

In the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, the mission of the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers is to invite young adults into a process of transformation through companionship with those who are poor and marginalized.

## Beloved is a powerful word in deed

**Cultivating quiet leads to revelations from the trenches**

By Evelyn Rakowsky  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

**B**eloved. Every time I hear or read this word I feel the comfort I experienced as a child when my mom would call me her Little Petunia. My body instinctively relaxes, and no matter how distracted I was before the romantic effects of this name wash over me, I am suddenly all ears and eager to receive the message that follows.

Two months ago, I participated in Adoration for the first time. There is a myriad of curious gifts that accompany being Catholic that remained complete mysteries to me before CVV ... Adoration was one.

One night, my community went to St. Ignatius of Loyola church where a circle of chairs is arranged at the altar so that parishioners have the option of getting closer to the blessed sacrament.

Soon enough, I found myself walking up to the altar.

As I sat before the Eucharist, I felt that familiar sensation of childlike comfort. I rested there and played through the life and



▲ Evelyn Rakowsky (center) with her community at Laradon.

death of Christ in my mind. It shattered me.

How was I possibly worthy of a love so powerful that Christ would sacrifice himself for me?

The truth is, I am not.

I compare myself to others daily over the silliest things; I experience jealousy so strong it tempts me to seek out the flaws in others.

### Catching myself

Just a few weeks ago, while home for Christmas, I caught myself at the age of 23 still reluctant when my mom asked for help in the kitchen.

I am far from deserving my name as one of God's Beloved, yet this word will not stop surfacing in my life.

Beloved has shown up in the daily Mass readings more times than I can count. Beloved floods the pages of my new favorite book by Henri Nouwen.

*Beloved* is even the title of my favorite song on the new Mumford and Sons album.

Beloved is haunting me.

No matter how many times I try to lay out all of the reasons I am unworthy to God, He hits me again with that word, Beloved, and I fall, all over again, like a child into His arms.

I've come to the realization that Jesus didn't die on the cross so that I could argue with Him about how unfair it is that He didn't let me earn my name as His Beloved before he started calling me it.

As I've repeated the word over and over to myself, I've heard God tell me that Beloved is both the mystery and the answer. As humans, we are God's Beloved.

But why were we given this title and what are we to do with it?

Truly accepting our status as the Beloved gives us the freedom to, as is hidden within the word itself, be love.

As God's Beloved we are called to be love for others.

And how do we *be* love? I'm still pretty clueless.

However, the Lord pointed out to me that the first step is hidden within the word itself.

In order not to only be love but also to understand that we are loved, we must first Be. We must quiet all of those external sounds and internal voices telling us we are not enough ... and meet God in the silence.

### Seeking silence

I've been seeking out new ways to create space for silence in my life. I've started leaving my headphones out on the bus, running without music, driving with the radio off and practicing centering prayer for 20 minutes every morning.

While I won't lie and say that I hear from God every time I sit in silence, I know He sees me trying. And the more silence I create, the more Beloved invades new spaces.

God is constantly sneaking around every corner to remind me that I am indeed His Beloved. The more room I give Him through silence, prayer and presence, the more this truth becomes irreversibly ingrained on my heart. ↑

*Evelyn Rakowsky works at Laradon.*

**I am far from deserving my name as one of God's Beloved**

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# Loving lessons from my students

## A teacher looks up from the trenches

By Francis Billena  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

**I**t has been six months since starting CVV and my experience at Mt. St. Vincent's has been filled with many interesting, heartwarming, and sometimes, wild and unbelievable stories.

Some days, I come home with dust or snot-covered jeans; on other day I come home with a few scratches and a sore ankle.

But every day after work, I come home with a heart filled with gratitude because I get to work with an incredible staff and a wonderful group of children.

Working with these kids has been challenging and requires a great deal of compassion and patience, but it has been rewarding

**One time, Justin told me his favorite part of the day is when I come to his classroom**

and filled with joy and laughter.

Lately, work has been tougher and more exhausting. We've been getting many new kids and the classrooms have been more *dys-regulated* than usual. To see what is positive when everything has been so focused on the challenging moment has been a lot harder.

I've learned to be more intentional when thinking about the positive moments that happen daily.

Journaling has been a great tool for me when I need time to reflect and think about the day.

