EXPLORING THE MEANING OF VOLUNTEERISM AS A VIRTUE THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE: THE LETRAN BATAAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The Letran community upholds a strong sense of unity, encourages an environment where every member is treated as part of a family. This study aims to explore the essence of volunteerism and its dynamics, focusing on how students, teachers, and employees willingly participate in community service as an expression of their dedication and love for the institution. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, the study employs phenomenological research, extracting the lived experiences of individuals through in-depth interviews to gather insights from participants. Through this method, the research examines their experiences, perspectives, motivations, and recommendations on how they embody the spirit of volunteerism within the Letran Bataan community. The findings reveal that compassion and commitment reflect the institutional virtues upheld through volunteerism.

Keywords: *Volunteerism, Virtue, Community Service, Commitment, Compassion*

INTRODUCTION

Beyond its spiritual tradition, becoming a Letranite also signifies embracing the Dominican identity. Letran Bataan, as an institution molded by the teachings of Dominican friars, actively embodies the Four Pillars of Dominican spirituality: Prayer, Study, Community, and Service. These foundational charisms serve as guiding principles, anchoring the development of students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders in a customed that enhances faith, knowledge, and service (Schaaf, 2022).

From a global perspective, various factors contribute to the concept of volunteerism, including humanism, spirituality, freedom of action, cooperation, and empathy (Ternopilska, 2025). These elements remain influential and move people worldwide. Similarly, in the lens of the Philippine context, Aquino et al. (2024) stated that working Filipinos see the word volunteerism as an act of benevolence. It is their genuine expression of kindness and empathy, an act of being a selfless being. In areas of Mindanao, particularly in Koronadal City, age emerges as a significant factor in grasping the concept of volunteerism, with youth becoming more engaged when activities focus on skill development and social interaction, whereas adults often perceive it as a civic responsibility and a long-term commitment (Diaz, 2025).

Building upon these global and local insights, the Letran Bataan community shares equal responsibility in forming and creating actions to address social issues that require not only individual effort but also collective support. The concept of volunteerism is widely acknowledged and experienced within the institution, yet the depth of meaning and personal experiences associated with it remain underexplored. Thus, while volunteerism has continued both as practice and an institutional value, there is still a need to uncover how it is anchored as a virtue. This gap calls for an exploration of the phenomenological experiences of its stakeholders to grasp how volunteerism is defined and embodied within the community.

Research Objectives

The study aims to explore the lived experiences of the members of the Letran Bataan community to understand volunteerism as a virtue through community service. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Describe how members of the Letran Bataan community experience volunteerism through community service.

2. Examine the meanings participants attach to volunteerism as a virtue in their personal, academic, or professional lives.

3. Explore how participation in community service influences their understanding and practice of volunteerism.

4. Identify common themes or essences derived from the lived experiences of participants regarding volunteerism as a virtue.

Significance of the Study

Thus, this study and its findings are intended to benefit the following groups, who serve as the main recipients of its outcomes.

1. Center for Community Development Department – By understanding the underlying experiences of the community through community service, the department can craft manuals and procedures that consider the essence of this study. This will serve as one of the factors in planning, ensuring that the values of volunteerism are anchored in personal experiences. It will also serve as a challenge to maintain and further improve the community services that capture the interest of the community by essence and purpose.

2. Letran Employees – The insights gained will provide a deeper understanding of how the essence of volunteerism can be applied to boost participation in community service activities initiated by Letran Bataan. By recognizing real and meaningful experiences, employees' commitment can be strengthened, positively influencing their engagement and tenure within the institution.

3. Students – Students are likely to become more active participants once the essence and depth of the experiences are recognized and articulated. This understanding can help instill what it truly means to volunteer, whether as Pages, Squires, or Letranistas.

4. School Administrators – The findings can inform decision-making regarding community service programs, as high participation and meaningful experiences serve as effective factors in implementing rules and procedures.

5. Institution (Letran Bataan) – The institution can develop new themes that reflect the community's characteristics. This study helps distinctively explore and promote volunteerism as one of the core values possessed by the Letran Bataan community.

6. Future Researchers – The study contributes to local research in the Philippine context by examining volunteerism as a moral virtue. It can serve as a foundation for further exploration in similar educational or community-based settings.

