

## **Mia Meinhardt - St. Jude - Saint Ursula Academy**

“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies” - Mother Teresa

Using the gifts that God gave me, I try to impact someone's day whenever I can. Even the small things like holding the door for the elderly at church or pushing in carts at the grocery store can make someone's day. A lot of the service I do happens at my school and parish.

At school, I tutor a student in 5th grade every day after dismissal. I make sure he has all of his books and his planner is filled out. Then I help him on homework that was confusing or difficult. I also volunteer to be an altar server at St. Jude. Sometimes being an altar server is hard because I have to miss a class at school and make up the work. I also have to wake up early on days we do not have school to get to church on time. However these are minor sacrifices compared to the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made by dying for us. I do not mind making these small sacrifices because I know that I am serving the Lord.

At my parish, I also help out with a 5k walk and run my family conducts each year. Sophie's Angel Run raises money for pediatric brain tumor research. When my little sister Sophie was 18 months old, she was diagnosed with a brain tumor and passed away from it a few days later. Instead of being bitter from the situation and feeling sorry for ourselves, we decided to better the lives of other children who have brain tumors. I help out with stuffing the 1000+ goody bags and help transport them from the St. Jude undercroft to the gym. I also help stamp and address the 1000+ envelopes that we send to people who donate. A lot of my work happens the weekend of Sophie's Angel Run. I help set up the gym where people come to pick up their t-shirts and goody bags. I set up tables, put on tablecloths, hang banners, and help organize the 2,000+ t-shirts. I set up the outside booths where people can come to register on race day. After the race happens, I also help with cleanup. I take things to the dumpsters, fold chairs and put them away, and carry items to our car. Helping out with Sophie's Angel Run not only helps my family, but also helps children with brain cancer.

In addition to doing service at my school and parish, I also do service in the community. Over this holiday season, I went with my mom and a few of my classmates to the grade school Holy Family. The seventh and eighth graders at Holy Family have been trying to raise money for their Washington D.C. trip. These students live in a high poverty area and were unable to afford this trip on their own. My school went last July and I remember how much fun I had. I wanted the students at Holy Family to be able to have the same experiences I did. To go on their Washington D.C. trip this spring, they still needed to raise \$1,000. Instead of a gift exchange at our annual class Christmas party, my classmates and I donated our own money towards the Holy Family Washington D.C. trip. I had some money saved from babysitting that I was able to donate. We also wrote the Holy Family students prayers and personal notes to let them know how much we wanted them to have this experience. Since my class raised over a \$1,000, a group of us volunteered to go to Holy Family during our winter break to tell

them the exciting news. Seeing the expressions on the students' and teachers' faces when they realized they were going on the trip was a life changing experience for my friends and me. One student even cried she was so happy!

Over the holiday season I also went with my mom and another family to hand out gifts at a nursing home. Parishioners at St. Jude donated these gifts as part of our giving tree program. When we arrived at the nursing home the residents were very excited and could not wait to receive their presents. Most of the residents were gathered in one big room to receive their presents but a couple of them were in their rooms. As we called out their names, the people's faces lit up. Even I was excited for them to open their gifts. We also sang Christmas carols for them and talked to them. They enjoyed our company and their presents. I especially enjoyed walking around door to door to deliver the presents. Even though their rooms were not big, the residents were very proud and wanted to give us a tour. Some people even had to share a room with up to three people! I am glad that we were able to add a little holiday cheer to their day and I hope I will be able to do this again next year.

I strive to take advantage of every opportunity with which God blesses me. Even though sometimes it can be challenging, knowing that I am impacting lives around me is worth it. Whether it is holding the door or raising money for pediatric brain cancer, everything matters. When my family first started Sophie's Angel Run one of the doctors told us that even if we raise a penny, it would be a penny more than we had yesterday. Even if the deed is small, I am still impacting and making the lives of people around me better.