cards.



SEPTEMBER PEPPERONI PIZZA DAY

WHAT TO DO

September 20 is **Pepperoni Pizza Day!** So, this September, surprise your volunteers with a special treat when they show up for church: pizza! Or if you don't want to do actual pizza, you could do other foods that look like pizza, like a cake decorated like a pizza, pizza sugar cookies, pizza gummies, or a pizza-shaped cheese and fruit plate.

Want a pizza-themed activity to go with it? How about pizza sack races with these [pizza blanket sack things](#)?

WHAT TO GET

- Pizza!
- A pizza cake.
- Pizza [sugar cookies](#).
- [Pizza gummies](#).
- Cheese and fruit.
- Pizza-themed [paper plates and napkins](#).
- 2 wearable [pizza blankets](#).



OCTOBER KNOCK KNOCK JOKE DAY

WHAT TO DO

Sure, everyone knows about that other holiday that happens on October 31 and involves banging on people's doors, but what about **Knock Knock Joke Day**? This October 31, surprise your volunteers with a knock knock joke or two to brighten their days and remind them how much you appreciate them. Now grab your phone and send some texts. Here, we even wrote a few jokes for you.

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Someone farted.

Someone farted, who?

Said every youth ministry volunteer ever. Thanks for serving with us, even when it stinks. :)

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Jesus!

Jesus who?

Um, I'm pretty sure we covered that in your volunteer training. But hey, we get it. Sometimes you'll get questions from students that make you wonder if they've listening to a single thing you say to them, but trust me – they are. Just wanted to remind you that the truth you're speaking into their lives is having an eternal impact. Thank you.

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Woo!

Woo who?

Woohoo! I'm having a great time too! I mean, how could I not when I get to hang out with people like you every week? Just wanted to say thanks for all you do – and for all of your enthusiasm. :)

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Who did he tell you that?

Who did he tell you that who?

Actually this joke doesn't have a punchline. Just smile, nod, and consider it practice for half of the weird things students will say to you this week or their slang you don't understand. Thanks for serving with us!

WHAT TO GET

- Your volunteers' phone numbers.
- Your phone.



NOVEMBER DOUGHNUT DAY

WHAT TO DO

November 5 is **Doughnut Appreciation Day!** Well, at least it is according to some. It's actually a hotly debated national holiday. But you know what? Just like every day is a good day to celebrate your volunteers, every day is a good day to eat a doughnut. So this November, surprise your volunteers with some tasty doughnuts, hold a fun doughnut-eating competition, and maybe give a doughnut-themed prize to the winning volunteers.

If you're looking for a fun doughnut-themed game, we like the idea of dangling doughnuts from a couple of strings, tying your volunteers' hands behind their backs, and letting them race to see who can eat their doughnuts the fastest. Give the winners a prize like a fancy doughnut [badge](#), a doughnut [pool float](#), or some doughnut [socks](#).

WHAT TO GET

- Plenty of doughnuts.
- Doughnut [plates and napkins](#).
- String.
- Doughnut [badges](#).
- A doughnut [pool float](#).
- Doughnut [socks](#).



DECEMBER CHRISTMAS PARTY

WHAT TO DO

Okay, it’s probably a good idea to celebrate a *normal* holiday once in a while — especially when that holiday is celebrating the birth of Jesus. So before your volunteers disappear for the holidays, throw a **Volunteer Christmas Party!**

Since the holidays can be a little crazy, you might want to schedule your Christmas Party at a time that won’t require your volunteers to leave the house again — like right after your last weekly program before Christmas. To prepare for your Christmas party, here are a few things to think about . . .

THE ENVIRONMENT

Christmas is special. Your volunteers are special. So make your physical space feel special. Set the tables. Make fun Christmas centerpieces. Light a tree. Blast Christmas music. (But this is still a youth ministry event, so maybe skip the poinsettias and Barbra Streisand Christmas albums.)

THE MENU

It’s not a party if there’s not food! Fill a table with all the food you can manage. Pizza! Cookies! Candy canes! A hot chocolate bar with whipped cream and sprinkles! Spaghetti with maple syrup!

THE FUN

Set up a Christmas photo booth. Do a Crazy Christmas Outfit Contest. Play a few Christmas games with your team. Ask your worship leader to write and perform a parody of *Jingle Bells* that’s all about how awesome your volunteers are. This isn’t a meeting. It’s a celebration!

THE PRESENTS

If you don’t do this already, it’s probably a good idea to set aside a few bucks in your annual youth ministry budget to buy some Christmas presents for your volunteers. That doesn’t mean you need to buy everyone an Xbox. Even a \$5 gift card or a bag of nicely wrapped candy can mean a lot to a volunteer if you pair it with a handwritten note.

THE THANK-YOUS

Before you wrap up your party, make sure you take a few minutes to tell your volunteers how much you appreciate them.