Scope and Delimitation

The scope of this study is confined to the Letran Bataan community, encompassing its employees, students, and administrators. It specifically examines the phenomenon within Letran Bataan and excludes other institutions, which may consequently limit the generalizability of the findings. The participants include individuals who have been affiliated with the Colegio for at least one year and have engaged in three or more community service activities organized by Letran Bataan. Given that the study adopts a qualitative research design, the use of statistical analyses and quantitative measures is beyond its scope.

Definition of Terms

To provide clarity and a common understanding of key concepts as they are applied in this study, the following terms are operationally defined:

1. Volunteerism – An act of serving without asking for anything in return.

2. Virtue – A moral principle seen as a habit.

3. Community Service – Prosocial activities initiated by Letran Bataan.

4. Lived Experiences – Shared personal insights and gains from the participants.

Review and Related Literature

This chapter presents relevant studies related to volunteerism and community service. It includes theoretical frameworks and research findings that support the discussion and provide insights into the factors and gaps addressed in the study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The present study is anchored in both ethics and psychology, describing how the virtue of habit influences volunteerism among individuals.

Aristotle's Teachings of Virtues

The first theoretical framework of this study is anchored in Aristotle's Virtue Ethics, which emphasizes the development of moral character through the concept of habit. Aristotle explains in the Nicomachean Ethics that virtue is not something inherent in human beings but is cultivated through consistent practice and conscious choice. In this view, individuals do not become virtuous or volunteers by nature; rather, they develop these qualities through deliberate and repeated actions that reflect moral discipline and a commitment to doing good (Miller,1974).

According to Aristotle, virtue is formed through habit (ethos), wherein repeated actions guided by the right intentions shape a person's moral disposition and lead to a good life (eudaimonia). In the context of this study, volunteering can be seen as a modern expression of this Aristotelian concept (Frede, 2015). Through continuous acts of service, individuals embody and reinforce virtues such as generosity, unselfishness, kindness, and goodwill. Over time, these acts transform from conscious decisions into habits of virtue, reflecting one's moral growth and genuine desire to contribute to the well-being of others (Lockwood, 2013). Thus, Aristotle's Virtue Ethics provides a meaningful foundation for understanding how volunteering, when practiced consistently and with the right intention, becomes a moral habit that enriches both personal character and the community.

Social Learning Theory

From a psychological perspective, the theory of Albert Bandura can serve as one of the anchors of this research. As a community that molds its stakeholders into a self-serving community, in line with one of the principles of a Dominican community, the virtue of volunteerism is learned through observing the instilled characteristics and behaviors demonstrated during particular events. When a person observes, imitates, and is reinforced in what he or she does, the individual learns within a social context and environment (Bandura & Walters, 1977). The concept of volunteerism is acquired through social exposure. A community develops character through its role models, such as administrators, teachers, peers, or community leaders, who actively participate in acts of service. These principles provide a practical explanation of how volunteerism is acquired through observation and modeling by role models.

Theory of Planned Behavior

This foundation explains that human actions are guided by three major factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These indicators influence how an individual deliberately carries out a behavior (Azjen, 1991). When a community service has value and a person has a positive attitude toward it, the action is believed to have meant and is supported by the community in practice. The conscious decision of a person can then turn into a habit, leading to the consistent practice of volunteerism.

Virtues and Motivation in Volunteerism

Volunteerism is a multifaceted concept influenced by several interrelated factors, particularly motivation and core values, which play a crucial role in sustaining individuals' continued engagement in volunteer activities. According to Faletehan et al. (2021), humans possess what they term as "work callings," a concept that integrates deeply with motivation. Individuals who embody this sense of calling perceive their involvement as a moral duty directed toward serving a greater collective purpose. In contrast to altruism, which is often rooted in personal choice and individual initiative "work callings" are more closely aligned with collectivist orientations that emphasize social responsibility and community contribution. In a related study, Ohri and Dutta (2025) identified factors such as consistent recognition, managerial support, and work-life balance as significant determinants of volunteer engagement and retention. These elements not only sustain motivation but also enhance an individual's sense of belonging and purpose within the organization. Similarly, Sextus et al. (2025) highlighted that the quality and commitment of volunteers, rather than their mere quantity, are essential in maintaining the vitality of volunteer programs. Their findings also revealed that the specific roles volunteers undertake particularly in environmental projects serve as key motivational drivers that reinforce long-term participation.

