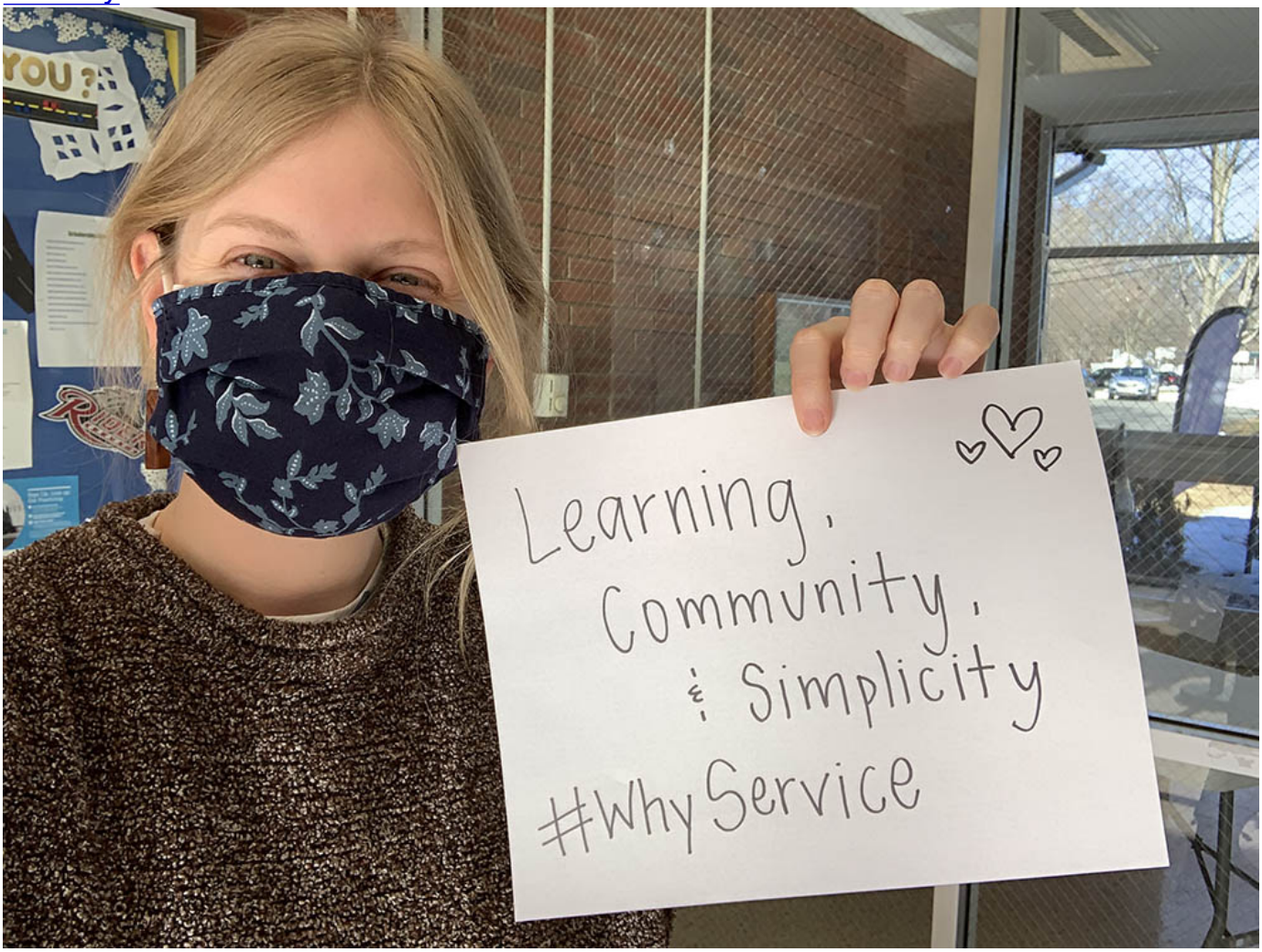
Blog
Ministry



As part of a campaign hosted by Catholic Volunteer Network, I answered the question "Why service?" alongside volunteers around the world. I engage in service for many reasons, namely to learn, grow in community and practice simple living. (Maddie Thompson)



by Maddie Thompson

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Wickatunk, New Jersey — March 24, 2021

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015.*

One tradition for Good Shepherd Volunteers at Collier High School is Collier Chats, lighthearted conversations with co-workers throughout the year. Collier Chats allow me to get to know the many people who make Collier what it is and provide co-workers with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences at Collier.