WHAT TO GET

- Photo booth props (like these DIY [holly balloon sticks](#) and a [tinsel backdrop](#)).
- Christmas decorations (like these [foil balloons](#), [streamers](#), red and green [balloons](#), or a [cardboard cut-out](#) of Buddy the Elf).
- Food and drinks.
- Paper [plates, cups, utensils, and napkins](#).
- A Christmas playlist.
- A nice [Christmas outfit](#) for yourself.
- Christmas cookies.
- Prizes for the winners of your games. (Might we suggest taking [this creepy Santa toy](#), painting it gold, and pretending it’s a trophy?)
- Christmas presents for your volunteers.



JANUARY PECULIAR PEOPLE DAY

WHAT TO DO

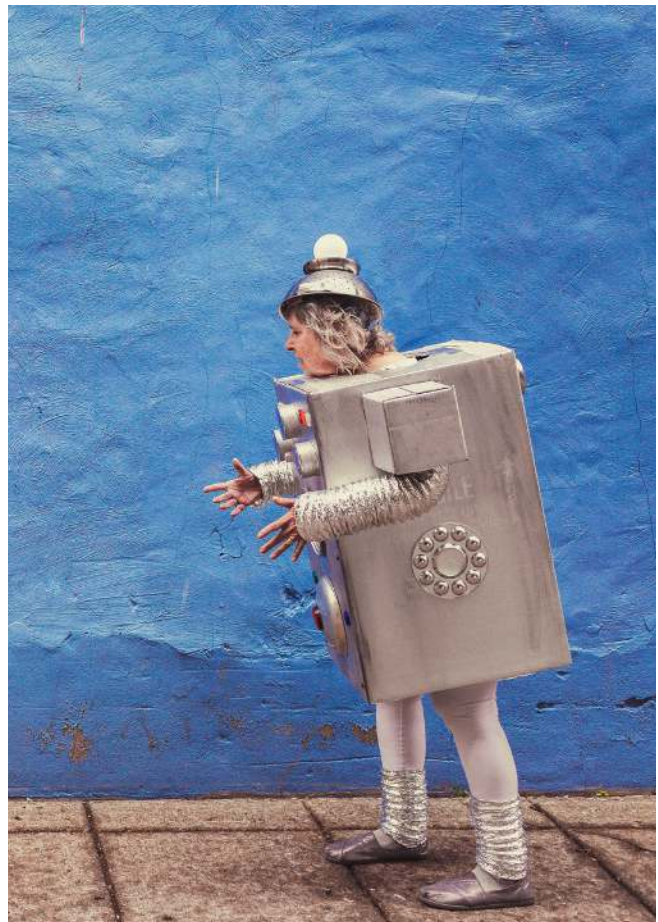
January 10 is **Peculiar People Day!** Kick off the new year by celebrating your team of incredible (and incredibly peculiar) volunteers. To start, you'll need some peculiar facts about each of your volunteers. You could always ask them for weird facts about themselves, or you could be extra discreet by asking their spouses, kids, parents, or best friends for weird facts about them. You only need one fact per volunteer, but if you want to gather a few extra for blackmail purposes, that's fine with us.

Once you've assembled all of your weird facts, it's time to organize a fun little appreciation campaign. If you want to keep things simple (and free) you could do this via social media. Throughout the month, create a series of social media posts on your ministry or church accounts introducing families to each of your incredible volunteers (plus a weird fact about them). Be sure to include what they do for your ministry and why you're so grateful for them. Then invite others to chime in with their stories, experiences, and words of gratitude for that volunteer too.

If you'd prefer to create something analog, you might create a big display board in your ministry space where you can post your volunteers' photos and weird facts, alongside envelopes where people can post thank you notes.

WHAT TO GET

- Weird facts about each of your volunteers.
- Photos of each of your volunteers.
- **OPTIONAL:** A large display board, envelopes, and thumbtacks.



FEBRUARY LIBRARY LOVERS MONTH

WHAT TO DO

February is **Library Lovers Month!** So, this February, create a volunteer library for your team – a resource center where they can borrow helpful books, resources, and tools to make youth ministry a little bit easier. Get a bookshelf, fill it with goodies, and then create a simple sign-out system (maybe with a clipboard, or a card system) and reminders to bring things back eventually.

