

Reflection on Service Experience at St. Francis Inn Soup Kitchen Philadelphia, PA June 2011

On June 29th, Terry Bluzard, Jill DiSabatino, Phil Pegan, and his son, Matt, had the opportunity to volunteer at the St. Francis Inn in Kensington. Terry and Jill shared the following reflection.

The St. Francis Inn serves the needy families of Philadelphia. It opened in 1979, and has served dinner every night since its opening. Treating each and every guest with dignity and respect is a priority of all those working at the Inn. Guests are seated at tables and served their meals restaurant style by volunteers, which is a unique feature of the St. Francis Inn. No one goes through a food line.

Having the opportunity to serve individuals in need in a sit down format is that “uniquely personal” touch that Neumann emphasizes to its students and employees. We saw this philosophy at work at the St. Francis Inn. Individuals were able to come in, sit at a table, and have a volunteer serve their meal and offer them a warm experience while they ate their dinner. Just as many of us experience in our own homes, families were able to sit down with one another to a warm meal.

You can see God work in many ways at a place like the St. Francis Inn. A team of friars, sisters, and lay people make up a permanent team of workers at the Inn. The team knows many of the regular guests by name. They give the children hugs and ask them how their day was. The volunteers are busy getting and serving meals to the guests. It was amusing to watch the volunteers dig through the layers and layers of dessert trays to try and find the exact dessert that the desired. Volunteers were also giving to one another as they helped each other fill water pitchers or helped someone at another table. Each volunteer was there to give and serve reverence to these needy individuals. Terry and I were fortunate enough to also see stewardship within our own group as Phil and his son came back a second time to lend a hand. At the end of the night, the manager gave the final count of people served. Our count was over 350.

When Terry and I first heard of the opportunity to serve at the Inn, we had some spare time and decided to volunteer. We weren't really sure what to expect but there were a few things that definitely surprised us. The sheer volume of people that walked through the doors amazed us, but it was actually the number of working poor that showed up that was even more shocking. The tone and attitude of a few of the guests we came across was remarkable. We met two women who first met each other at the Inn and now meet there each night to share their dinner and talk about their day and their families. They told us about their grandchildren and even wrapped up their desserts to take to them. They had a silver lining in their lives, and it happened to be each other. There were also a few families that we served. We later learned that they lived in a nearby shelter. That was heart-breaking news to hear, but those children were smiling and laughing. They were out for dinner.

These children and these two women did not seem to dwell on their misfortune. Rather, they found the good in their everyday lives and embraced it. They were thankful for what they did have....the important things in life, their families and their friends. They are truly an example for all of us.

Reflection on Mission Trip to St. Stephen's Mission/Wind River Indian Reservation

Riverton, Wyoming - June 2011

Good morning my name is Stephanie Fortunato and I am a graduate student in the strategic leadership program. This past June I joined Melissa Hickey, Michael Martin, and undergraduate students on a mission trip to St. Stephen's Mission in Wyoming.

Before the trip, I had an idea of what I wanted to get out of it. I wanted to give of myself to others but also experience healing in my own personal life. I didn't realize to what degree I would experience those things and more.

The work was certainly harder than I anticipated, but I found myself driven by the love shown by Sister Teresa for the Native American people. I was content each day knowing each small task I did would contribute to a greater whole, even though I knew I wouldn't see all of the results. I think that this could be a challenge for some people in our world of instant gratification. I've come back a more patient, open-minded person with the knowledge that I must take every challenge in my life one step at a time. I've also gained a more complete understanding of a people that I didn't know much about in the past. I'm grateful for that because I believe the more we educate ourselves about various cultures and their struggles, the more spiritually, mentally and emotionally mature we will become.

I am also very thankful for the group experience that evolved. It's not easy to drop everything, go on a trip with people you don't know and then live with them for 8 days. We developed a strong bond as we strived for a common purpose. There was shared leadership, and I can probably safely speak for everyone who went when I say that we all emerged with the knowledge of what it's like to be part of an extraordinary group.

I feel grateful that I was able to go to Wyoming and that Neumann really reaches out to all of its students. Neumann's values are in alignment with my own, and I think it was because of this that the experience was so rewarding. It is clear that Neumann's mission is to educate us about, advocate for and strengthen the voice of struggling peoples.

Melissa and Michael provided us with reflection booklets on the trip which were very beneficial. As we all moved in different directions throughout the day, the reflections provided us with the opportunity to re-center in the evening. The beautiful selections of St. Francis' life, prayers and the Gospel readings served as reminders of why we were there and encouraged us to stay in touch with the majestic nature and people surrounding us. I saw the booklet as a lesson in what we should be doing on a constant basis. The entire experience was this also. We built for ourselves a tiny 8-day model for living our everyday lives in the service of others.

Thank you!