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Ever since I can remember my parents have taught me that kindness is not an option for our family; it is a MUST DO. They said kindness does not take a lot of work; it can be a simple gesture like holding the door open, smiling at someone or even just saying hi. Over the years my parents and teachers have also taught me that part of kindness is giving back. It's very important to me that I give back to my family, school and community through my time and talent.

My first experience with giving back was when I was 8 weeks old. I went to the Cincinnati March for Babies. March for Babies is a walking event sponsored by the March of Dimes which is a charity that focuses on preventing premature births and other health issues with moms and babies. My mom has shown me the pictures and explained that we participated in the walk to honor my older brother, Anthony. It's a very special event for my family because of my older brother. Anthony was born premature at 26 weeks. He weighed 1 pound 13 ounces when he was born. The doctors at Cincinnati Children's Hospital said he would be in the hospital a very long time so they offered my parents a room at the Ronald McDonald House so they could be very close to the hospital. My parents were so grateful that they wouldn't have to be far from the hospital. Unfortunately, Anthony passed away two days after he was born. They never stayed at the Ronald McDonald House because they never left the hospital, but they have always said how great the Ronald McDonald House is for families with very sick children.

Today, we participate in the Ronald McDonald House "Fill the Stations" by donating snacks and decorating snack bags for the families staying there. Whenever we drop off the snacks, I always think about how all the families staying there must be so worried about their sick child. It makes me constantly pray that they will be okay. It's our way as a family to remember Anthony and how the Ronald McDonald House would have helped my parents.

Two years ago, my uncle moved from Lexington, KY to Independence, KY with my two cousins so they could live closer to family and attend the same school as my younger brother and me. When my cousins started school at St. Cecilia, they were very scared so I took the time to look out for them at school even to say hi or wave in the hall just so they saw a familiar face. Now occasionally my uncle must go out of town for work, so my cousins come over and live at my house. When this happens, I meet my cousins in their classroom at the end of the day to ensure they know where to go for pickup. I always make sure that I am early just so they do not worry. When we get home from school, I also help my cousins with their homework. My parents tell me how much my cousins look up to me and they have noticed how my cousins copy what I do and say. I try to be a good role model for them by being responsible and respectful.

My favorite free time activity is spending time with my Grammie. She is 82 years old and lives by herself. I love every minute I get to see her because I know

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she sometimes gets lonely at her condo. During the holidays we have a routine where I spend a couple days with her baking, and we have a sleepover.

St. Cecilia has a lot of opportunities to volunteer and be involved at school and at our Church. I try to volunteer for as much as I can because I enjoy it. I have been an alter server since the 4th grade, and now I am the only female server in the 8th grade which I am proud of. I have also been part of the choir. My family has also participated in the Adopt a Garden where we take care of two landscaped beds on the Church property. One of my most favorite activities to volunteer for at our Church is the festival. I always sign up to work at least one of the kid's game booths.

This school year has been extra special because I am in the 8th grade and the Buddy Program was back which had been cancelled due to COVID-19. The Buddy Program is when older students are assigned a younger student as their buddy. Our role is to help the kindergarteners learn about our school by sitting with them in Church and reading with them at the library. I remember how kind my 8th grade buddy was when I was in Kindergarten, so I want to make sure I have that same effect on my little buddy.

I have also had the opportunity to give back to other organizations in the community. I made bracelets and sold them at school to raise money for the Kenton County Animal Shelter in the 5th Grade. When I took the money to the animal shelter the manager gave us a tour and explained how they would use the money.

Each year my school has a toy drive for Toys for Tots, and I always like to donate. I do not donate for the Out of Uniform Pass, but because there are kids without any toys, and I believe all kids need toys. When I am handing in the toy to my teacher, I always think of what the kid's faces must look like when they see all the toys and how happy they must be. My school also has a canned food drive each year to support St. Vincent De Paul Food Pantry. I can't even image what it would be like to not have enough food so I'm glad I'm able to donate food.

Prior to COVID-19, I delivered ornaments to the nearby nursing home and my class sang for the senior citizens during Christmas. At first, I was nervous going to the nursing home, but once we started singing it was so nice to see them smiling and singing too. You could tell we made them very happy.

Giving back to the community is very important but showing kindness to others you meet is just as important. Holding the door for someone, smiling or just saying hi to another person can immediately change a person's attitude for the day especially if they are having a bad day. During the high school placement test there was a girl sitting all alone during the break, so my friends and I went over and just said hi. She didn't know anyone. She was very nice and all of us started talking to each other. I hope to see her at Notre Dame when school starts.

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Last year, at our hotel over spring break I helped a man make waffles for his son's breakfast because the man didn't know how to work the machine and his son was hungry and crying. The man was very thankful because his son stopped crying when he saw us cooking the waffles. It was so simple I didn't even think twice about helping him, but he was so appreciative.

I am thankful that my parents taught me the importance of kindness and giving back at a very young age. I am also grateful to St. Cecilia for giving me opportunities to have an impact on others thru volunteering and donations. I am looking forward to attending Notre Dame Academy and participating in their service programs too.

Kindness is the way I live my life – it's my MUST DO and CAN DO. Whether it's supporting an organization or a simple act of kindness I want to continue to live my life having a positive impact on others which fills my heart.