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**Serving With a Grateful Heart**

Ever since I was little, a sense of service and “paying it forward” to those in need was always instilled in me. This has been one of the major ways I affect the people I know, and do not know. I would help my mom make meals for ladies in her Bible Study who had just had a baby. She would also take my siblings and I to SEM Food Pantry to stock shelves and provide groceries to those that came there in need. It was here that I began to learn about service to others, while having a feeling of gratitude for the blessings I had been given. Through my last 13 years, I have been blessed with so many opportunities to serve in my home, church, and community.

I have been a parishioner of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish for 11 years, and have had great opportunities to serve my parish and school. We have a twinning community where we are able to serve and fundraise to help with the needs of Our Lady of the Mountains Parish in Stanton Kentucky. Every year we collect socks and underwear for the parish to give out to families in need. I have been able to go to OLM to sort the collection according to size, so that the donations are available for families. It was startling and sad to me that something that is as basic as undergarments wasn't affordable to the families there. It made me feel grateful that I have these things, and remember not to take it for granted. A couple of years ago I went back to OLM to serve Thanksgiving dinner to elderly members of the community. They enjoyed the meal so much, and it made me happy to bring them joy. Another opportunity I have participated in at IHM is Vacation Bible School. I started going as a CAMPER in 1st grade, and when I was a 6th grader, I became a volunteer. For the last three years I have been an assistant to the group leader. I have loved serving the children of our parish by helping to bring them closer to God. On a Saturday during the summer my friends and I helped put on a Rosary Rally at our church. We did all of the singing, and led the decades of the rosary. The past two summers I was also able to serve my parish by volunteering at our parish festival. It was fun to see how happy the little kids were when they saw their painted faces! When I think about being grateful for my blessings, and trying to pay it forward I think of what it says in the bible, “To whom much has been given, much is expected.”

In my community I have been able to serve in meaningful ways. I have been volunteering on a regular basis at the Ronald McDonald House for two years. We are responsible for cleaning the different rooms in the house. I love knowing that this little act of love will make someone's stay there a little better. People come from all over the world to stay there while their child is at Children's Hospital. It makes me feel so blessed for my health when I see the kids there with facing so many medical challenges. I have also volunteered at Matthew 25 Ministries. My hope is that the people who receive the items feel the love that was put into

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sorting and packing the clothes for their use. I have served meals at the Walnut Hills Food Pantry and St. Joseph Seraph Food Kitchen. These opportunities have made such an impact on me. Once again, it makes me so thankful to provide for those who are in need.

I am the oldest of three kids, and I serve my family on a daily basis. My mom went back to work this past fall, and she counts on me to get my sister and brother off of the bus after school, and home safely. I make sure they have a snack and I check my brother's homework. We also have chores that we do during the week and on Saturday. I know that my parents work really hard to send my siblings and me to IHM. Because I am grateful, I know how important it is to help around the house. This brings joy to my Mom and Dad's faces!

I believe in following the teachings of Christ, by serving my church, community and family. I have been able to bring joy to people in need and affect other's lives in a positive way. I look at it as being Christ's hands and feet here on earth. Mother Theresa said to "Do little things with much love." I know that the little things do add up. I plan to always use the gifts God has given me to serve with love and gratitude, in order to bring others joy.