Blog
Spirituality



I enjoy taking a walk around campus in the evening to catch the sunset, which paints the sky with incredible color. (Maddie Thompson)



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Like many service programs, Good Shepherd Volunteers roots itself in values and tenets that shape and guide a volunteer's service year.

Good Shepherd Volunteers is committed to "honoring the Sisters of the Good Shepherd core values of individual dignity, mercy, reconciliation, and zeal for those suffering injustice, oppression and alienation by practicing the 4 Tenets of GSV: social justice, simplicity, spirituality, and community, during their service year."



A collage I made during our recent Good Shepherd Volunteers midyear retreat focused on simplicity and social justice, depicting my desire to stay rooted in the tenets of social justice, simplicity, spirituality and community. (Maddie Thompson)

As I reflect back on the first half of my volunteer year, I am struck by how these tenets have kept me rooted when the pandemic has turned the world upside-down. Each tenet has taken on new meaning as it shapes my daily life. As I spend more time in reflection, I stand in awe of what these tenets teach me, how they challenge me, and why they provide such solid ground upon which to serve.

Social justice

Good Shepherd Volunteers seeks to connect a volunteer's work with a better understanding of systemic injustices. At our midyear Good Shepherd Volunteers retreat in late January, the volunteers shared personal stories of how they have experienced a deeper understanding or encounter with social justice at their placements. I was inspired by my fellow volunteers and the stories of their work. I am grateful for the ways they teach and challenge me this year.

In my own story of encountering the work for social justice at Collier High School, I struggled to limit myself to sharing just one area of social justice. Instead, I described how Collier has exposed me to an array of social justice topics: access to education, rights for those with special needs, gender equity, LGBTQ rights, care for creation, poverty/housing access, racial justice, restorative justice and more. As I encounter different injustices in the lives of our students, I am first challenged to receive, listen and observe their stories before educating myself more on a specific topic and finding ways to advocate or take action.



I often enjoy a warm cup of tea or engage in creative activities during my free time. The simplicity of my service year has continued to offer gifts of peace and balance. (Maddie Thompson)

The pandemic has given me time to continue learning and engaging with the world around me through books, lectures and Zoom events. My year of service as a Good Shepherd Volunteer has also allowed me opportunities to be more intentional about educating myself on local, national and global issues.

Simplicity

As a volunteer living on a limited budget this year, I am challenged to set priorities and get creative, especially when it comes to spending money. However, Good Shepherd Volunteers challenges volunteers to also be intentional about their time, not only their resources. I often spend my time engaging in inexpensive activities like going for walks around the property, hiking, practicing yoga, enjoying a cup of tea, painting, crocheting, embroidering, cooking or talking with friends.

Simple living as an independent volunteer at Collier has looked like quiet nights in the apartment, diving deep into a book, and trying to catch a glimpse of a sunrise or sunset. This tenet of simplicity has prompted me to be conscious and mindful of how I spend my time. The quiet simplicity of the year has offered me balance, grounding and peace from which to serve and engage in the world.

Spirituality

Good Shepherd Volunteers encourages volunteers to respond to St. Mary Euphrasia's call to "just love." Good Shepherd Volunteers believes that all people are spiritual and that "we live our best lives when we choose to love ourselves and others."



At our recent Good Shepherd Volunteers midyear retreat, each volunteer created a self-care jar. We each wrote self-care ideas on popsicle sticks to fill the jar. When the days or weeks feel long, I pull an idea from the jar and remember to care for myself while supporting students. (Maddie Thompson)

I find myself challenged to grow in spirituality each day I walk into Collier High School, as the mission pervades every corner of the campus. The high school is one program of Collier Youth Services, whose mission is "to provide at-risk youth a chance to grow toward their potential in an environment that promotes belonging, dignity and hope." This mission was founded on "a philosophy of deep respect for

the inherent worth of each individual and the belief in the capacity for personal change that is consistent with the ministry of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd."

