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## MEANINGS OF VOLUNTEER WORK: A STUDY WITH MEMBERS OF A LUTHERAN INSTITUTION

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To understand the meanings of volunteer work among members of a lutheran protestant church.

**Originality/gap/relevance/implications:** This research adds to the field of knowledge of the meanings of work, especially because of the specific context studied. In addition, it extends the discussion on volunteering, by entering the management of religious institutions that are supported by the help of volunteers.

**Key methodological aspects:** A qualitative approach to research was adopted and data were gathered in documents, interviews, and non-participant observation of the board meetings of a lutheran church synod in Southeast Brazil. The perspective used to analyze data was that the production of meanings is also a means for interpreting. Besides, using associating ideas mapping technique allowed the identification of categories based on the content and logical sequence of discourse.

**Summary of key results:** The study found eight meanings of work: identification with the lutheran ethics; integrity and image of the institution; unit; conditions and willingness to participate; incentive from others; relation with the profession; pleasant relationship between a board of directors; and monitoring, support, and recognition.

**Key considerations/conclusions:** The study revealed a better understanding for volunteering at a religious organization on how to think about ways to manage it. Also, it was realized that the experiences and interaction with others shape the individual and his or her relationship with the church, and that the meaning of work has a different relationship to each religion.

## KEYWORDS

Meanings of work. Volunteer work. Management. Religious volunteering. Lutheran church.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Work is a form of social relationship that builds and is built by man and society, one of the main factors of human existence (Araújo & Sachuk, 2007). However, the views on work have changed throughout history, changing the meanings and values assigned to it.

Starting with the Protestant Reformation, with the ideas of vocation and duty in relation to work, it became to be seen as central to the construction of subjectivity of the human being (Bendassolli, 2007). With the Industrial Revolution, work also becomes a way of progress and, although it involved exploitation, it generates satisfaction and fulfillment that give rise to meanings beyond the economic (Araújo & Sachuk, 2007). Additionally, new meanings of work are also perceived when it comes to changes in the capitalist spirit over time (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Some authors advocate the centrality of work for human life (Araújo & Sachuk, 2007; Coutinho, 2009; Coutinho, Borges, Graf, & Silva, 2013; Coutinho, Dal Magro, & Budde, 2011; Graf & Coutinho, 2011; Lima, Tavares, Brito, & Cappelle, 2013). This is because work contributes to the identity construction of the individual (Dubar, 1998) and their social integration; on the other hand, the absence of work can lead to suffering (Dourado, Holanda, Silva, & Bispo, 2009).

Thus, there are reasons for social studies in the area of work and studying aspects that build meaning, understanding what leads individuals to work. The economic dimension is not crucial; there are ways to work outside market logic, because, in addition to financial compensation, work should also make sense (Dourado *et al.*, 2009; Goulart, 2009).

The worker's experiences and a shared environment, involving the values and ethics of the group to which he or she belongs form the meanings attributed to work. Therefore, the meanings of work and how they are constructed understanding never ends.

The organization studied is a Synod of the Lutheran church based in a State of the Southeast Brazil. Synod is a structure that covers a certain geographical region, consisting of the parishes and communities of the region, with lay people and ministers being involved in making decisions (Voigt, 2010). The Lutheran church is comprised of 18 synods, subject to a national structure.

The participants' work on the research is voluntary. It addresses volunteering at a church, through participation in management, which focuses on managing the institution. The synod has three hired employees (synodal pastor and two secretaries) and seven volunteers in executive positions.

This study is based on social constructionism, which seeks to qualitatively understand the construction of meaning in a particular socio-historical-cultural context. This approach is interdisciplinary and can be integrated into organizational studies (Rosa, Tureta, & Brito, 2006). Studying the meaning of work in a traditional institution in contemporary society presents itself as a challenge in an effort to understand how those involved deal with these seemingly incongruous aspects.

The aim of the study is to understand the meanings of volunteer work to members of a Lutheran Protestant Church. For this reason, the shared lutheran ethics will be studied and life pathways of the group members (Graf & Coutinho, 2011), as they allow an investigation of the social aspects and experiences that constitute and influence them to be in this work. The following shows the context of the organization and the lutheran ethics involved.

## 2 THE LUTHERAN CHURCH: CONTEXT AND ETHICS

Based on the 2010 census (IBGE, 2012), some characteristics can be identified for a better understanding of lutherans. Characterized as mission evangelicals, 95.5% are literate, with high school or college education; 54.6% receive between half and two minimum salaries monthly per capita; and 90% say they are white – an aspect related to ethnic origin, as the church is concentrated in regions with descendants of Pomeranians and Germans (Rocha & Zorzin, 2012).

