



Vincentian Service Corps-Central

A Year of Service Makes a Lifetime of Difference

Spring 2009

I've Decided I'm a Learner

by Emma Olwell

VSC-Central



Emma and some of her students

It takes three seconds for my sixth graders to form a mob. A moment's notice and I'm suddenly staring at the back of their heads. Their attention is precious and fleeting. It can be utterly dissolved by a piece of paper blowing in the parking lot outside, a seventh grader's new weekend mohawk, or a pencil. And absolutely nothing takes precedence over an argument; even the class currently in session.

Growing up, my index of potential careers included actress, astronaut, toy-maker, midwife and storyboard artist. Teaching never entered my scope of possibility. I had the luxuries of two parents, creative encouragement, and home-schooling. Two community colleges and a year at film school devoured my passion and left me wondering what direction I was ever headed in the first place. My formerly abundant vision became blinding at twenty, and crafting a life seemed as difficult as a lunar landing. Somehow, I settled on a road less traveled, took time off from college and decided to do a year of volunteer work.

An invisible hand seems to have scooped me up and dropped me in the

least likely of places, an all-boys Catholic middle school in St. Louis, Missouri.

The young men are sixth through eighth graders, ranging from eleven to fourteen. There's not a single awkward female to balance the volatile hormones. Sixty out of Loyola Academy's sixty-three students are African-American, leaving two tough little white boys and a boy of Vietnamese heritage. Coming from all over St. Louis, they share the common ground of wasteland neighborhoods, struggling families and poverty. The goal is to provide them with an alternative to failing public schools—the coveted Catholic education. We groom them, teach them, and hopefully provide a shot at a scholarship to one of St. Louis' elite private high schools.

With no expectations I stepped into my post as school librarian and sixth grade religion teacher. Well, maybe some expectations. A closeted love for Hallmark Hall of Fame films had me envisioning the inspirational struggle of futures brightened. The movie in my head showed successful fathers reminiscing on their middle school years and swallowing hard. "If it wasn't for that one teacher..." (they break off, too choked up to continue. Roll those credits.) But the misty eyed future is fantasy. I'm engrossed in the frustrating, eye-opening present.

I stand in a classroom trying to explain the intricacies of Catholicism to mini Bible-pounding Baptists. One of them asks me whether the Eucharist is a cracker you can buy at Aldi's. I was given a garage sale quality Danielle Steele novel and fuzzy purple slippers for Christmas. I lost my voice while substitute teaching a rowdy Literature

VSC MISSION STATEMENT
Responding to the call of the Gospel
in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul,
lay women and men of the
Vincentian Service Corps
serve those who are poor,
while growing in prayer
and living in community.

class. I have snapped the words, "Because I said so." I refer to them as "My Kids" in conversation. The sixth grade has spent the year inhaling Lemony Snicket's melancholy novels, begging me for the final two since October. When they were finally donated to us, I was the one choking up. I've been accused of voting for John McCain AND asked whether I was related to another teacher, solely on the grounds of being...white.

I teach them nothing. At 5:40, (the end of our extended school day) I'll find myself rubbing my temples and repeating instructions for the twentieth time. From the depths of fatigue, I struggle to find the magic combination of advice and encouragement they need from me.

Then there's the glowing moment when they'll repeat something I've said, make a connection, or jump up with the correct answer. No satisfaction could be clearer. I bask in those moments. They sustain me when my alarm goes off at six in the morning or when I collapse on my couch at night.

Continued on page 2

Many Thanks to Our Generous Donors

We give special thanks to those who have so generously donated to the VSC Program during this past quarter.

Your support helps the VSC Members in their service to persons who are poor and marginalized.

If you are able to help support the volunteers in their service, please return your donation in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you so much for your generosity and prayerful support.

- Deborah Bean
- Louise Beddingfield
- Rose Mary Buck
- Del & Teo Bumgardner
- Viola Clements
- Rosemary Cuffman
- Creighton University
- Bonnie Gentile
- Annie Godwin
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Vincintian Service Corps—Central is a member of Catholic Network of Volunteer Service (CNVS)

Because I am not a teacher, not a good teacher. I've decided I'm a learner. I receive twice what I give. Experience gained compensates the lack of salary. I'm learning how to communicate, how to discipline, how to show I care. If I'm training them to become teenagers, they're transforming me into an adult.

Analyzing this year "off" is impossible right now. It may take me months under the psychological microscope to discover the ways I've been changed. The need to leave them and return to college nags at me. I wonder if my heart will break. I might feel selfish. I worry I've already done the most meaningful thing I could hope to do.



