



Community Connections

**FCV IS GETTING
READY TO CELEBRATE
50,000
HOURS SERVED**

**The April newsletter will be a special
edition featuring the past, present and future!**



Bishop Don Kettler visiting with the volunteers at the Christmas Open House. L to R: Ann Anosike, Isaac Vacheresse, Bishop Kettler, Jenny Wonsever, Anna Taylor, John-Caleb Vacheresse

The privilege of listening

By Isaac Vacheresse

I have been given the privilege to serve at St. Benedict's Senior Community Center this year. Upon the first days of starting my position, nearly all expectations of what I would be bringing to the residents changed. I have been shown again and again that the sacrament of listening is desperately needed in all of our lives. However, this is especially true with many of those I serve at the Senior Community.

St. James guides us very simply when he explains, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak..." (James 1:19). I had to learn how to embrace the silence instead of filling it with my words. I had to accept that the sadness many of the residents feel because of their losses wouldn't be cured by my kind words to them. I am learning, however, to take a portion of their grief into my own heart and become a companion on their journey. This can only be done through true listening and empathy. Once we have walked together down the roads of despair and loneliness, a spark of gladness and peace usually awaits us. As the psalmist says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

The emptying of oneself to be filled with another's experience is one of the essential gifts we have been given in this life. Our mother Mary is the perfect illustration of this gift. At the Annunciation the angel Gabriel said to her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). She completely emptied herself to become full with the Spirit and love of God. She was able to share in the pain and suffering of our Lord, because she abandoned her own desires to follow and attend to the Word made Flesh. The Body of Christ is with us, and He is always speaking with and through those around us, all we are asked to do is listen. I am eternally grateful to have been given this opportunity to be with those who need to be heard. Thank you for all of your prayers!



Isaac and Lu Gohman during an art class at St. Benedict's Senior Center

Community building blocks: food and relationships

By Laura Shrode, FCV Program Assistant

The past few months I have been very mindful of the time FCV spends eating together. Michael Pollan, an American author who often reflects on humans' relationship with food, says that "Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well." And, I would add, we nourish all those things when we eat *together*. There is something special about sharing a meal with others.

At the Welcoming House, volunteers, sisters, staff and guests gather together for dinner several nights a week. This is a practice that seems lost in many American family households. Dinner becomes something you grab on the run or eat in the living room while watching TV. This is different at FCV. Many people are gathered around a large table, a table that seems to have the capacity to grow so more people will always fit. At FCV, the meal is a time to be together. It is a time for sacred conversation (and some not-so-sacred conversation 😊). Sharing meals together helps to nourish and strengthen a community.

When thinking about community, my mind wanders to the passage in the book of Acts that reflects on the communal life of the apostles and the early Christians. Acts 2:42 says "They [the early followers of Christ] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." In a way, that is what we are doing. While our meals together are not the same as the Eucharistic feast, we are breaking bread together and breaking open our lives. We are sharing our experiences, our pasts, present and futures. The shared meal is both holy and mundane all at the same time.

"Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well."

Michael Pollan

In living out the communal life, I am assuming the early Christians had many moments for mealtime conversations. What did they talk about? I used to think that their conversations must have always been holy and pious. Yet, they too, were just human and therefore had very human conversations. Perhaps they spoke about what Jesus said that day. Or perhaps they spoke about their fears regarding the way of life to which Jesus was inviting them. Or maybe they shared about other normal things like: how many fish they caught that week, if anyone was sick in their family or what they were hoping to do next year. They were sharing their lives with each other, building relationships in the process of doing so.

As we've already discovered, one way to nourish the relationships that strengthen community is to eat together. So let us, like the early Christians, nourish ourselves and our communities by sharing more meals together!

Whether it be simple or extravagant, I'm going to spend more time this year breaking bread with others and breaking open our stories through shared conversation. I encourage you to invite others to join you at your table as well. *Bon appétit!*



FCV: Empowering, growing and serving!

By Anna Taylor

Even though I risk stating the obvious, it's empowering to have people believe in your abilities and trust your judgment. I hadn't really realized this until I came to the FCV program. I did work study in college, and it was beneficial experience. I spent three semesters and a summer working in the college's weaving studio, where I hand wove baby blankets on a 30-year-old loom. I loved my job and still value the weaving skills I learned there, but I felt like an apprentice. I was just a college student, and still learning. I had almost no say in what was going on. I just did as I was told.