The study of this institution is justified by its tradition and expressiveness – the evangelical denominations in the state headquarters of the synod (including lutheran) accounts for 15.09%, the highest rate among Brazilian states (Neri & Melo, 2011). This research will study a synod of the Lutheran church consisting of 182 communities and 60,000 members (Documento Corporativo, 2012) – about 8.6% of the Lutheran church in the country.

The volunteer workers of the institution, *a priori*, have something in common: faith and a common ethic that permeates them. It is intended to define the main lutheran ethical principles that can be applied at work, support understanding of their way of working. The study defines work ethic as a set of guidelines that orient behavior; every Christian should be aware of and know how to discern what is right or wrong (Lutero, 1983, 1999; Brakemeier, 2010).

Weber (2004) treats the Protestant ethic as significant and related to life changes in society, including work. Luther asserted that humans could serve God through work (Lipset, 1990), as it is a vocation and mission of God, necessary for the moral self-realization of the human being (Weber, 2004). The basic lutheran concepts are:

- **Accessibility and equality of knowledge:** with the Reform, access to the word of God was no longer exclusive to the church body – the laity began to study and draw their own conclusions (Comparato, 2006). Thus, one could think of participation and conscious volunteer work, transforming the members of the spectators into those involved, who could make decisions that were not allowed before.
- **Christian freedom:** The subject could discern what was right, making the Christian free and no longer subject to anyone. This freedom is accompanied by an awareness of consequences and responsibility for one's actions, with individuals being free and a servant at the same time (Brakemeier, 2010; Lutero, 1983, 1999).
- **Ethic of gratitude:** Doing good deeds brings rewards, but dishonesty can also bring them. Therefore, the lutheran ethic goes beyond rewards and is based on the ethic of gratitude, “[...] love because God loved us first (1 Jo 4.19) [...]” (Brakemeier, 2010, p. 59).
- **Social welfare:** The focus is on solidarity (Brakemeier, 2010), as the best penance is to improve life in this world (Dreher, 2005), not paying indulgences. “I dare say that, before Luther, the target of Christian ethics was Heaven. Luther transferred it to Earth. Good works produce ‘salvation’, the salvation of survival in a world in danger” (Dreher, 2005, p. 47).
- **Non-dualistic view of reality:** Lutheranism breaks from the stated dualities between good and evil, for example. One begins to understand that human beings are complex and “[...] simultaneously equal and different, that they are individuals and social beings, body and soul, organisms and people [...]” (Brakemeier, 2010, p. 55).
- **Compensation for work performed:** Luther believes work should be rewarded and advocates people to work, maintaining fair prices and not taking advantage of the needs of others (Lutero, 2001).
- **Shared priesthood:** Authority is not centered in the ministry, entrusting the priesthood to all members. The difference between ministers and laypeople is that some activities are specific to those who have training, i.e., how to preach and administer the sacraments (Brakemeier, 1994; Lutero, 1983).
- **Good works do not lead to salvation:** Luther argues that grace and faith lead to salvation and that everything should be carried out with these two elements. That way, people who cannot perform good works do feel neglected as they may contribute in their own way, within their limitations (Lutero, 1983, 1999).

These principles influence the lives of individuals and consequently their actions at work. It can be said that the lutheran work ethic guides behavior to

preach: equality between colleagues and sharing information; freedom to act with responsibility and awareness of their actions; practice good deeds and carry out the work without thinking of direct rewards; well-being at work, encouraging solidarity; absolute truth does not exist and different sides of an issue must be held; recognition of the people's effort; participation of all; and good deeds at work does not always lead to a promotion.

These characteristics are relevant to understanding volunteer work in a religious organization, when viewing this shared ethic. However, it is not expected that these views are unique to and present truth in all the lutherans. The next section deals with volunteer work.

### 3 VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteer work is unpaid monetarily; people who make their time available for the sake of another, for different reasons (Souza & Medeiros, 2012) – and these give meaning to the work. When analyzing the reasons for volunteering, Godoi and Piccoli (2012) noted that almost all participants had stable relationship and usually their spouses were also or had been volunteers.

McAllum (2014) identified two lines of meaning for carrying out voluntary work: freedom-reciprocity, dedicated to the benefits and individual results; and donation-obligation, focused on the good development of work and a sense of contribution and permanence towards difficulties, generating loyalty to the organization.

In their study on volunteering, Dias and Palassi (2007) pointed out that most of the organizations studied are legitimized as corporate foundations and social organizations; churches are not covered. Therefore, investigating the meaning of that work in a religious context will certainly contribute to expanding this area of expertise.

