

Good Shepherd Institute for Mission June 2019
June 2019
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As a second year Good Shepherd Volunteer (GSV), I have faced the stress of deciding what comes after my year of intentional service not once, but twice. Both times I have felt periods of intense waffling as I struggled to place myself in the world as a person dedicated to mission, with a desire for living a simple lifestyle in community and with a focus on spiritual connection. Through my last two years as a Good Shepherd Volunteer I have felt cared for and nurtured in this program and in the greater Good Shepherd Community around it. As my time as a volunteer comes to an end, as well as the time of my fellow community members, how do we pass through the “Continuum of Care” as our May contributor Christella Villasenor explains? How do we exit this conservatory of support and find a different one in our next steps in life?

As Good Shepherd Volunteers, our daily SME quotes, quarterly retreats, and lots of conversations with our community support people create opportunities to help us stay grounded in mission and reflection even after our year is over. As we approach that ending and transition into the world outside of GSV, we are faced with losing this specific type of support. As we are about to transition through our continuum of care, it can feel scary. How do we recover from this change?

“Do you know what draws down God’s special protection, which upholds our Institute and gives it such strength? It is the union between us, the spirit of unity.” Conferences, p.500, Saint Mary Euphrasia

In May, my community members and I hosted a Murder Mystery Fundraiser in Manhattan, NY. When we sign up to be GSVs, we are told about the need to create a volunteer-led fundraiser sometime during the year. When my community and I originally discussed the kind of fundraiser we wanted to host, we shared with one another our feelings of guilt in asking our already generous, loving communities for money. To ask those who already support us to do even more is hard. How much can we ask from those we love before even they might run out of zeal?

It seems to me that we as Good Shepherd Volunteers are gifted with so much, and often feel we have so little to give back. Each of our placements works with women, adolescents, and children affected by poverty, violence, and neglect. Frequently, those of us who elect to engage in a year of service are privileged to be able to say we have never known the kinds of obstacles facing those we serve. When starting at our placements in the fall, we usually feel a little lost but lucky enough to have supportive Good Shepherd staff to guide us into the fold. As people who only serve their placement for a short time, we often do not get the chance to shepherd others into the flock in a similar way. How then do we get to have those kinds of opportunities?

I didn’t expect to find an answer to that question in the form of a fundraiser.

We were hesitant when we decided to move forward with our Murder Mystery event idea. We didn't think anyone would come, or that we would get donations, or even feel much support. We definitely didn't expect our individual support networks to rally and to bring even those outside the Good Shepherd flock to our humble event, but they did.

The 80 people that showed up at our event were comprised of co-workers from our service placements, our friends, family members, The Good Shepherd sisters, GSV alum and each of their own networks as well. By the end of the night, guests who had never previously met shared that they felt like they already knew one another, if only by the name of the character they were assigned at the door. During our awards ceremony, people were cheering and congratulating each guest whose name was called, and all were taking photos together. Somehow three hours in a room working together with purpose brought our diverse group of connections into community.

In a small and unexpected way, we as volunteers had provided an opportunity for community-building as our placements, GSV, and Good Shepherd as a whole have offered us. This wasn't something I ever expected to be able to do during my year, particularly not in the format of a required fundraiser. It's funny how things that can create a sense of dread can turn around to create unexpected opportunities.

Even in the format of fundraiser, we witnessed the core values of both the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (Mercy, Individual Dignity, Reconciliation, and Zeal) and Good Shepherd Volunteers (Community, Simplicity, Spirituality, and Social Justice). Guests participated wholeheartedly, and were truly animated by zeal.

I feel this is representative of our lives as Good Shepherds. We are able to live out all our tenets, sometimes to their fullest, even in the most unlikely spaces. When we're out of our element of comfort in the values, we are pushed to take them to new heights. When we lean into that exploration, our mission knows no bounds, illustrating so clearly that our continuum of care doesn't have to end after we leave GSV.

As we as Good Shepherd Volunteers struggle to figure out "what's next" in our lives, we can rest a little lighter knowing that wherever we go, we can bring these skills of shepherding along with us. Whether we move away from non-profits, go to grad school, or stay right where we are, we have the ability to turn every opportunity into one founded in our GSV motto "Just Love."

"Go forward in the spirit of God. I am relying on your zeal." - Saint Mary Euphrasia

Reflection Questions:

- Where have you witnessed an unexpected sense of community?
- In what ways have you facilitated community for yourself and those around you?
- How have you navigated transitions in the continuum of care in your own life? How have you helped others navigate those changes as well?