

Just Love
Good Shepherd Institute for Mission
September 2019
By Janet Jones

'Just Love.' The first time I recall really capturing the magnitude of this quote was in 2004 when I attended the Angers Good Shepherd Pilgrimage. I thought, "Wow, what an amazing concept." At this time I had already been working as a Good Shepherd for over 6 years. Up until that time, I thought I knew my purpose at the agency and considered myself a good staff member who was there to 'direct' our girls. While I cared about the girls and wanted to see them thrive and do better, I realized something was missing. What I figured out was that up until that point, my Good Shepherd career had been only a job to me. It wasn't until after that pilgrimage when those two words, just love, really spoke to me. That is when I started to understand I wasn't there to 'direct' the girls, I was there to love and shepherd them. From that point on, I knew my Good Shepherd purpose was not just a job, but it was a passion, a calling; a mission to love for the salvation of souls.

About six months after my pilgrimage to Angers, the door opened for me to share my newfound love and understanding for the Good Shepherd Mission campus-wide. I left the comforts of working in the residential setting and moved into my current position as Values Educator. This position allows me the honor of working with our residents and staff across campus in many ways. More importantly, I get to talk to staff about their Good Shepherd Journey and how it is a calling and a passion, not just a job. One of my favorite tasks is to talk with the new staff during on-boarding about our Good Shepherd Mission and how our Foundress lived out the concept of 'Just Love'. We have conversations about how Mary Euphrasia taught her sisters to love in all that they did and as Good Shepherd People that is what we need to do. I love seeing the expression on the faces of the new staff when I bring up our final slide that says,

At the end of Mary Euphrasia's life, someone spoke to her about the many things she had accomplished in her lifetime – and she did accomplish a lot! But Mary Euphrasia replied, "**I had no great talents or special abilities. I only loved, but I loved with all the strength of my soul.**"

It has been 15 years since attending the pilgrimage and having my "aha" moment, when I really felt I understood those two words: "just love". Recently I stumbled across a webinar entitled, 'How to Motivate Yourself with Kindness.' The webinar talked about self-compassion and loving ourselves. This concept of self-compassion intrigued me so I began to read more about it. As I did, the word love kept surfacing and my thoughts kept going back to our Good Shepherd mission. Up to this point, I would talk about the need to love our youth, our families, our Good Shepherd Mission, our passion and a general attitude to all. Then I realized that the concept of self-compassion calls for me to also love myself; giving myself permission to make mistakes and be imperfect without being hard on myself.

This idea of self-compassion and loving ourselves can be challenging. One common theme that keeps coming up in this journey of understanding and applying self-compassion to loving oneself is our Good Shepherd Values; Individual Worth, Reconciliation, Mercy, and Zeal. I have always spoken to those values in terms of loving others, but I don't recall ever thinking about the values in terms of loving oneself.

Individual Worth - realizing that I am worthy of self-love and I am of more value than the world.

Reconciliation - it's a call to action to have courageous communication with oneself, not just others. To find that inner peace that comes with reconciliation and will allow us to just love who we are.

Mercy - having self-compassion means that you offer understanding and kindness to yourself when you fail or make mistakes rather than judging yourself harshly. In order to show oneself mercy, we need to learn to sit with our emotions and mistakes and be able to forgive ourselves so we can love who we are.

Zeal - zeal for myself (oneself). Allowing oneself to feel the same love and passion we give to others and the Good Shepherd Mission.

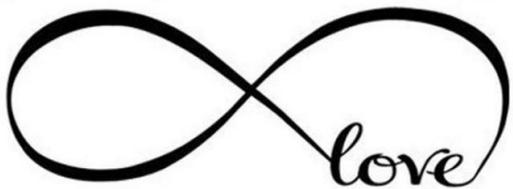
While writing this article I had many opportunities to reflect back on my almost 22 years as a Good Shepherd and there have been countless experiences that I can say by just showing love to our clients (our girls) I have been able to help guide them. This love might have meant sitting with them for a while until they felt safe or offering them a smile when they stepped out of their rooms to start the afternoon. Loving them even when I had to call on my zeal to get me through a situation.

This journey of love and exploring what it means has come full circle for me. I have realized that whether I am loving others or myself, love is the basis of all we do and say. Love is at the root of our Good Shepherd Mission and existence. I feel a person can have many skills, talents and gifts that you bring with you when you are working for the Good Shepherd, but none of that matters if you don't love what you do, those you serve, and who you are.

You can accomplish many tasks, start many programs, win many awards, but none of it holds the real glory. The real glory is when you can say I did it for love and leave it at that. It is amazing how those two words have shaped and motivated my personal and professional journey. Just love; just love our youth and their families, our coworkers, those around us and ourselves.

As I conclude, I want to refer back to something I shared earlier about our foundress. These words are a true inspiration to me and speaks volumes to me.

"I had no great talents or special abilities. I only loved, but I loved with all the strength of my soul."



"Love never says, 'It is enough.'"

~ St. Mary Euphrasia

Reflection Questions-

1. What does the words 'Just Love' mean to you?
2. How does love look to you when you are working with a client? Co-worker? Others? Yourself?
3. When was a time in your Good Shepherd Mission or life that you saw a difference in what you did by just simply letting love be your guide? How did it feel?
4. Where are you at on your Good Shepherd Journey?

“How happy are we, who are co-workers with *the Good Shepherd* in his Mission of love and friendship for each person.”

St. Mary Euphrasia