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Love to Serve, Serve to Love

Looking back, I remember that Ursuline Academy's motto: *Serviam* stood out to me because of the truth that service is the best way to fulfill one's mission in life: to love others. However, I had never lived *Serviam*, "I will serve", as fully as I did this past summer while volunteering at Crossroads Community Services. This small, busy food bank granted me the opportunity to interact one-on-one with those I serve: a life-changing experience. Through my experiences at Crossroads Community Services, I have learned to embrace a love of service and seen that service itself is the most beautiful way in which we can love others.

Crossroads Community Services—also known as CCS—is not simply a brick and mortar food bank, but also a warm home to which some of Dallas' most unfortunate went to seek human kindness. CCS, located in a less affluent sector of Dallas, gives low-income families and individuals access to pantry staples and fresh produce: a rarity for those living in poverty. The doors of pantry open at eight in the morning; hence, I would wake up at six-thirty to arrive on time. Often, I would stay after the four o'clock closing time because of how packed the food bank was. Not only is CCS the only food bank to offer fresh food, but they also treat all who enter through those doors with the dignity they deserve. While most food banks shuffle people in and out as quickly as possible, CCS's structuration ensures efficiency and attends to humans most basic need: empathy. These individuals enter "processing" where a receptionist greets them and gives them a waiting number; then, they pass "intake" where they speak with a volunteer and choose their food within a predetermined limit; and finally, with their food list in hand, another volunteer walks them to the "shopping" area to assist in gathering their food. I assisted at each of these stations because my second language, Spanish, was often needed; however, I chose to

spend most of my time aiding in intake and shopping where I engaged individually with those I served. Through jovial conversation, I heard about their lives, and cheered successes to help them briefly forget about the struggles. Every CCS volunteer and I knew it was our responsibility to smile, greet, and love all who came to us because this is our human duty: to be loving and respectful of all. At the CCS food bank, I satisfied bodily hunger with nutritious food and hopefully lessened the mental burden of my brothers and sisters.

As I strived to positively impact my neighbors, I yearned to tell them how this service experience both enlightened and invigorated me. I found this project enlightening because I was immersed in a new environment with different people who I could empathize with. I heard their striking stories, saw their dilapidated cars, and interacted with their energetic children. Although they lived in poverty, many came with a joy I found intoxicating and reaffirming of the truth that money does not buy happiness. However, I was also enraged with the injustices these beautiful souls faced. The knowledge that there exist valiant veterans rejected by their country and parents breaking their backs working two or more jobs to give their children a brighter future invigorates me to study now and later break the cycle of poverty I see all around me. This experience holds great importance to me because it has opened my eyes to the horrible truth that I live in a free country with an issue of wealth inequality and systematic oppression. The service project has become a call enlightening and invigorating me to take advantage of my education now so that I may provide my neighbors with the life they deserve.

Volunteering at the CCS foodbank gave me the opportunity to satisfy the bodily hunger and spiritual craving for kindness of my valuable neighbors. I loved this service and ended up loving those I served which turned this service into an enlightening, invigorating experience that will always remind me of my human purpose: love to serve and serve to love in all one does.