At my weekly Good Shepherd Volunteer support meetings with two former Good Shepherd Volunteers who now work at Collier, I have the chance to share about my different Collier Chats. Each time we discuss a Collier Chat, I reflect on what a gift it is to have intentional time with my co-workers, often conversing with individuals I do not regularly see throughout the day. Each co-worker has such a unique view of Collier, and I feel blessed to receive their stories and see Collier through their eyes.

I want to highlight a few of the questions posed during my Collier Chats and the reflective responses I receive in return.

What is one Collier tradition (practice, event or activity) we do for our students and staff that speaks to you most?

Many co-workers discuss the ways we make every holiday truly special for our students through large and small gestures, staff videos, and delicious food. For example, at Christmas, we go above and beyond to celebrate our students by giving them a present, releasing fake snow from the ceiling, dressing as elves and serenading the students.



One of the ways we celebrate our students is by making holiday celebrations extra special. This year, I designed and created buttons in honor of St. Patrick's Day for staff and students. (Maddie Thompson)

A few co-workers mentioned the special ways we honor and create space for our seniors on their senior retreat and graduation ceremony. Seniors walk the campus in silence at the end of the year to say goodbye to this home and the beautiful land of Collier. At their graduation ceremony, seniors process from the high school, down the hill to the graduation stage. These rites of passage are special moments for our students, their families, and staff, as many of our students have experienced immense growth during their time at Collier.

Another co-worker mentioned the last day of school because there is an expectation that students will be happy to leave for summer, but our students are usually a bit sad to leave Collier, as they really love it here. A co-worker also shared that ending

the year by affirming staff members who made an impact has been a powerful way to wrap up the school year and provide renewed energy for next year.

What keeps you coming back to Collier each and every day?

Our students, fellow staff members, campus, mission, and work to honor the dignity of each person were the anchors for many co-workers I spoke to during my Collier Chats.

Our students: The fact that our students, with everything they have going on in their personal lives, choose to get out of bed and come here each day inspires many to continue in our work. Meeting our students where they are is like searching for the lost sheep. The growth staff members witness when journeying alongside and supporting students could not be traded for anything.

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The staff: Knowing that we might not be able to change the world in large ways every day inspires staff members to truly be present to the person right in front of us. Fellow staff begin as co-workers and soon become close friends and family. Staff members are more than colleagues; we are a tight-knit community.

The campus: The place itself has a magic to it, like a retreat center. The campus is beautiful, life-giving and peaceful. Pulling into campus is like taking a deep breath of fresh air that fills you with hope and happiness.

The mission: The mission of Collier infiltrates everything we do as staff. Each student is cared for in his or her own unique way. For many, Collier is the best place to come to work because the mission is unlike any other. Working for a mission feels different than working for a job.

The dignity of each person: For many students, their time at Collier makes up some of the best years of their lives. Playing a supporting role to make sure Collier is a home to all is a great privilege for many staff members. St. Mary Euphrasia, the foundress of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, once said, "A person is of more value than a world." At Collier, we strive to embrace this message in all that we do.



A sign was installed on campus recently, highlighting our students' different home counties. The top marker of "just love" celebrates a well-known phrase of St. Mary Euphrasia that continues to motivate staff and students alike. (Courtesy of Erin Alburtus)

If you met St. Mary Euphrasia, what would you want to say to her, or what would be one question you would ask her?

Many co-workers responded with an enthusiastic "Thank you." Praise for St. Mary Euphrasia as a woman beyond her time, a selfless visionary, a leader for feminism and anti-racism, and more also resounded in my Collier Chats with co-workers.

Others posed questions to St. Mary Euphrasia about finding strength during her time and reflecting on our work today. How did you stay patient in moments of frustration or when you were having a bad day? How did you keep hoping? How did you find creative ways to overcome obstacles? How did you open doors for women and children in your time? How are we doing? What do you think of your work today? Are

you surprised by what you created?

Attempting to summarize my co-workers' responses does not do justice to their careful observations, reflections and experiences at Collier. However, having the opportunity to sit with them and ask questions about the mission and heart behind their work has truly inspired me in my year of service as a Good Shepherd Volunteer. The insights gleaned from my Collier Chats and the models of commitment my co-workers embody every day sustain me in a year unlike any other. I continue to hope that their witness stretches my own capacity to serve and support our students in new ways.

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.