WHAT TO GET

- A **bookshelf** to store your books and resources.
- A clipboard with a **resource sign-out sheet**.
- **Signs** with instructions on how to borrow a resource from the library.
- **"Please Return" stickers** for any resource you'd like to see again.
- Helpful or fun resources, like . . .
 - Postcards
 - Conversation-starter tools like [this](#) or [this](#)
 - Pens, markers, and paper
 - Candy
- Helpful or fun books, like . . .
 - [Youth Ministry Fails](#) (Kenny & Elle Campbell)
 - [Enjoy the Silence](#) (Maggie & Duffy Robbins)
 - [Sacred Pathways](#) (Gary Thomas)
 - [The Be-With Factor](#) (Bo Boshers)
 - [Growing Young](#) (Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Jake Mulder)
 - [A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Young Teen](#) (Mark Oestreicher)
 - [A Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenage Brains](#) (Mark Oestreicher)
 - [A Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenage Girls](#) (Mark Oestreicher & Brooklyn Lindsey)
 - [A Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenage Guys](#) (Mark Oestreicher & Brock Morgan)



MARCH WHAT IF CATS AND DOGS HAD OPPOSABLE THUMBS DAY

WHAT TO DO

March 3 is the very famous and important holiday we all know and love, **What if Cats and Dogs Had Opposable Thumbs Day!**

To celebrate this day, create a fun shared experience just for your volunteer team (and give away some prizes) before, during, or after your service. We'll give you the basic idea, and then you can decide exactly how you want to make this happen.

First, split your volunteers into two teams: cats and dogs. Next, make your players wear cat and dog ears, masks, or costumes, because why not? And don't forget, this day is all about opposable thumbs, so **use duct tape to tape your players' thumbs to their palms.**

Next, play some ridiculous cat-and-dog-related games with your volunteers — things that would be challenging to do without thumbs. We suggest a relay race with different challenges or obstacles, like . . .

- Tug-of-war.
- Race to pick up cat and dog toys and toss them in a bucket or basket.
- Eat a bowl of "dog food" or "cat food" (dry cereal in a dog or cat bowl).
- "Groom" a person (braid their hair or beard) or a really hairy stuffed animal (give it a hair cut).

Finally, give your winning team some fun prizes (like gift cards, trophies, or gifts) — and maybe give your losing team a concession prize, like, uh . . . thumb-shaped cookies?

WHAT TO GET

- Duct tape
- [Cat ears](#) and [noses](#) or [cat masks](#)
- [Dog ears and noses](#) or [dog masks](#)
- A tug-of-war rope
- [Cat toys](#) and [dog toys](#)
- Buckets or baskets
- Pet food bowls and dry cereal
- A person with long hair or a beard, or two long-haired stuffed animals
- Prizes (gift cards, trophies, gifts, etc.)



APRIL CARAMEL DAY

WHAT TO DO

April 5 is **National Caramel Day!** So, this April, celebrate your volunteers (and this very important national holiday) by hooking your volunteers up with a special treat just for them – no teenagers allowed.

Sure, you could get by with a simple box of caramels from the closest grocery store . . . or you can show your volunteers a little extra love by setting up a whole spread of caramel treats! (And yes, you can have some too.)

WHAT TO GET

- Caramel candies
- Caramel popcorn
- Caramel sauce for coffee
- Caramel sauce and ice cream
- A big "thank you" [sign](#)



MAY NATIONAL STATIONARY WEEK

WHAT TO DO

National Stationary Week happens at the beginning of May or end of April every year. To celebrate and honor your volunteers this year, set up a letter-writing station where your volunteers can be celebrated by you, by your students, and by each other.

At your stationary station, you'll need lots of stationary, pens, markers, and a box for submitting any cards and letters that the writers can't deliver in person.

This appreciation campaign for your volunteers can last a single day or it can last all month long. Either way, make a big deal out of it so your students and the rest of your team are all motivated and inspired to participate.

WHAT TO GET

- Plenty of assorted stationary, like any of these [thank you card sets](#).
- Pens and [markers](#).
- A list of your volunteers' first names and photos (in case your students or volunteer team need a reminder of who's who).
- [Signs](#) with instructions.
- A box for submitting the letters and cards.



JUNE END-OF-THE-YEAR PARTY

WHAT TO DO

Celebrate the end of a successful school year and thank your volunteers for all their hard work by throwing them another party! Because, remember, your volunteers are definitely worth throwing parties for. To prepare, here are a few things you probably want to think about . . .

THE ENVIRONMENT

Head outside if you can! You might host this party at your church, a local park, or someone's backyard for a fun off-site alternative. Whatever you choose, make sure it's a place where everyone can eat, talk, and play. Then turn on some summery music.

THE MENU

Since it's the summertime, try having a cookout, a picnic, a build-your-own ice cream sundae bar, or the biggest selection of popsicles you can afford. And don't forget about the lemonade. Yay summer!