Religions have different administrative forms, modifying the number of volunteers and hired professionals – the studied synod has about 1,500 volunteers in the management area. The functions and nomenclature of the laity work differ, making it difficult to search for academic papers<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, it could be understood that among the possible religions that use these terms, research in the area of administration is a rarity. Therefore, general texts on voluntary work were used.

<sup>1</sup> Looking at the Capes Periodicals Portal, with a filter for the last five years, we did not reach any relevant result because the terms have different meanings in other institutions. As an example, a presbyter, or minister, in the Lutheran church is a volunteer who conducts specific acts of the church; in the Catholic church, the priest leads the ecclesiastical area.

Silva (2004b) identified, *inter alia*, religion and family as central to the decision to volunteer. Furthermore, the example at home and the study reinforce the tradition of solidarity. Political and ideological influences may also exist, as well as the expectation of symbolic exchange for life experience or affectivity.

Hill and den Dulk (2013) report that students from schools with religious teachings were more likely to volunteer, more so if they are Protestants. Paixão (2004) observed characteristics of wanting to help and personal motivation in a group of lutheran women and the importance of the informal group to continue working for the pleasure it provides. Silva (2004b), in turn, analyzed what people look for in the volunteer life experience, work experience and affectivity, since it do not change their routine or cut off free time.

Caldana and Figueiredo (2008) state that voluntary work is part of the construction of subjectivity, because it fills gaps in esteem, recognition, and satisfaction, and offers time for relieving stress. Silva (2013) believes that voluntary work is focused on the emotional and social return, through relationships or sense of pleasure in developing the activity.

When thinking about the commitment to work, three dimensions should be considered as per Jaussi (2007): willingness to exert effort, identification, and positive affect through the organization. Maciel and Camargo (2011) state that the commitment to work is influenced by the overall satisfaction with the organization, both the emotional connection as well as what they would lose by leaving it. People also get involved for the pleasure of working for a cause, to feel useful, and their own psychological well-being. However, the organization should offer conditions for the work to be carried out and provide a positive experience (Caldana, Souza, & Camiloto, 2012).

It was observed that there are several aspects that involve volunteer work. Our focus, however, is to understand the meanings of this work, which is the subject of the next section.

## 4 MEANINGS OF WORK

The transformations of contemporary labor relations (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) may have implications for the meanings given to work and how to manage it in organizations (Araújo & Sachuk, 2007; Coutinho, 2009). The interest here is to articulate the meanings with the work ethic and understand these meanings for volunteers of a religious institution.

Among the issues relevant for the understanding is the subject's work path (Coutinho, 2009). In addition in order to analyze the trajectory of work in the

church, it is important to know some aspects of the profession of each one, which aid in developing meaning in volunteer religious work.

The theoretical aspects of constructionism were used in this study, arising from social psychology, in which initiatives to methodically and epistemologically study this aspect can be seen (Arendt, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Galbin, 2014; Gergen, 2009; Rasera & Japur, 2005) and others to understand the meanings of work starting with this approach (Graf & Coutinho, 2011; Lima *et al.*, 2013; Rosa *et al.*, 2006).

Social constructionism strives to understand how the meanings of work are presented and formed, understanding it as a process. Therefore, it searches for historical and cultural specificity of a particular social group; we understand that human relationships and language produce and sustain knowledge and reality; see that the ways of describing the world influence the forms of action; cherish a critical and reflective attitude of reality; and hear multiple voices to understand the meaning, which is collectively constructed (Galbin, 2014; Rasera & Japur, 2005; Rosa *et al.*, 2006; Gergen, 2009).

This aspect, i.e., to listen to the community, aims to grasp the multiplicity of understanding of practices without being detached from reality, but one may believe that there are different views for the same reality. It believes the individual sees the world from their experiences in a given socio-historical context (Berger & Luckmann, 1974), and that it is not possible to obtain a single truth. Relativism gives way to discrediting a universal law that is applied to any case. Yet, not everything can be considered, because there will always be normative rules historically and culturally located (Gergen, 2009).

Berger and Luckmann (1974) understand that reality is socially constructed and collective events have a unity that makes sense from the understanding of the past, present, and future of each one in context. As such, there is such agreement with Coutinho (2009) and Graf and Coutinho (2011) with the investigation of the subjects' paths in their analysis. It should also be based on the ethics and values that these individuals share from the work they develop together.

There is relevance to study the meanings of work using this approach due to it is considered more thorough, investigating the construction of reality and providing new perspectives, valuing the process of the construction of meaning rather than looking at the static.

