THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO
OUR MISSION

Volunteers of America is a movement organized to reach and uplift all people and bring them to the knowledge and active service of God.

Volunteers of America, illustrating the presence of God through all that we do, serves people and communities in need, and creates opportunities for people to experience the joy of serving others.

Volunteers of America measures its success in positive change in the lives of individuals and communities we serve.

OUR CALLING

Volunteers of America is a church without walls. We were founded more than a century ago in response to God’s call to transform lives by reaching and uplifting America’s most vulnerable. From our very beginning, we have sought to represent God’s love, grace, and redemption through both service and ministry. Our commitment to this calling continues to define our work today.

Volunteers of America Ministry Vision Statement: Volunteers of America is a church without walls that answers God’s call to transform our communities through a ministry of service that demonstrates to all people they are beloved.
OUR FOUNDATION

Volunteers of America was founded by Ballington and Maud Booth in 1896. At the time, the United States was in the midst of the Social Gospel movement, a religious social reform movement inspired by the poverty and deprivation that resulted from the industrial revolution. The movement’s emphasis on emulating the life of Christ through good works would influence Volunteers of America in a way that can still be seen today.

At its onset, Volunteers of America was a Christian organization whose primary work was to preach to the Gospel, but Maud and Ballington quickly realized that preaching alone was not enough to fulfill the mission of “reaching and uplifting.” As Ballington wrote, “The poor man needed a coat that he might come to hear of the Gospel.” Volunteers of America soon found its identity as a unique organization that brings together the work of the church and the work of the social service organization. The organization’s new approach was simple: serve God while serving humankind.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:14-17
MINISTRY OF SERVICE

Today, Volunteers of America is continuing Ballington and Maud’s charge to bring together the human service agency and the church to serve the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. Our ministry is one of service. We provide assistance to people of all faiths and never require those we serve or employ to participate in worship services or to acknowledge specific beliefs. Yet, our work is motivated by God’s love.

Our ministry of service can be seen in many different ways. In some affiliates, ministry occurs through weekly worship services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Some within Volunteers of America may live out the ministry by visiting men and women in prison. For others, the ministry may be as simple as providing a meal and fellowship for an older adult moving into their new home. We believe worship takes many forms, both formally in the community and individually in our acts of service to others.

No matter the form it takes, our ministry of service operates with one mission: to demonstrate to all people that they are beloved children of God.

Today and every day, we are answering God’s call to be a ministry of service that sets Volunteers of America apart.

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.* Matthew 15:16

Being a ministry of service means that in addition to being one of the nation’s largest and most comprehensive human service organizations, Volunteers of America is an established, interdenominational church.

Staff and volunteers throughout affiliates, the national office, and National Services sites serve as ministers, providing spiritual leadership and service in their local office. Our ministers are drawn from every Christian denomination and are encouraged to serve as active members of other churches.
To become a minister with Volunteers of America, individuals must go through a year-long process of theological study and spiritual formation. There are three formal ministry opportunities within the church:

**Constituent Minister**
Constituent Ministers are volunteers who have been continuously and actively engaged with Volunteers of America for at least two years and are seeking to deepen their connection to our ministry.

**Commissioned Minister**
Commissioned Ministers are Volunteers of America employees who embody Christian leadership. These ministers help support Volunteers of America’s ministry through compassion, knowledge, and active service of God. Commissioned Ministers take on this role in addition to their regular job responsibilities.

**Ordained Minister**
Ordination is the highest level of response to God’s call to ministry in Volunteers of America. Ordained Ministers are also employees of Volunteers of America and are committed to overseeing the Christian ministry and mentoring their local office’s ministers.

Volunteers of America’s ministry affairs are overseen by a Church Governing Board. The Church Governing Board sets the criteria for receiving credentials as either a Constituent, Commissioned, or Ordained Minister.
There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. I Corinthians 12: 4–6

Volunteers of America encourages everyone to be active in our ministry in whatever way they are called. Constituent membership provides a path for employees and volunteers to use their spiritual gifts to strengthen the Volunteers of America church without becoming credentialed ministers. While all ministers are also Constituent Members, an individual does not have to be a minister to join the church as a Constituent Member.