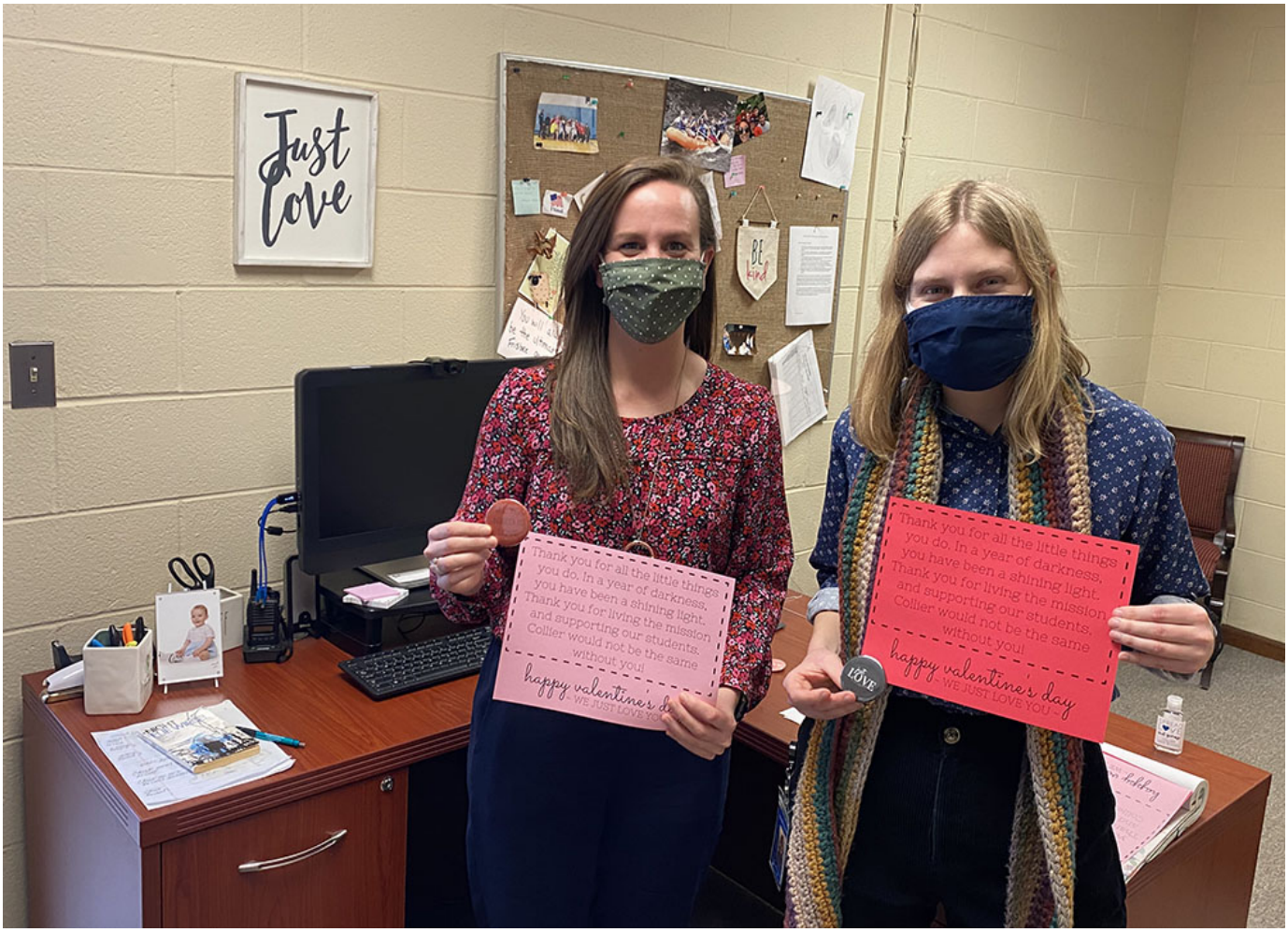
The invitation to "just love" students, staff members and self on good days and bad has stretched me to choose empathy, listen more deeply and receive support from those around me.

Community

I entered my service year with the expectation that I would be living in a community of three volunteers in New Jersey while serving at Collier High School. Due to unforeseen circumstances, however, I ended up being the only volunteer here in New Jersey.

While living by myself in the Good Shepherd Volunteers apartment can look lonesome or isolating on the surface, I have found that this living arrangement has challenged me to creatively seek community elsewhere and to expand my view of what defines community. Staff members, college friends, family members, other current Good Shepherd Volunteers, former Collier Good Shepherd Volunteers, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their mission partners have become my community near and far.

Hosting a virtual art-sharing group with friends, joining the Sisters of the Good Shepherd for dinner, calling family members and catching up with the other Good Shepherd Volunteers continue to be sources of community life for me this year. Each week, I also meet for staff support with co-workers and volunteer support with former Collier Good Shepherd Volunteers who are now employees at the school. These spaces provide opportunities to gather in small groups to share the struggles and joys of this year. I am deeply thankful for the listening ears, receptive hearts and vulnerability present in these spaces at Collier and elsewhere.



My supervisor and former Good Shepherd Volunteer Sarah Dodgson, left, and I created Valentine's Day buttons and cards for staff members and students. (Courtesy of Christina Hardebeck)

Social justice, simplicity, spirituality and community have woven together in beautiful, creative and unexpected ways this year, rooting me in important values as I serve during the pandemic. My hope is that in this second half of my service year, I will continue to build habits and find ways to incorporate these four tenets into my everyday life for the years to come after my year with Good Shepherd Volunteers comes to an end.

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