



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.

## Lessons from the border

**W**e exit the van and are told we'll be walking across the bridge separating Texas from Mexico. We begin the walk, silently, and we feel the cool air slowly moving across the bridge with us. I see the last of El Paso for the day.

I pass the middle of the bridge on the U.S.-Mexico border and see there is a small creek, the Rio Grande. As I take the lead and leave

**We made it ... to a country that wanted us.**

space between us as a group, I come to the Mexican side of the bridge and I feel my anxiety start to rise when I see security baggage scanners and two Mexican guards waiting for visitor arrivals.

I look at the big, tall sign to read directions, but they're in Spanish, and now, internally, the alarms are going off telling me I'm lost and not sure how to proceed ...

I am so thankful and relieved to receive a smile from the security guards as I place my phone and keys through the scanner. We made it ... to a country that wanted us. †

*Scott McKillip,  
Arrupe Jesuit High School*

**I** felt a hand on my leg. "Hola!" I heard. I swiftly put my phone back in my pocket and bent down to the level of the beautiful little girl who had confidently come to introduce herself.

This was one of those moments where I was so thankful to have some common ground through our shared knowledge of Spanish.

She told me her name was Esmeralda and that

she lived in the little green house not 100 feet from the border wall. It dawned on me then that I was in fact on her playground, her backyard.

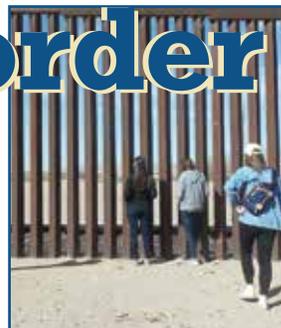
She grasped both of my hands gently and continued to talk in the way that little children do. As much as I know that it is good to see for ourselves what is actually going on at the border, I felt like I was intruding, like the way the wall intrudes the landscape of these people's lives.

The next day we had the chance to have some quiet time, walking along the Texas side of the border wall. As I was talking to God, I looked up and saw the most stunning sunset along the mountains that snuggle up to the wall.

The dichotomy of beauty and pain at the border is deafening. The beautiful mountains, crafted and painted by God himself, right next to a symbol of the ugliest of human nature.

The border has tension. The tension of despair and hope, big pain and big faith, Hispanic culture and the USA. However, while walking in the silence of the Texas side of the border, what was loudest was the knowledge that I was on holy ground. †

*Melinda Birky,  
Stout Street Health Center*



**Clockwise from above: Crossing the bridge; at the wall; with the U.S. Border Patrol; a child with a puppy peeks through the wall from the Mexico side.**

*"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."*

— Rumi

**I** heard stories of people that were so desperate they had to cross illegally, even though they didn't want to.

Stories of lawyers tired of fighting discretions and loopholes. Stories of farmers who were crippled by the same policy that benefited my neighbors in Minnesota.

And stories of Border Patrol who abuse their power, but they just

**The dichotomy of beauty and pain at the border is deafening.**

want to protect their country from a dangerous world of drugs and violence.

It was a confusing trip that led to more questions than answers, but one humbling answer did ring through.

What the CVV border pilgrimage did clarify was where the field beyond right and wrong

was: The field is us.

No matter which policy or actions occur, they will always hurt someone and will always benefit someone -- but us as individuals, we can go past that and love everyone.

Even if that looks like shaking the hands of someone you disagree with on a political opinion, this world needs a little more love and acceptance of everybody. Then maybe one day we can say that we are standing in the field that Rumi was talking about. †

*Mathew Vasilj,  
Urban Peak*



**It takes  
the utmost effort  
not to walk past ...  
to avoid considering  
the humanity  
of this person  
before me.**

## Some final stretches will never end ...

*“He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain, like one from whom you turn your face, spurned, and we held him in no esteem.”*

*Isaiah 53:2-3*

By Hannah McIntyre  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

The final stretch holds special meaning for me. I ran competitively throughout high school and college, and I looked forward to the final stretch of a long race.

The last 200 meters of every race were always an all-out effort. I didn't strategize about pace or calculate and save energy. It was simply a matter of spending my whole self. The pain simultaneously climaxed and disappeared at this point because I was so near the end.