I realize that appreciating little positive moments can mean a lot and change my whole day. One time, Justin (no real names are used) told me that his favorite part of the day is when I come to his classroom to see him. In her story for Literacy class, Angela called me the Hug Fairy who saved her from a bad fairy. (She was struggling one morning, and I was able to help regulate her and move into academic work afterward).

As I look back, I really appreciate these positive moments within the challenging time.

One Thursday, I had to say goodbye to Maria, whose discharge date was the next day. (I wouldn't be there to say goodbye in person.) She is super cute but also super sassy. She has a strong,



▲ Francis Billena working with a student at Mount St. Vincent.

very bright personality. I wouldn't say we had a close relationship, but I knew saying goodbye was going to be difficult.

She was playing with her habitat project that we worked on that day. I approached, knelt to her level and said, "I won't see you tomorrow, so I want to say goodbye. I will miss you very much. I am so proud of you and I wish you luck."

### Hug wisdom

She gave me a big hug and told me to wait for a little bit. She went to her desk area, looking for something, and came back with her personal teddy bear.

"This is for you, so you'll remember me forever," she said, giving it to me. I was touched and surprised. It was such a sweet gesture that I started to tear up.

She gave me one last hug -- truly a bittersweet moment.

I left the classroom with a happy heart and the realization that what we do matters. It was humbling to receive a present that she most likely treasured. Although I did not think that we had a close relationship, it meant more to her than I thought.

### Let the positive in

It is easy for the challenging moments to overshadow the positive.

Work can get so stressful that I do not realize how much I affect these kids ... as well as the impact they have on me.

We deal with multiple crises every day and it can get overwhelming. It's easy to feel hopeless when we hear bad news and feel there's nothing we can do.

All the challenges every day at work make it feel like we're way deep in the trenches right now. However, it just takes a little prayer, intentionality and extra effort to see the beauty that happens while we are in it. And to treasure a teddy bear. ↑

*Francis Billena works at Mount St. Vincent's.*



▲ Melinda Birky working with a client at Stout Street Clinic.

## She's learne

By Melinda Birky  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

**A**ccording to Google, the definition of the word trench is "a long, narrow ditch."

Seems to me like an odd place to find grace: Trenches are typically dark, dirty and crowded. The word reminds me of things like world wars, heavy rainfall and hardship.

This time of year can easily feel like trudging through a trench.

As a Registered Nurse at Stout Street Health Center, I work a lot with feet that have been through way worse than some wet mud. These feet have seen unfathomable trials that are sometimes hard for me to understand. A lot of my job is spent caring for the feet of my



# I'm in the trenches with CVV

By Mathew Vasilj  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

Since I was young, I have had a fascination with history. There was just a magical feeling I got reading stories from history books and knowing that they were true and real.

There were times I could not believe what I was reading! How some people lived these wild and extravagant lives while others lived these bleak and miserable ones -- and everything in between.

Even with these differences in how people lived throughout history, and even today, they all had their purposes.

That was what I was looking for when I came to CVV.

I was looking for my purpose. I came with all this joy and pride that I was coming to help the poor and marginalized and

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▲ Mathew Vasilj with one of the youths at Urban Peak.

that I was doing the Lord's work. That joy and pride only grew with my first months of being here.

The early part was easy. The people in our program are some of the most amazing people you could meet. My work at Urban Peak was super fulfilling and I was growing in ways that I did not think I could. I was proud to be a CVVer and to be a part of this great organization.

Then all of a sudden work started to become harder and I was beginning to realize how much I was missing home and my family. The adventures from the start of the year were not happening anymore.

Life was getting almost too real. I was way over my head.

And then I decided to volunteer to write this article.

My fellow writers and I

decided the theme of our articles would be "In the Trenches."

As I started to write, all I could think of was, 'I am not in a trench in World War I getting shot at, while sleeping next to rats the size of cats, suffering from lice and a plethora of other things.'

As a history buff I know this story of the trenches, but all I deal with is some attitude and disrespect. I could not see how my story was anything like the horrors the men who fought in The Great War experienced.

I did, however, find one commonality: Community.

The soldiers had each other and I have my fellow CVVers.

As the greenness from the beginning of the year wore off and things got tough, we experienced traumas and hardships in a different capacity and we

needed each other.