From the perspective of student volunteers, the primary motivational dimensions tend to revolve around altruism, self-satisfaction, spiritual fulfillment, and the desire for meaningful involvement (Wondimu & Admas, 2024). Students are often guided by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influence their willingness to participate in community-oriented initiatives. Intrinsic motivations encompass offering one's abilities for the benefit of others, fostering happiness, and contributing to social transformation. Conversely, extrinsic motivations include establishing social connections, gaining practical experience, enhancing one's public image, and pursuing personal and professional development. Thus, for students, volunteerism can be understood as a dynamic process of transforming motivation in both internal and external turning it into purposeful and socially meaningful action. One of the key elements in cultivating ethical virtues among students is the role of religious education in enhancing their emotional, positive, and prosocial behavior. It serves as a guiding framework that upholds the principles of integrity, honesty, and respect. Students who receive such formation are more inclined to engage in activities that embody acts of kindness, volunteerism, and social cooperation. Thus, religious education continues to serve as an essential instrument for character formation and the promotion of social cohesion (Hussam, 2025).

Volunteerism and Service-Learning in Education

As an educational institution committed to educating students, volunteerism can be viewed as an essential part of learning by integrating community service into education. Research findings suggest that students typically participate in one or two major volunteer events in an academic year, focusing on environmental, health-related, community service, and faith-based outreach programs (Aung, 2025). In a study on volunteerism at the collegiate level, freshmen and sophomores were found to serve their communities through seminars and orientations. They were also more willing to raise awareness when given proper exposure to the community and its advocacies (Mori, 2025). Meanwhile, students at the secondary level often show positive impacts when social and civic responsibility and commitment are incorporated into pedagogical approaches and initiatives (Gregorova et al., 2024).

Community Service in the Philippine Context

Engaging in community work contributes to the overall good of society. Asio et al. (2023) found that students in Olongapo City prefer community service activities that provide a high level of satisfaction, as this fosters greater engagement in volunteer acts that utilize their skills in areas such as education, information dissemination, typing, and cooking. In the local context, particularly in Northern Mindanao, another form of volunteerism and community service emerges during calamities, especially major typhoons. During these times, civil society organizations serve as partners of the government in conducting fundraising activities and mobilizing networks for humanitarian purposes (Pasamonte, 2025). Moreover, community service programs also extend to children in conflict with the law, focusing on skills development and education as means of encouragement for the youth, which further strengthens the overall scope and impact of community service (Celis, 2025).

In summary, the reviewed literature indicates that volunteerism is influenced by a combination of multiple factors such as motivation, education, personal experiences, and moral and social development. However, most studies focus primarily on the motives for volunteering. Therefore, the researchers recognize that volunteerism as a habit has received limited exploration. Furthermore, there is an essential need to examine this aspect more deeply.

Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology used in the study. It outlines the step-by-step process of how the data were gathered and analyzed to support the research objectives. The chapter also discusses the procedures for data collection and the methods employed in data analysis.

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design, using phenomenological analysis, was employed in this study. This approach was chosen to explore the lived experiences of the Letran Bataan community when it comes to volunteerism as a virtue. It is an appropriate method for understanding participants' perspectives, values, and institutional practices, particularly when the goal is to analyze concepts grounded in existing experiential knowledge.

Participants of the Study

The researchers used the purposive sampling method to assess the qualifications of the participants. These include the students,

employees, and faculty staff who actively joined in the institutional outreach programs for over a year and beyond. The number of participants will be from five - ten persons for data saturation.

Research Instrument

The primary source of data will be gathered by the use of semi-structured interview questions crafted by the researchers in alignment with the research statement of the problem. Each main question was anchored to four research objectives. While probe questions are also provided to explore and fully extract the lived experience of the participants. The instrument was validated by 3 experts to ensure that the interview questions are appropriate for the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers will seek help from the Center for Community Development to qualify and analyze the following chosen participants in the study. Verbal and written invitations in the interview will be sent to the participants explaining the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. Before the interview, the researchers will inform briefly, the participants about the nature of the study including the confidentiality of their responses and their right to withdraw anytime as part of the obtained written informed/assent consent forms. The semi- structured interview will be facilitated by other professional other than the researchers to avoid biases.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological approach. The transcribed data will undergo seven procedural steps: familiarization, identification of significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, providing descriptions, structuring, and validation (Douglas, 2004, as cited in Colaizzi, 1978). After applying Colaizzi's approach, the researchers then applied thematic analysis to detect, evaluate, and interpret the themes from the qualitative data. This aims to obtain an in-depth exploration of a certain phenomenon that will aid in seeking answers on how volunteerism is perceived in the community.