Above all, that's what the final stretch meant: The end of the effort was near. Push past even what you thought was your all because it doesn't matter now – the end is so close. The strain will be over!

I questioned my life as a college athlete many times. Dad said that my time as an athlete was preparing me for something else.

I pass many homeless men and women on my morning and evening commutes from the second I step out of the house until I lock the door behind

me at night. Making eye contact is always a risk – very often, people will ask you for something. Many times, these interactions turn into long, exhausting conversations full of suffering and confusion and despair.

I can only sit and listen. I usually feel impatient and inconvenienced. It takes the utmost effort not to walk past, eyes ahead, to shut my imagination off and avoid considering the

humanity of this drunk, belligerent, smelly, suffering person before me. These encounters always feel like a final stretch effort, made possible only because it's the last time I'll ever have to do it. ***The strain will be over!***

I experienced so many final stretches. They were bearable because they signaled the end. But as Christ tells us, *“the poor will always be with us.”*

His imperative to love the poor requires a final-stretch effort that we must engage in until death. The final stretch is the only stretch – a bleary, ugly, all-out self-spending for the battered man on the other side of the road.

Will my heart harden toward these least – these who produce nothing in the eyes of society, who, like Mary Magdalene, are good for nothing except to deliver the message of the Resurrection to the rest of us – after this year is over?

I don't know. I hope, by the grace of God, it won't. But the time for strategy and calculation is over -- the final stretch is here and it continues until I have finished the race. †

*Hannah McIntyre works with the GED program at Urban Peak*

**Hannah McIntyre, above left and below, with a client in the Urban Peak GED program.**



# The final stretch is the best part

By Emilio Taltique  
CVV Year 24 Volunteer

**I** always enjoy the final stretch of a phase of life because it inspires me to take as much time as I can to enjoy the people around me. My senior year of high school and college were the best because my friend groups took the time to cherish the little time that we had left together.

And now I feel that my CVV community is in the same stretch.

At the beginning of the year we spent a lot of time sharing stories about growing up, playing board games or just sitting in the piano room and chatting about our day.

Everyone was excited to build new friendships and start on this year-long journey together.

But as the year went on, like any community, we became more comfortable spending time apart and some of our time together felt more like a part of the daily routine.

Recently, however, I noticed a change for myself at dinner one night after someone shared a funny work story and everyone was laughing so hard we had to take a breather after.

It was one of those moments I came to CVV for and I realized how quickly the year has gone, and how many opportunities for moments like this we had left.

As everyone is starting to finalize plans for next year the reality of our time together and time to come is starting to settle in.

This has made little moments

**If every moment  
or phase of life  
lasted forever,  
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for granted.**



**Emilio Taltique, above and right, working at a Brothers Redevelopment jobsite.**

feel special again but not because of their novelty. It's more because of how much we appreciate each other's company. At dinners we reminisce about the beginning of the year: like when we grilled the burgers we were supposed to save for a CVV event.

Or the time nine of us piled into a Subaru so we could drive the last mile to the trailhead of two 14,000-ft. mountain peaks.

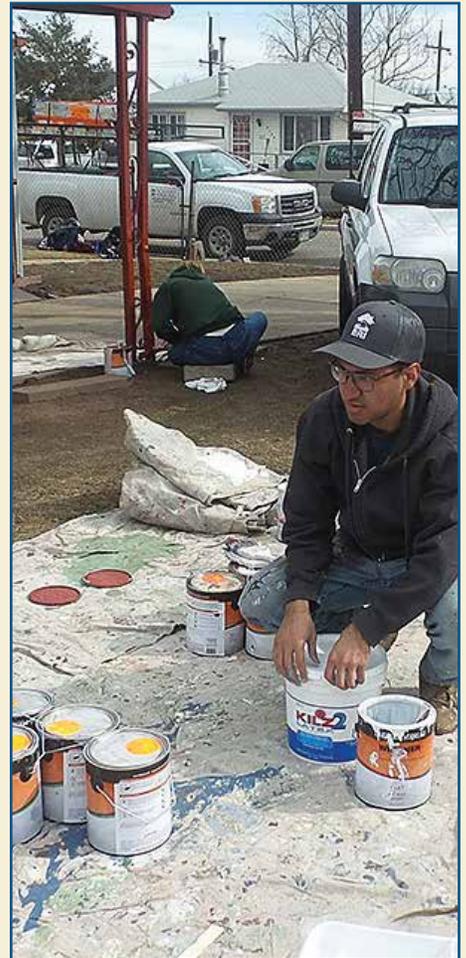
Even simple time spent together, like going to a coffee shop or cooking dinner, feels special because we know how few chances we have left for moments like these.