My senior year I worked at the college's education abroad office, where I helped other students apply to study in another country and did data entry for the study abroad advisor. This job was a perfect fit for me and taught me database and customer service skills. Once again though, I was just a student worker, and while I knew I was integral to the functioning of the office, I didn't take myself too seriously or dare to think I really knew anything. I referred to myself as "my boss's minion" whenever someone asked what my position was. It was a great job, and we students had a fair amount of responsibility, but we were still students, still "unlearned" compared to the regular staff, and we were treated as such.

Coming to the FCV program, I had no idea what to expect. My logic was that since I was merely a young volunteer, an extra to my service site, no one was going to expect me to do all that much serious or critical work. Well, I was rather wrong about that. I work as a MNsure Navigator at Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (I help people enroll in health insurance). Even though I am "just a volunteer" with that office, I have exactly the same tasks and responsibilities as everyone else on the navigator team. I drive to Elk River and Monticello for outreach, I take hotline calls, I follow up with county agencies to make sure applications are being processed correctly, and I am one of three Spanish-speaking navigators in the office (which gets pretty crazy anytime you're the only Spanish bilingual at an enrollment lab and seven Hispanic families show up). No one looks at me as "the extra." I am one of the team.

The confidence I have gained to call county workers, to guide people through often bewildering healthcare choices, to drive as far as Elk River even though I only got my license last July—wow. Just wow. No one ever expected this much of me in college, so no one, including me, ever saw what I could do. And it is so empowering to see not only what I am capable of, but also to see how much good change I have been able to bring about for others.

I've worked with dozens of Hispanic families who would struggle to apply on their own due to the language barrier. I've helped people with extreme anxiety get coverage so they can afford therapy sessions. I've helped everyday people who just wanted to get insurance but had absolutely no idea where to start. Because of my job, I have been able to realize that I don't have to let others deal with the complicated "stuff"; I am smart enough to figure it out and help others figure it out too. I am beginning to see how I can use my talents to serve God, and trust in myself that I can do it, whatever the "it" may be.



Anna and Sister Cordy Korkowski, her sister companion

*My spirit wants to soar
Don't trap me in
With possessions
My spirit starves on
Your diet of the latest trend
Shop shop shop
Buying for the "what if" that will never come
My spirit grows sluggish
On that schlock
I need people, humanity
Culture, love
Shared understanding
Safety, feedback, concern.
Without others
My spirit would never grow its wings*

By Anna Taylor



1600 11th Avenue South
St. Cloud, MN 56301

Contact FCV:

Pat Flicker

FCV Director

info@fcvonline.org

Office Phone: 320.229.0307

www.FCVonline.org

Sister Karen Niedzielski, one of the sisters who lives at the volunteer house with the volunteers, fell down the steps at the house.



Please keep Sister Karen in your prayers. We miss her smile and light-hearted banter so much!

8 T H A N N U A L
TASTE
OF ST. CLOUD

A cartoon illustration of a chef in a white hat and a woman in a purple dress cooking together at a stove. The chef is holding a spoon and the woman is holding a knife.

Monday, May 1, 2017
4:30-7:30 p.m.

Territory Golf Course
Coyote Moon Grille
480 55th Ave SE, St. Cloud, MN 56304

Tickets: \$25
(\$30 at the door)

*Featuring 16 local restaurants,
a silent auction & music*

CELEBRATING
50,000 HOURS SERVED
in the St. Cloud community!

Supporting the Franciscan Community Volunteers
A ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota

The logo for Franciscan Community Volunteers, featuring a stylized figure and the text "FRANCISCAN COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS".The logo for Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, featuring a stylized figure and the text "FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA".

Green
tip

Did you know you can
receive this newsletter
electronically?

If you would like to save
some trees, go to
www.fcvonline.org.

Enter your name and
e-mail at the bottom of
the page.

Franciscan Community Volunteers is based on three pillars: service, community living and Franciscan spirituality. Volunteers make a year-long commitment to work full time in local nonprofit agencies that serve the needs of those who are poor and marginalized while accepting the challenge of living simply and in accordance with Gospel values.