Constituent Members are dedicated to the work of Volunteers of America and committed to being active members of their affiliate’s ministry. As members of the Volunteers of America Church, Constituent Members elect leaders to Volunteers of America’s National Board of Directors and vote on proposed resolutions to the organization’s Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation.
OUR BELIEFS

Volunteers of America is not affiliated with any one Christian denomination. Instead, we are an interdenominational Christian church that brings together individuals from all faiths in a ministry focused on service and community. While we affirm the central truth of Christianity, Volunteers of America has always acknowledged the many paths that have developed for experiencing that truth. We believe there are no walls dividing the children of God from one another.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. I Corinthians 12:12

Volunteers of America’s theology, or fundamental beliefs, are best defined by our Cardinal Doctrines and Principles of Faith.
Cardinal Doctrines
Volunteers of America’s original Constitution, written in 1896, included the following Cardinal Doctrines which describe the fundamental beliefs of the Volunteers of America church.

1. We believe in one supreme God, who is “from everlasting to everlasting,” who is infinitely perfect, benevolent and wise, who is omnipotent and omnipresent, and who is creator and ruler of heaven and earth.

2. We believe in a Triune God – The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. We believe these three persons are one, and while separate in office, are undivided in essence, co-equal in power and glory, and that all men everywhere ought to worship and serve this Triune God.

3. We believe the contents of the Bible to have been given by the inspiration of God, and the Scriptures form the Divine rule of all true, Godly faith and Christian practice.

4. We believe that Jesus Christ, when upon earth, was truly man and yet was truly God – The Divine and human being blended in one Being, hence His ability to feel and suffer as a man and yet supremely love and triumph as the Godhead.
We believe that our first parents were created without sin, but by listening to the tempter and obeying his voice, fell from grace and lost their purity and peace; and that in consequence of their disobedience and fall, all men have become sinful by propensity and are consequently exposed to the wrath of God.

We believe that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, by the sacrifice of His life, made atonement for all men, and that whosoever will call upon Him and accept His overtures of grace shall be saved.

We believe that in order to be saved it is necessary to (a) repent toward God; (b) to believe with the heart in Jesus Christ; and (c) to become regenerated through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, thus giving the inward witness of acceptance by God.

We believe that the Scriptures teach and urge all Christians to be cleansed in heart from inbred sin, so that they may walk uprightly and serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.

We believe the soul shall never die; that we shall be raised again; that the world shall be judged by God; and that the punishment of the wicked shall be eternal, and the joy and reward of the righteous will be everlasting before the throne of God.
Later, Volunteers of America also adopted the following Principles of Faith, which serve as a modern statement of our beliefs.

- We are diverse individuals, drawn together as a ministry of service.
- We are one church without walls.
- We believe God’s love is revealed to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that when serving the most vulnerable, an authentic spiritual transformation happens – for both giver and receiver.
- We believe in God’s boundless grace and mercy.
- We believe that every individual deserves to be lifted up to the glory of God.
COMMITMENT STATEMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Volunteers of America is a Christian church without walls dedicated to serving ALL people. We embrace the fullness of cultural, denominational, ethnic, political, racial, and theological differences. We acknowledge and respect the plurality of sexual and gender identity, and the diversity of voices that comes with difference in age, life experience, and socioeconomic status. We believe every individual is made in the image of God and deserves to be lifted up to the glory of God.

We especially seek and strive to:

- Reflect Jesus’ love for all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, through authentic engagement with the communities we serve;
- Pay attention with sensitivity to every individual’s cultural narrative and the possible influence of our actions, words, prayers, and praise;
- Have courageous conversations amid difference; and
- Uphold the values of diversity and inclusion in our acts of social service, worship, and communal life.