Moreover, one may evoke a brief discussion of identity, considering it to be formed by the construction of the self in relation to others and social roles, including those at work. In other words, identity is constructed using socialization experiences as a reference (Silva Neto, 2008). Likewise, organizational identity is formed by perceptions generated by its members (Dubar, 2005, 2012;

Sainsaulieu, 1977). Thus, the identification with the organization triggers emotional processes in the individual (Machado, 2003), and meaning is generated in the context of work from identification with the institution. For Silva Neto (2008), the desired identity, based on aspirations and personal projects, is the identification linked with a pathway, which is a result of their inclusion in the work and organization.

Based on the discussions, it is possible to describe the research method.

## **5 RESEARCH METHOD**

The qualitative approach was adopted, as it is more sensitive to understanding the meanings (Spink & Menegon, 2004).

### **5.1 ETHICAL ISSUES**

This study was authorized by the organization and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State Federal University, as per 783,390 of September 9, 2014. Data collection included the use of an Informed Consent Form.

### **5.2 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND PARTICIPANTS**

The studied organization is a Synod pertaining to a Lutheran church based in a State located in the Southeast of Brazil, consisting of: 1. Synodal Assembly, a deliberative and sovereign body, formed by the Synodal Council and representatives of communities; 2. Synodal Council, responsible for administrative and doctrinal aspects and used to enforce the decisions of Synodal Assembly and ensure that the Church's goals are followed; 3. Synodal Board, which chairs the Council and has the same characteristics; and 4. the Secretariat, which provides executive support to the board and the synodal pastor.

The research will focus on the Board, consisting of: president, secretary, treasurer, and their deputies – composed of ministers and laity – in addition to the participation of the Synodal pastor and assistant pastor (Regimento Interno, 1998). The synodal pastor is the only paid individual, who accompanies the board, but does not preside over it. The other ministers are active in parishes and their board functions are voluntary. The laypeople are members of the Church who have no theological training and are not employed by the

organization. This board level was chosen because its members possess work experience in the communities and parishes, which, hopefully, more reliably represent lutheran concepts.

### 5.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data were collected from documents, interviews and non-participant observation. Tools included:

- **Non-participant observation:** involves no intervention by the researcher (Flick, 2004), occurring during monthly meetings of the synodal board as it was the meeting point of the participants' work. It permitted the observation of members' interactions, behavior, and joint decision-making. The meetings were followed from June to December 2014, for a total of seven meetings with an average duration of two and a half hours.
- **Interviews:** they sought to delve deeper into the questions, allowing us to understand the participants' views (Gaskell, 2002), which was essential to understand the meanings attributed to work. They were held with the board members, a total of seven people (the synodal pastor was excluded). The script was semi-structured without impeding the flow of the interview and addressed: the life story of each participant and aspirations for the future, in addition to questions about the relationship of this work with paid employee. These paths – especially those of the professionals – helped the understanding of the respondents' meaning of work based on their unique experiences and collective constructions (Coutinho, 2009).

### 5.4 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Analysis began by reading the field notes from non-participant observation, which assisted in contextualizing the environments and in understanding how participants addressed certain aspects. The interviews were conducted and later transcribed and read without categorization.

To analyze the construction of meaning, we used the 'association map of ideas' (Spink & Lima, 2004; Lima *et al.*, 2013), which analyzes the corpus of content and also the logical sequence of the discussion.

After the first reading, the use of qualifiers by the respondents was identified, which are "[...] terms, metaphors, signs, figures of speech, and images used in conversations that lead to the production of a sense of reality" (Lima *et al.*, 2013, p. 52), expressing the affective tone to the subject matter (Spink & Lima, 2004). Chart 1 typifies an interview excerpt.

CHART 1

INTERVIEW EXCERPT, SHOWING RESPONSES  
TO THE CATEGORY “INCENTIVE BY OTHER PEOPLE”

EXPLANATIONS	QUALIFIERS
So the first invitation, which was from the pastor [name],	I felt like, “No, really, I’m just returning gradually, I feel extremely unable to be leading yet another board of the synodal council”.
But then the other board members said, “No, be assured that we are together with you”.	Then, I felt confidence in this meaning that will support me, help me face the difficulties I’ll have.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Using the qualifiers, it was possible to see similar justifications in different interviews, constructing categories of meaning, as shown in Chart 2.