Gratia Plena

The Story of Mary

KRISTINA SCHLIESMAN, SOPRANO
SUE PANKRATZ, PIANO
MARK REYNOSO, PIANO



SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2009
3:00PM

CHRIST THE KING PARISH
UNIVERSITY CITY
ST. LOUIS, MO



FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
DONATIONS WILL BE COLLECTED FOR OUR LADY'S INN

Kristina Schliesman is a VSC Volunteer this year at Our Lady's Inn.



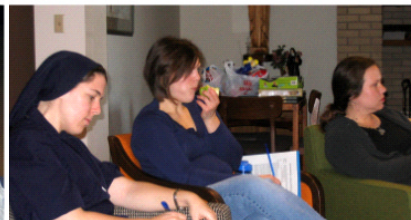
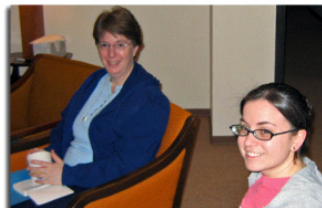
I really enjoyed talking with the retired Daughters in Evansville. It was neat to go from our sessions with Cackie, where we discussed biblical and Vincentian characters to our time with these "living saints". They are remarkable women with inspiring stories.

Kristina



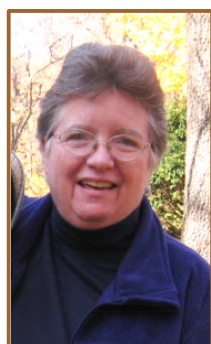
The Renewal Weekend was wonderful. The place was gorgeous and sitting out on the back patio with a few of my VSC girls just looking out onto a beautiful frozen pond was so peaceful. The weekend really gave me a chance to get back to the right place I needed to be, spiritually with God and also I was able to be physically refreshed. And the most memorable moment was when Sister Honora tried to lead us astray during lunch one day.

Kelly



I was able to refocus my efforts toward continuing my spiritual journey as a result of discussions and personal reflections during the weekend as I enjoyed my time away with my VSC girls and the lovely Sisters in Evansville!

Caryn



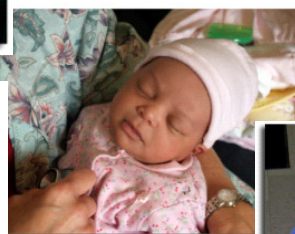
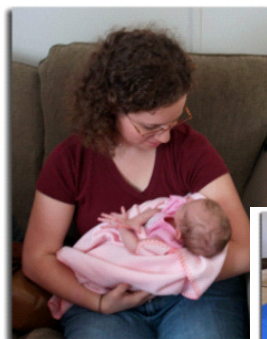
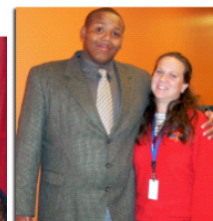
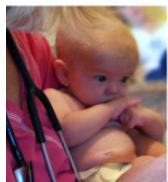
Dear Friends,

Please enjoy a few pictures from the VSC Renewal Weekend which was held at the Daughters of Charity Mater Dei Provincialate in Evansville, Indiana.

We have also included some pictures of the volunteers at their various ministry sites.

May Easter Blessings be Yours!

Sr. Teresa Daly, Director-Vincentian Service Corps-Central



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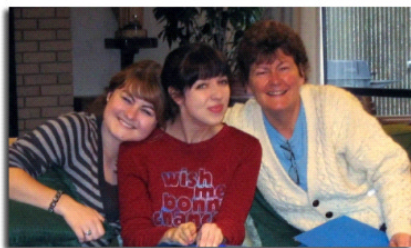
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Address Correction Requested



I really enjoyed how the “Cloud of Witnesses” talks used people from Scripture and the Vincentian family to illustrate facts of our relationships with God. Mary Magdalene’s life has always been a favorite of mine! The midpoint of the VSC year was a great time for reflecting on how trust in God led us to St. Louis. It was also an opportunity for reflections on where God’s will might be leading us after this year. The senior Sisters at Evansville were a “Cloud of Witnesses” in their own way. I was so touched by the caring welcome they gave us. These women radiate joy and pride about their decades of serving the poor. Sarah



The retreat in Evansville was an amazing experience. It was absolutely inspiring to be among all of the Sisters while learning to witness to each other and those we work with. It was a terrific weekend for community bonding.
Molly

VSC Volunteers at the February Renewal Weekend
Front left to right: Kelly, Emma, Molly
Back left to right: Sarah, Kristina, Jessica, Caryn, Elena,
Cackie Upchurch—Executive Director of Little Rock Scripture Study
Sr. Honora Remes—Visitatrix, Daughters of Charity East Central Province