Ethical Considerations

Since the nature of the study will use interview questions, the researchers will ensure that the shared experiences of the participants are kept confidential. Informed and assent consent forms will be provided once the participants agree to participate. The right to withdraw at any time is properly discussed. To ensure the participants' safety during the interview, counselors are cued when participants feel triggered during data gathering for proper debriefing.

Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

The views presented in this chapter are based on the responses of nine participants who shared their insights for the study. The respondents consist of students, employees, and administrators, who are the primary stakeholders of the institution. A semi-structured interview was conducted to gather the data, and Colaizzi's approach was employed to analyze the participants' statements and responses. The following themes highlight the rich experiences of the respondents regarding the concept of volunteerism. The findings are presented to capture both the individual insights and learnings of the participants, as well as the collective essence of their experiences with volunteerism.

Theme 1: Letran Bataan Community Experiences

The members of the Letran–Bataan community openly shared their positive and negative experiences with the institution's community service programs. For the younger generation, participating in these activities provides a sense of belonging that gives meaning to their service. Employees, meanwhile, expressed a profound happiness when they engaged in these programs with purpose. Among the activities mentioned, the Makibata Series stood out as the most significant, being referenced twelve times during the initial part of the interviews. Both employees and younger participants reported a strong sense of fulfillment, purpose, and challenge when planning and conducting outreach programs for children. Makibata is regarded as the most memorable community experience in Letran Bataan, with environmental advocacies and Tulong Letranista also highlighted by the respondents.

Supporting statement: (R3)

"It's very inspiring and uplifting na hindi mo lang gagawin 'yun as part ka ng Letran, pero dahil na-instill na sayo yung values… yung virtue of helping."

As stated in the previous literature, participants are more drawn to participate in activities such as community service involving children and environmental purposes. Another highlights the sustainability projects of Letran Bataan, such as the annual coastal clean-up, tree planting, and care for the environment.

The Makibata Series provides participants with a profound sense of emotional fulfillment, making it a central reference point in recalling and understanding volunteerism as an integral aspect of the Letran–Bataan identity.

Theme 2: Volunteerism as a Virtuous Practice Reflecting Letran Ideals

The strong ideals of Deus, Patria, Letran are reflected in the meanings that participants attach to volunteerism. Common themes include serving God and serving others, demonstrating that the nature of being a Letranite is closely intertwined with the practice of volunteerism. These values also reflect the upbringing and guidance of their families, emphasizing compassion, empathy, and sympathy toward others, which shape the kind of individuals they become. Volunteerism further signifies a sense of social responsibility toward the less fortunate. Participants shared that even in the absence of initiatives from Letran, they are motivated to serve the community through activities such as storytelling, literacy programs, and distributing groceries or other goods, driven out of good will.

Supporting statement: (R2 & R5)
R2 added, "Letran molded us not just to be socially responsible at maging mapagdasal. Most importantly… maging maka Diyos, makabayan, at maka-Letran."

R5 stated, “Basically, as a Letranite. This is really important for us. We have the ability to touch lives, to help others. As a Letranite we can create and help through small things… small things that can create big impact in the future.”

Theme 3: Volunteerism as a Sense of Belongingness

Most of the respondents initially perceived volunteerism as a social obligation and responsibility. However, as they became more involved in the activity, a deeper meaning began to emerge. They expressed that their motivation to continue volunteering was largely influenced by the sense of belongingness they experienced within the community. The act of volunteering allowed them to feel connected and integrated with others, fostering a shared identity and purpose. In the context of Letran Bataan, volunteerism serves as an avenue for socialization, participation, and care, reinforcing the institution’s values of community involvement and collective growth.
Supporting statement: (R1 & R2)

R1: “For me po, sa mga tao. Sa mga nakakasama ko po. Kasi po kung hindi po sila masaya kasama, hindi po ako magtatagal dito.”