CHART 2

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS SHOWING RESPONSES  
TO THE CATEGORY “UNITY”

RESPONDENT	EXPLANATIONS	QUALIFIERS
A	[...] what we note, for example, the movement [name], it didn’t come to add, but rather to divide, unfortunately, got it?	And this, then, in all sectors, if something doesn’t come to add, but instead to divide, how it’s split up is difficult. Adding is always very good.
D	[...] told that there are different theological currents in the Lutheran church.	This is always sad for me.
F	[...] there shouldn’t be this kind of thing inside the church, a pastor being able to divide the community.	I mean, it can’t exist within the church. It should be the other way around, join it’s a community! Not separate it. So I find it very sad that it happens within our church.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The process resulted in eight categories of meanings, which are discussed in the next section.

## 6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: MEANINGS OF VOLUNTEER WORK IN A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

The atmosphere at the meetings is friendly. Religiosity is always present with reading Bible verses and prayer, which is aligned with Voigt's guidelines (2010, p. 69), "[...] All resolutions and decisions must take place in the search for understanding God's will. So the presbytery meetings shall not start or end in just any fashion".

Everyone expresses their opinions and do not strongly disagree, attempting to reach a consensus. There are three main types of treated subjects: 1. **administrative**, such as the reading the minutes; synodal budget; new projects for strategic planning; 2. **disciplinary**, especially with regard to parishes with internal problems whose members and ministers are in conflict; and 3. **political**, highlighting synodal elections, present at several meetings.

The observation of the meetings contributed to prepare the interview script and better contextualization of the work. The interviews sought to involve the historicity of experiences at the professional and personal levels and within the church. Four men and three women were interviewed, but all will be termed as "respondent". These took place between September and December 2014 and ranged from 40-78 minutes, totaling 419 minutes.

The profile of respondents is compatible with the IBGE survey (2012): white, highly educated, and in a good financial condition. Six are Pomeranian in origin, confirming the relationship with ethnicity (Rocha & Zorzin, 2012). Three have undergraduate degrees, three have graduate degrees, and one is working on a master's degree. It is noticed that the professions of volunteers deal directly with people (Chart 3), and six are professionals engaged in non-profit institutions and one with a government agency.

CHART 3

### PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

RESPONDENT	POSITION ON THE BOARD	PROFESSION	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN
A	President	Physician	60	Married	Yes
B	Secretary	Lawyer	35	Single	No
C	Treasurer	Manager of institutional relations	39	Married	Yes

(continue)

CHART 3 (CONCLUSION)

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

RESPONDENT	POSITION ON THE BOARD	PROFESSION	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN
D	Vice-president	Pastor	41	Married	Yes
E	Vice-pastor synodal	Pastor	63	Married	Yes
F	Vice-treasurer	Shelter coordinator	51	Divorced	Yes
G	Vice-secretary	Pastor	55	Married	Yes

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Their profile is also suitable for research on volunteering, showing that married people with children have a greater predisposition to volunteer (Godoi & Piccoli, 2012). The family brings these leaders to church, mainly because they want to set an example for the children and encourage them to also follow the religion.

Regarding their routine as volunteers, it comes down to participating in monthly meetings and synodal council meetings, neither of which requires much of their time. Occasionally, there is also resolution of conflicts, in which case it is necessary to visit the parish with difficulties. Furthermore, each one has tasks related to their position, such as resolution of legal issues.

From this approach to the routines of respondents, learned meanings can be addressed. Silva (2004b) states that people seek volunteer activities through life experience, professional and affectivity, which is in line with the meanings here in proposed. Life experience is gained with new challenges, and part of them can be embedded as a professional experience. Affection expected by the volunteer is present when there is unity between the board and the church, when they make friends and their work is recognized.

The aspects that make this work meaningful to the volunteers are brought in the following section. These were grouped into eight categories – those prominent and properly identified in interviews being interconnected.

## 6.1 IDENTIFICATION WITH THE LUTHERAN ETHICS

The identification with the organization and its ethics in this case are part of the individual's socialization and construction of their identity (Dubar, 2005; 2012; Jaussi, 2007; Machado, 2003; Sainsaulieu, 1977). Religion makes people

join and become a member, which is in line with what Penner (2002), and Caldana and Figueiredo (2008) argue that religious beliefs help stimulate a willingness to volunteer. The greater the identification and compatibility with what they think and with their daily lives, the more likely they feel compelled to help.

Board members are lutherans at birth or since childhood and, except for one, had an example set by their parents. Involvement has been learned from the lutheran doctrine and, in a practical way, through the family. Despite the tradition, respondents spontaneously said they were Lutherans by choice. Respondent D said: “I’m in the lutheran church by conviction [...] to me it’s about principles, ethics, [...]”.

Pride and identification with the Church is perceived in the interviews. Respondent A said: “[...] being Lutheran is actually belonging to the church, [...] we believe in salvation by faith and grace, without sacrifice and without having to suffer [...]”. The excerpt shows the absorption of the lutheran ethics of grace and salvation faith, not by good works (also cited by B, E, F, G).

