

Simple acts of kindness, Part 2

In my previous post, I told you about a great place named Canteen on Charles Street (Simple Acts of Kindness, Part 1).

It offers free water in real glasses as part of its charm. It's a simple act of kindness that means a lot.

During the second part of this post, I'll highlight another simple act that happened at the end of the same week, and it's about a group of students from Baltimore Polytechnic Institute visiting the Franciscan Center for the first time.

My sister, Maria, is a member of Baltimore Polytechnic Institute's Air Force JROTC. Last week, she and others members of the corps, made their very first trip this year to the Franciscan Center. They didn't know what jobs would be in store for them, so I decided to tag along and see what these kids would get to do.

If you've never been to the Franciscan Center at 101 W. 36th Street in Baltimore, you might not know it services as many as 700 clients per day. That includes a range of services from free lunch, computer/job search help, clothing, a food pantry, and help with essential services such as utilities and obtaining a state ID.

Far from a revolving door of charity, the Franciscan Center aims to get clients to a place where they can be independent and live decently. We all deserve some human dignity, right?

Until this point, all I knew of the Franciscan Center came from their website, newsletters, and the collections we run throughout the year at my parish, Saints Philip and James (collecting money for turkeys, collecting winter clothing, and participating in the Souperbowl of Caring). It was amazing to see how everything comes together there for only a few hours each day.

Usually, people talk to the clients and the volunteers to get their perspective on groups coming in to volunteer. I did that. Clients said it was great to have the kids there and it gave them hope for future generations. For the kids, I got the sense they had been looking for something like this all year. A way to help people and put a smile on their faces at the same time. After all, the students did volunteer to come!

The Poly Cadets were placed at various stations for lunch service as well as in the food pantry and the clothing area. That day, clothing was set out for women and children and the lunch included pasta with meat, veggies, bread, and Cafe Latte flavored greek yogurt. The students' jobs included handing out napkins, taking trays when clients were done, keeping count of clients as they came in, and assisting clients in the dining room with other needs (such as carrying a tray if someone was burdened with lots of bags and such).



Laura Rochevot '14 waiting for clients in the clothing center.

After having a talk with a couple of clients, which included a very spirited discussion of all things science fiction, I decided to get lunch for myself. And that's when it hit me: I was closer to the poor by breaking bread with them than by volunteering.

Earth-shattering, right?

What I came to understand was, that for me, it isn't enough to donate time, money or goods. Those things are necessary and must continue in order to help the poor and marginalized. But some of us are called to live a life a little bit closer to the poor. Call it my own vow of simplicity or poverty since I don't belong to a religious community. In being with the poor, and using my own talents to share stories like this with you, dear reader, I have found myself closer to God.

Does it have to be this way for everyone? Of course not! God created us all to be able to help people in different ways. The point is that when you find your special way of helping others, everyone wins and the joy that only God can give can be yours.

So, it was a simple act of kindness on the part of Poly's AFJORTC to come and volunteer, but their kindness and willingness to serve changed at least one life that day - the one I least expected - my own.

Many thanks to Christian and Debbie at the Franciscan Center who hosted me and the cadets. Also, I'd like to thank the following cadets and officer who volunteered last week: Maria Stewart '14, Laura Rochevot '14, Jaleel Daniels '14, Nishae Deramus '15, Ashelle Henry '15, Trey Huff '14, Katesha Culp '14, Dkhrya Mcfadden '14, and Major Gauert, USAF.