The greenness from the beginning of the year wore off and things got tough. We experienced traumas and hardships in a different capacity, and we needed each other.

In my experience of community here at CVV, we are there for each.

We laugh about the insults we received at work that day; we comfort and support each other when we are feeling down; we push each other to keep fighting the good fight.

Yes, there are times when we do not see eye to eye or we have a string of miscommunications but we battle back from them and continue to help each other grow and stay on the right path.

By doing this and not giving up, we have created a special bond of friendship and camaraderie that will not be replicated easily. I cannot say for certain this is how the soldiers in the trenches felt, but from the tales and stories I have heard, I like to believe this is how they felt.

Even though the journey is not over, I feel my purpose becoming more and more clear to me.

The best part of all is that the happiness I would get from reading a history book, I now experience with the wonderful CVV people and at Urban Peak.

*Mathew Vasilj works at Urban Peak.*

# d to walk through the pain in the trenches

patients, as feet are their main mode of transportation. Due to this, my patient's shoes become quickly inadequate and their feet exposed to the elements.

Like the inadequacy of the shoes for my patient's feet I sometimes feel inadequate in the fight for social justice. I have felt worn down overtime, thinned by trial and just plain uncomfortable in some situations throughout this year ... again, not unlike the shoes of my patients.

Here at CVV we are not immune to the darkness of the season. It is sometimes challenging to see God in the face of the pain and trial of people who could easily be us or ones we love.

That is the funny thing though, the people I have the honor of working with have become those I care for deeply, simply because we share one

thing; our humanity.

This is where I have found grace in the trenches: in the relationships I have built with my patients. Seeing God heal them, and seeing them reach their goals, is where God is in all of this.

Spirituality is an unavoidable quest this year. We are constantly challenged with big questions of humanity and dignity and how God plays into each of our lives and the lives of those we are serving. For me, the trenches have been a part of that.

To live in the pain that my patients experience every day has been hard, but I learned quickly that it does no one any good to live in that pain and do nothing.

To walk through that pain and use my position as a nurse to alleviate anything I can, is enough. I'm not going to save the world, but I can build a rela-

tionship and make someone feel heard -- and I think that is what God calls us to do. That is where the grace is found.

It takes a lot of time and reflection to come to these conclusions and not to get stuck in the mud. For that, we have community to lift us.

My community has moved through many phases. We have surpassed the honeymoon phase and have entered some trenches, which I could not be more grateful for.

In community, the trenches, the tension, and deep discussions are where the most growth has happened. It is where we sit with each other, where we don't have all the answers.

Despite our differences, we believe in one another. More importantly, we love one another.

And so, the people I have

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the honor of working with have become those I care for deeply, simply because we share one thing: our humanity.

*Melinda Birky works at Stout Street Clinic.*

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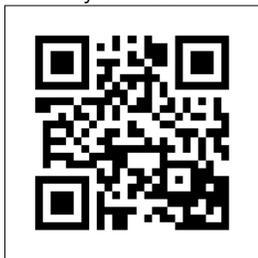
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## You're the Best ...

Alumni who helped with recruiting this past fall: **Jess VanOrden, Lauren Gauzza, Maggie Loughran, Brian Igel, Mary Morgan-Perro, Anna Lawler and Marianna Ugalde.**

Also, we so appreciate the folks who provided housing for the recruitment season: **Jill and Dave Trawick; DePaul House** in Chicago; the **Vincentian priests** in Philadelphia;

### Maura and Greg Carpinello

#### More thank yous:

- ✓ 125 Colorado Gives Day donors. CVV raised \$27,000 from individuals and \$30,000 from an anonymous foundation
- ✓ 122 Thanksgiving/Christmas donors both online and in return envelopes
- ✓ Anonymous Donors and Foundations

- ✓ Egan Printing
- ✓ Holy Family and Church of the Risen Christ for hosting CVV's pancake breakfast
- ✓ The CVV volunteers' Spiritual Directors
- ✓ Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
- ✓ The priests who preside at our liturgies
- ✓ Panera Bread Co.
- ✓ Humble Pie Store

### Welcome New Board Members!



Haley Todd



Brian Bates

### Save The Date

#### Heart and Soul Benefit Concert

Thursday June 13, 2019

FEATURING



Tony Melendez



Doug Brummel

### Stuff We Need



Home-size coffee pot



Microwave oven