Another source of pride is the diaconal vein of the church, linked to the ethical aspect of social welfare, where there is concern not only with spirituality, but life as a whole (Dreher, 2005), because the religious experience cannot be detached the reality we live in respondent G. One more widespread ethical aspect is Christian freedom. Respondent C states:

We have a great responsibility by being Lutheran and, at the same time, we have great freedom, and that attracts me. It is not the pastor who will tell me what I have to do [...] Each of us is smart and has the responsibility to make their decisions in the best way and such, [...].

Freedom carries with it responsibility, and with it, active participation. According to respondent E, “it is a faith that does not allow us to fold our arms and watch what happens around us as bystanders, but this faith leads us to action”. With this participation, they had greater community experience, they felt more complete, they knew the church through their parents, and participated in decisions.

Another perceived principle is the shared priesthood (Brakemeier, 1994; Lutero, 1983), in which different points of view lay people and ministers promote discussions and make richer decisions. The participation of lay people is part of religious culture and equality of knowledge occurs at the time that all participate and know about the same things.

## 6.2 INTEGRITY AND IMAGE OF THE INSTITUTION

The integrity and the image of the institution are meaningful because the members are proud to serve in the church, relating to satisfaction with the organization, one of the reasons for their commitment (Maciel & Camargo, 2011). Members value transparency and integrity. Respondent C explains: “I think what stimulates us is seeing everything, we are part of a serious church, a church that’s concerned its members, concerned about the financial resources it has”.

In some statements, pride in the synod image can be seen. Respondent B says: “[...] when they begin to discuss, think about something down south, here in the synod we’re already doing it, so I think it’s cool, it’s pride of the people who come and say ‘ah, you talking about what we’re already doing’”.

## 6.3 UNITY

For the members, work has meaning if the person feels and contributes to it, so it is important to promote unity in the synod, between parishes and ministers – conflicts discourage volunteers because they cause discomfort from the breakdown in the union and conviviality, which is one of the most beautiful aspects of the church (A, E). Respondent F reports: “[...] it really saddened me [...] A pastor who divided the community. I mean, that can’t exist within the church. It should be the other way around, join, it’s about community”.

When there are conflicts involving ministers, groups usually begin to form in the community that strive among themselves, creating disunity. This is the biggest challenge for the board, as it is called upon to intervene and resolve the problem, which is not always easy, especially when one understand the church differently, involving divergent theological views.

## 6.4 CONDITIONS AND WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE

The interviews indicate that people volunteer when they are in a more stable time in life, who already have balance between family and work. This is important and gives meaning to work because the person does not feel as though any aspect of his or her life is being sacrificed, as per Silva (2004a), who states that volunteers act if there is no change in their routine or their free time is not being taken away. If that happens, the volunteer is likely not to give it priority and walk away. Respondent A talks about the apprehension of not being able to give proper attention to a new role on the job and voluntary work at the same time: “[...] I was assigned to be coordinator of the resident doctors. [...] So I do not know how long I’ll be to do it all”.

What also proved important were the cycles in each type of work, as it is possible to act on different levels – community, parish, synod, national church – and activities – board, confirmatory teaching, working with groups, among others. It is good for the volunteers because it offers new goals, challenges, and conviviality.

This renewal can also happen by stepping away from the activities. In the future, some respondents said they would return to community activities (B, C, G) and others would return to personal plans (A, E, F, G) because work is meaningful only when it is based on past experience and expectations for the future in an identification process (Machado, 2003; Silva Neto, 2008). What had meaning when first assuming the position may change, which leads to detachment or not seeking re-election.

## 6.5 ENCOURAGING OTHER PEOPLE

Encouragement was also shown to be important to each respondent – from family, ministers, and other people who helped develop the work. Most have had participatory families since childhood and were encouraged to participate (A, B, D, E, F, G), so it made sense to work in the church as it could be a mirror for others, especially for children, because children are also encouraged to participate (C, D, E, F). Silva (2004b) states that religion and family are the main aspects supporting the decision to volunteer, which, in this case, appear to be intertwined.

The role of other people is important to strengthening their faith and their work path. In the interviews (A, B, C, F, G), there are excerpts of statements by people who decided to remain committed to their purposes or participate more actively. Respondent A tells of an invitation to participate once again the church “[...] pastor [name] left. He was gradually coming to me, asking me to participate in the service [...] we became involved”.