THE FUN

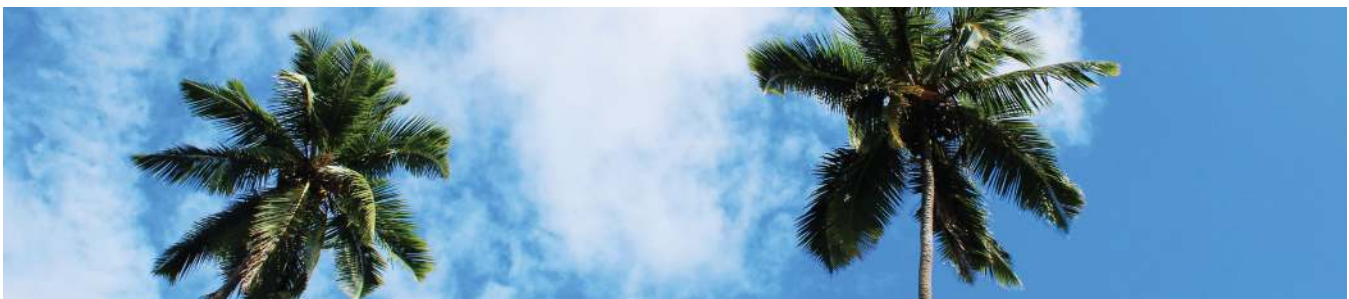
To keep your volunteers entertained while they eat, set up some icebreaker questions or activities. If your party is happening outside, you might want to skip the organized group games and go for some more casual fun. Set up a few lawn games or plan a few organized group games. Head to the Games section of Grow and pick out a few of your favorites. It'll be a fun way to recap some of your favorite ministry memories from the school year.

THE THANK-YOU'S

It's the end of another year. For some of your volunteers, this may be their last chance to spend time with you and your team, so don't let this opportunity go to waste. Go ahead and get a little mushy. Recap the incredible things that happened during your year of ministry together. Give awards to a few volunteers who deserve a little extra recognition. Make a sappy slideshow of their faces. Tell your volunteers how much you love and appreciate them. And finally, don't let anyone leave without a hand-written thank you note from you and your church.

WHAT TO GET

- Food and drinks.
- Plates, cups, utensils, and napkins.
- A summery playlist.
- Ice cream or popsicles.
- Table games like [Hedbandz](#).
- Lawn games like [ladder toss](#), [Flickin Chicken](#), or [Kan Jam](#).
- Prizes for the winners of your games. (We suggest visiting your church storage closet or your favorite thrift store, raiding it for weird objects, spray painting those objects gold, and pretending they're trophies.)
- Awards for a few notable volunteers.
- Thank you notes from you (and maybe from your lead pastor too).



JULY COMPLIMENT YOUR MIRROR DAY

WHAT TO DO

July 3 is **Compliment Your Mirror Day!** It's a day to remind yourself about how awesome you are by looking at yourself in the mirror and giving your reflection some compliments

This July, celebrate your volunteers and help them celebrate themselves by giving them an encouraging sticker or two to put on their mirrors. The stickers could say things like . . .

- I AM AWESOME**
- I AM LOVED**
- YOU CAN'T SPELL "AWESOME" WITHOUT "ME"**
- I AM MAKING A DIFFERENCE**
- I MATTER**
- I AM A WORLD-CHANGER**

You can have these stickers professionally printed if you'd like. Or, if you want to go a little more low-budget, hand write a few notes on colorful index cards and give them to your volunteers with a small spool of washi tape so they can stick them to their mirrors.

Whether you use professionally printed stickers or homemade index cards, put them in an envelope for each volunteer, along with a note that says something like, "On this Compliment Your Mirror Day, I hope you remember how incredible you are. I wrote down a few facts about you that I hope you'll say to yourself. Stick these pieces of encouragement on your mirror and read them to yourself. Out loud. And yes, this is supposed to be embarrassing. Just do it. It'll be fun."

WHAT TO GET

- Professionally printed stickers or index cards and [washi tape](#)
- Blank note cards and envelopes



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KENNY & ELLE CAMPBELL

- stuffyoucanuse.org
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Kenny and Elle were youth pastors in Buffalo, NY (home of the chicken finger sub) for almost ten years. Kenny was the Middle School Pastor and Elle was the Small Groups and Volunteer Coordinator for Middle School Ministry. While they were there, they founded [Stuff You Can Use](#), a youth and kids ministry resource company, as a way to share the resources they were already creating for their ministry with others.

Today, Kenny and Elle live in Atlanta, GA, where they lead the Stuff You Can Use team full-time, host the podcast Youth Ministry Answers, coach and train youth workers around the country, and serve as volunteers. They are also the co-authors of the book [Youth Ministry Fails](#) and are the creators of [PHARISEES: The Party Game](#).

When Kenny and Elle aren't creating youth ministry resources, they're usually playing games, listening to podcasts, exploring new cities, and looking for things that make them laugh.

If you want to chat with Kenny or Elle about youth ministry, board games, pizza, being an entrepreneur, or which podcasts you're currently listening to, reach out on social media! They like making new friends.