

Hannah Thomas - Mary Queen of Heaven - Saint Henry District High School

As Catholics, we are called to help others and that is something my parents have always instilled in me since I was a young girl. Once I started participating in service projects and outreach, I discovered just how many people in our world need help. Through my experiences, I have encountered some people who want and ask for help, and some who are too ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help. I have also experienced or seen others who needed help because they were in a situation that was out of their control, such as having a sick child or suffering a tragedy as a family. Once I began helping others through difficult times, I realized it was something that I wanted to continue to do through my lifetime.

Part of our family mission has always been to help those children suffering in the hospital for extended periods of time. Both my sister and I had some health complications when we were younger, and it had a lasting impact on my mom and dad when they would see young children battling cancer while they were in the hospital with us. Luckily our health has improved and we are just fine now, but it led our family to a desire and mission to always help those kids that are struggling and exhausted. Our first endeavor was making care bags for children on the cancer floor. My sister and I asked for donations and from those donations we bought the drawstring bags and items to put inside. Some of the items included coloring books, beginning reader and chapter books, toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorants, water, hand sanitizers and fun toy items to help pass the time and give the kids something to do. Not only was it a great family activity, it also made me joyful because I knew the kids were hitting a rough patch and receiving these bags would make them smile. It would also help the parents because it would help them see that there are people that care and there are people out in the world that are willing to help their families and their children.

Two summers ago, my sister and I joined the Payton's Lemonade Stand organization. We have been hosting our own neighborhood stand since that time and will continue to participate this summer as well. The organization is a big organization made up of kids, and helps other kids facing medical, personal, and financial problems. My purpose for participating in this group is to collaborate and be part of the "kids helping kids" group because all the money we raise goes to nonprofit organizations and groups that focus on helping children. Just a few of these groups include Children's Hospital, The Ronald McDonald House, Shriners' and Be A Kid Again. I have loved being a part of this group because we get to carry out our mission of philanthropy and helping others without expecting anything in return. Along with my sister, we created and set up our own stand, advertised and created signage and accepted donations. It gives us the opportunity to be creative and make a huge difference in the lives of other children and their families. When it's all over and we see how much money we raised by

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simply making lemonade and cookies to share with our community, my heart is happy that we have made a difference.

We also decided to take it a step further and set up a big two-night lemonade stand at a local Jazzercise studio with cookies and other goodies. We collaborated with the Jazzercise team so that all of the trainers were there and the place was packed. We were dancing to the music and it ended up being so much fun! We received a huge outpouring of support and donations from a ton of people and ended up raising just under \$1,000 dollars!

Another outreach project that we started with my family and continue to do today are blessing bags. My sister and I packed Ziplock bags with small necessities. We keep them in the car so that we can hand them out to the homeless while we are driving around the area. I feel good in my heart when I can give them basic necessities like gloves or socks to keep them warm, knowing that they may not have a home to go to at the end of the day. I feel extremely thankful to have all the blessings in my life, but not everyone is that lucky. If I can do just one thing and it makes all the difference in the world for someone, then I will do that whenever I get the chance. Giving to others is a selfless act and it is what we are called to do as we walk through life. I try to put myself in someone else's shoes, and I know if I was in their situation I would want others to treat me the same way without any judgment.

Finally, another service project that I took part in with some of our parish members involved prepping some packed lunches and drinks, and then distributing them to the homeless in the downtown area. This group is known as Walk the Mile, and those individuals who started it attend our church parish. It was eye opening to see what the homeless were going through. The most touching one, was a couple that was expecting. It broke my heart that they were in the conditions they were in and I wanted to do anything I could to make their day a little better. To this day I think about that lady who was pregnant and hope and pray that everything turned out okay with the baby. I hope the best for that family, and I am glad that I was able to help them a little bit, even though it wasn't a ton. It was heart wrenching and difficult to realize and see with my own eyes the unfortunate conditions they were in, but it also made me even more passionate about helping others.

In conclusion, the world is a harsh place and many people need help. Service isn't about people praising you for doing the right thing. It is about doing as much as you can for the people that need it, because you want to leave the world making it a better place than where you started. It is about realizing that your actions can change someone else for the better and I can be a light in others' lives. I want to have a positive impact on the people that surround me, and I will always aim to be a part of the change.