R2:“Yung volunteerism sa akin before, honestly, mag-volunteer ka lang, kasi kailangan, kasi requirement, pero after every activity, yung volunteerism pala ay malalim na, it’s like… being one of them.”

According to the findings Diaz, 2025, it was also observed in the Letran community that being socially involved is a factor in joining community service, not just for children but also for workers, as it makes them feel that they belong to a certain community that acts with a goal and purpose. This reflects Bandura’s theory that your environment models and shapes who you become (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Theme 4: Commitment and Compassion as Virtue

The respondents commonly agreed that the virtue they possess in volunteerism incorporates compassion and commitment. A deep sense of empathy and care that results in action and commitment after exposure to the event eventually forms a habit.
Supporting statement: (R2 & R8)

R2: “Siguro yung ano… having a sense of compassion… saka yung… commitment mo, hindi lang sa mga tao. Hindi lang yung receiver kasi ang nagkakaroon ng fulfillment, kundi yung nagbibigay. Kumbaga… nagkakaroon ng shared… mas deepened na sense of humanity.”

R8: “If you’re obliged, that’s not volunteerism. Volunteerism aside from commitment, it involves passion. Kapag “you have to” lang, hindi… it won’t work.”

Unlike findings from other studies (Ohri & Dutta 2025, Wondimu & Admas, 2024) which emphasize social responsibility, social connection, and personal experiences as primary motivators for volunteerism, the Letran Bataan community demonstrates that participation is guided by the virtues of compassion and commitment, which gradually evolve into enduring moral dispositions. A profound awareness of the needs of others motivates individuals to engage in service not as isolated acts but as sustained, continuous practices, reflecting the lived values and identity encapsulated in the concept of a “tatak ng isang Letranista.”

Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

1. The community of Letran Bataan shows a positive attitude toward community service in the institution.

2. They perceive community service not just as an outreach program but as an opportunity to socialize and become part of a community with purpose.

3. The community reflects the Letran core ideals of Deus, Patria, and Letran in engaging in such activities.

4. Compassion and commitment are virtues of Letran Bataan in participating in community service.

Conclusion

This phenomenological research reveals the lived experiences of its respondents, reflecting community engagement, values, and principles, including their sentiments regarding the programs and initiatives led by the Letran Bataan community. Although some activities primarily required their participation and there were challenges in formulating and conducting laborious community service, MakiBata had a significant impact as it encouraged a sense of satisfaction in helping children. Helping during times of calamities and promoting care for the environment were also mentioned in this exploration. Letran Bataan would not be a community if it were not for their shared sense of belonging. Social engagement and involvement are important to sustain these kinds of services; it is the camaraderie that builds the Letran Bataan community as one. The effectiveness of teaching the principles of Deus, Patria, Letran is also reflected in how the community engages and responds to the spirit of Arriba, as Letran continues to move and touch the lives of the community and others. Finally, the compassion and commitment of Letranites as virtues signify that the community truly understands what they are doing, not merely through action, but rooted in their personal and communal values.

Recommendations:

Center and Development Office

The community expressed enthusiasm for participating in the MakiBata series as part of their community service and looked forward to future activities. Challenges in crafting and formulating activities were also mentioned, highlighting the need for careful planning. However, the use of standardized patterns and formats for Maki series proposals is encouraged to ensure consistency and effectiveness. Community service activities related to sustainability projects, such as environmental initiatives, also received high engagement from participants. The researchers recommend stronger collaboration with the Auxiliary Department for institutional environmental programs. Furthermore, partnerships with the BED faculty in promoting community service in education, such as reading and writing programs, are highly encouraged to expand the reach and impact of volunteer activities. Overall, structured planning, institutional support, and collaboration are key to sustaining and enhancing volunteer initiatives.

For the Letran Community

Administrators, staff, students, and their parents are encouraged to

embody the virtues of compassion and commitment in every community service activity they participate in within the institution. Practicing these values consistently strengthens the sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and the overall spirit of volunteerism within the community.

For Future Researchers

A longitudinal approach or comparative studies are recommended for future research to examine the long-term impacts of volunteerism and the differences in experiences across various communities or programs. These approaches can provide deeper insights into the sustainability, effectiveness, and transformative potential of volunteer initiatives.

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