

Anne Touhill

Public Service Month: Essay Contest

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### Serving Those Among Us

When I thought of the “poverty,” I thought of all the unfortunate people who live in third world countries, without regular meals, a comfortable home, proper medical attention, or clothes on their backs. When I thought of doing “mission work,” I immediately thought of leaving my home and traveling to another country: a war-torn, devastated country. I would see myself as the hero of the people, giving them practical relief from their suffering. Yet, as I contemplated the idea behind servant leadership, service, and the like, I cannot help but recall the words my mother always said to me: “Love begins in the home.” She would remind me that if I were to do great things for others, I might as well begin doing them for the people closest to me.

I had a great opportunity to travel to Mexico where I participated in mission work for a little over four months. During this trip, I witnessed the “poor people” in that they owned very little material possessions. They were often sick, dirty, unkempt, and smelly, yet amazingly beautiful. The people I was privileged to serve possessed a beautiful gift of joy that surpassed all the surrounding “impoverished” conditions. They were simply happy to live the life God gave them, and did not resent the fact that they owned next to nothing. As I reflected on this experience, it seems as if the camera shift from them to me. I went to Mexico with the intention of serving the poor, but in return they were the ones who helped me. I was the one who was living in poverty, in the sense that I was lacking the proper perspective on life. They taught me not to place my identity in my possessions or status, but rather to be a steward of everything God has given me. Through their example of gratitude to God for the simplest things, I was inspired to be grateful for everything, both material and non-material blessings.

Poverty is not merely the lack of material possessions, but can be the absence of love, self-esteem, proper perspective on life, encouragement, or motivation. I think that many people immediately associate the same meanings of poverty that I previously had, poverty means dying of starvation and diseases. Fortunately, I learned this through my experience in Mexico. Upon returning to my home, this lesson has transformed my idea of “serving others.” It is no longer limited to the idea of traveling to another country, but has changed into loving and serving those around me. I go back to what my mother taught me about serving those closest to me. Often time I find this more challenging than actually going away. We also serve the poor when we make a decision to love and serve those near us. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says: “Whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you do unto me.” These words of Christ inspire me to seek out those who are needy in our own midst. He calls us to love and minister to all those in need, not only the physically needy, but all those who are in need of God’s love and truth. It is my duty as a

servant of God, as a humble leader, to give myself for the love of God, manifested in the service of others.

Throughout this semester I have been confronted with the term “servant leader” on many different occasions. Personally, I look to the example Jesus set at the Last Supper, when he, as King and Messiah, knelt down and washed the feet of the apostles. If the Creator of the Universe can kneel down to serve sinners, I too, as a sinner, must follow his example of humble service to others.