Respondents showed they like to actively participate in the church, to be involved and feel useful. People with this type of profile should be identified and encouraged by the institution, reaching another point: encouraging volunteering. Although the family is important, it is essential that the community and leaders encourage participation, according to the respondents, by showing the positive aspects of such work; praising the qualities and capabilities of the person; and inviting them to participate in small activities.

## 6.6 RELATIONSHIP WITH PROFESSION

Finding points of volunteer work related to one’s profession also provides meaning because participants can learn something that might prove helpful in

their profession. Also, the professional skills of each volunteer can be used in the decision-making environment, which is important for problem resolution.

Even those who do not have a profession related to volunteer work can make contributions to it. For respondent A, church participation brings a humanistic vision, putting one's self in the position of another. For B, participation meant becoming less inhibited, developing the ability to speak in public. The experiences also help with conflict resolution skills, dealing with people and management, which is important in one's professional and personal life.

## **6.7 GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BOARD MEMBERS**

The board has a harmonious relationship of trust and respect, with time set aside for relaxation and celebration. The good relationship between the members of the group is indicated, as it creates emotional ties, not only formal ones. Paixão (2004) and Caldana and Figueiredo (2008) treat these affective ties as essential for the continuity of work. If not friendship, but rather a pleasant relationship and one of respect, is important for the person to feel welcome and belonging to the group.

## **6.8 ACCOMPANIMENT, SUPPORT, AND RECOGNITION**

If managing people in a company is complex, in which all are employed and depend on it for their livelihood, institutions that deal with volunteer work should be even more sensitive to demotivation. As Caldana *et al.* (2012) stated “the organization should provide conditions for volunteers to do their work and have a positive experience, accompanying, supporting, and recognizing their work”.

One of the respondents, who did not attend the meetings during observation, had not seen in a position to help. This involved personal and occupational aspects that did not encourage participation. This is not good for the person, who feels irresponsible, and the group, which loses members for discussion and developing activities.

It is also important to have guidance regarding the roles and importance of board. This deficiency has been identified among the laity; Respondent F reports: “At the first meeting [...] I left there asking ‘why did I take it?’. [...] When I walked in and saw this pile of problems, it once again stirred up the whole confession and what I believe”.

It should be noted that it would be difficult for the church to sustain itself without volunteers, because it depends on members' contributions, and, therefore, it is difficult to maintain a service structure. “And volunteer work is important

because it is this willingness that things will be developed” (G). Accompaniment, support, and recognition make the volunteer feel satisfied and valued, which coincides with what Caldana and Figueiredo (2008) concluded. Furthermore, recognition is a way of compensating for the work (Lutero, 2001).

## 7 CONCLUSION

This qualitative study certainly contributed to the reflection on the subjects addressed. A number of meanings assigned to volunteer work in the institution were observed: identification with the lutheran ethics; integrity and image of the institution; unity; conditions and willingness to participate; encouragement from others; relationship with the profession; harmonious relationship between the board members; and accompaniment, support, and recognition. Although some items resemble the literature used, it is clear that voluntary work in the Lutheran church has its unique characteristics and specific context to be considered.

It can be seen that the meaning is part of a social construction, in which the experiences and interactions with others shape the individual and their relationship and identification with the Church. It begins with socialization in the family and continues with the teachings, expectations, and objectives in the organization.

In terms of the organization, it is important to understand the process involved in the construction of meanings throughout people’s lives to understand the issues that require special attention. Among the respondents, there was a distancing from the board, which was important to understand what differentiates this behavior – many of these meanings were not being supplied and, together, led them to back away.

Certainly, having knowledge of the identification processes and accompanying situations in which volunteers are involved and what displeases them could improve the management of this work. The church should invest in accompaniment, including training leaders to renew and strengthen faith, as recommended by Voigt (2010).

It is understood that research can contribute to the church management and that of other organizations that rely on volunteer work because it reflects on these aspects and stimulates thinking with respect to alternatives that could improve and facilitate volunteer activities and provide them in greater quantity and quality. Specifically for the area of Administration, a study of the meanings of work is relevant to understanding the organizational context through the perspectives of the people involved. Based on the understanding of the identification processes and what adds meaning to the workers, it is possible to address motivation, quality of life, and human relationships at work.

This research further extends the discussion on the nature of volunteering, by adding management of religious institutions, which, unlike in the past, are largely supported by volunteer help (Dias & Palassi, 2007). Research can also help institutions that have similar organizational structures or have ongoing volunteers that reflect on their management.

Organizational studies in Administration are understood as relevant if they rely on the perspective of social constructionism to studies like this, focused on understanding meaning. It is a topic that is still little discussed within the scope of Administration, especially in a religious institution.

A study on the subject showed that the meanings of work really are related to religion, but there are differences in the work ethics that permeate each one. Christian churches may pattern volunteering after the example of Christ's "serving". However, a church with an Episcopal structure will have no concern with a shared priesthood as in a Lutheran church. Similarly, a Pentecostal or Congregational church will not be greatly concerned with unity.

This research has a limitation by one of the researchers being a member of the studied synod and was, therefore, close to the object. However, this limitation assisted in the research by it being accepted by the organization and an easier approach to the respondents.

As suggestions for future studies, it is believed that an understanding of the work ethics and meanings of work for volunteers in other religions would be an interesting foray to expand the discussion of the similarities and differences of volunteer work among themselves and with secular institutions. Another aspect would be to analyze the content of hymns and texts used by the Lutheran church or other churches, looking at the doctrine and culture that is passed along to the members regarding the concepts of work and acquire a better understanding of how they absorb volunteering. That would broaden a comprehension of how religion influences the meanings given to work, whether volunteer or paid, and how churches still exert a strong influence on people's lives.

## SENTIDOS DO TRABALHO VOLUNTÁRIO: UM ESTUDO COM MEMBROS DE UMA INSTITUIÇÃO LUTERANA

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Compreender os sentidos do trabalho voluntário para membros de uma igreja protestante luterana.

**Originalidade/lacuna/relevância/implicações:** Esta pesquisa agrega à área de estudos dos sentidos do trabalho, pelo contexto específico estudado. Além disso, amplia a discussão sobre voluntariado, por adentrar a gestão em instituições religiosas que são sustentadas pela ajuda dos voluntários.

**Principais aspectos metodológicos:** Foi adotada a abordagem qualitativa de pesquisa e os dados foram obtidos em documentos, entrevistas e observação não-participante de reuniões da diretoria de um sínodo da igreja Luterana no sudeste do Brasil. Para análise dos dados, partiu-se da perspectiva de que a produção de sentidos também é uma forma de interpretação e, a partir do mapa de associação de ideias, identificaram-se categorias baseadas no conteúdo e na lógica do discurso.

**Síntese dos principais resultados:** Foram encontrados oito sentidos do trabalho: identificação com a ética luterana; seriedade e imagem da instituição; unidade; condições e disposição em participar; incentivo de outras pessoas; relação com a profissão; relacionamento agradável com a diretoria; e acompanhamento, suporte e reconhecimento.

**Principais considerações/conclusões:** Foi possível compreender o voluntariado em uma organização religiosa para se pensar formas de gerenciá-lo; percebeu-se que experiências e interação com outras pessoas moldam o indivíduo e a sua relação com a igreja e observou-se que os sentidos do trabalho possuem relação diferente para cada religião.

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Sentidos do trabalho. Trabalho voluntário. Gestão. Voluntariado religioso. Igreja Luterana.

## **SENTIDO DEL VOLUNTARIADO: UN ESTUDIO DE LOS MIEMBROS DE UNA INSTITUCIÓN LUTERANA**

### **RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** Entender los significados del trabajo voluntario para los miembros de una iglesia protestante luterana.

**Originalidad/laguna/relevancia/implicaciones:** Esta investigación se suma al campo de estudio de los significados del trabajo, por causa del contexto específico estudiados. Además, extiende la discusión sobre el voluntariado, mediante la introducción de la gestión de las instituciones religiosas que son sostenidas con la ayuda de voluntarios.

**Principales aspectos metodológicos:** Era el cualitativo adoptado de la investigación y los datos habían sido conseguidos en documentos, entrevistas y del no-participante observación de reuniones de un sínodo de la dirección de la iglesia Luterana en el sureste del Brasil. Para el análisis de los datos, la perspectiva fue utilizada de ésa que la producción de significados es también una forma de interpretación y, a partir de la mapa de la asociación de ideas, se identificaron categorías basadas en el contenido y la secuencia lógico del discurso.

**Síntesis de los principales resultados:** Encontraron ocho direcciones del trabajo: la identificación con la ética luterana; la integridad y la imagen de la institución; unidad; condiciones y voluntad de participar; aliento de los demás; relación con la profesión; buena relación entre la junta directiva; y el seguimiento, apoyo y reconocimiento.

**Principales consideraciones/conclusiones:** Es posible entender mejor como voluntario en una organización religiosa que pensar en maneras de manejarlo; se observó que las experiencias y la interacción con los demás dan forma a la persona y su relación con la iglesia y se observó que las direcciones de trabajo tienen diferentes relaciones con todas las religiones.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Direcciones de trabajo. Trabajo voluntario. Gerencia. Voluntariado religioso. Iglesia Luterana.

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