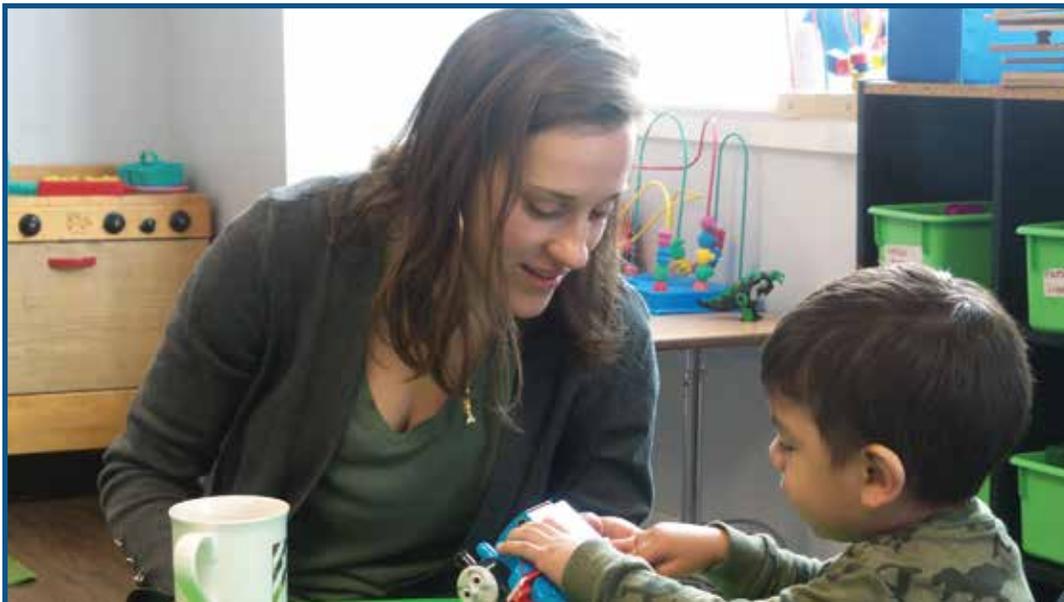
It's easy to get sad and think about how much we'll miss each other, but I think to dwell on too many of those thoughts is to miss out on a secret to life.

If every moment or phase of life lasted forever, we would never let them change us and we would certainly take the people around us for granted.

So this time, with these special people and these unique experiences, I hope to cherish it all in a way we could never have imagined. †

*Emilio Taltique works  
with Brothers Redevelopment*





Irene Presper, above and below right, with children at Aurora Community Connection.

## It's no stretch after all to pass up social work ...

*Finance grad helps people with budgets, finance*

Irene Presper

CVV Year 24 Volunteer

Less than a year ago, when I first arrived in Denver to begin my transformation with CVV, staff told us all to keep our minds open to a different future than what we were expecting. They told us that what we envisioned ourselves doing in a year might be completely different from what we actually wanted to do when we reached the final stretch.

I listened to their advice thinking that there was absolutely no way my plans could possibly change that drastically.

There were a few things I knew for sure: I wanted to stay in Denver after the program, possibly work in a nonprofit afterwards, and to really commit myself to the Catholic faith I had been neglecting since high school.

I had decided to dedicate a year to service, partially because of my disappointment with the path I had taken in college.

I felt as though I had

sold my soul for a high-paying career and hoped that CVV would redirect me. Basically I was hoping CVV would convince me that what I really wanted was to be a social worker.

Unsurprisingly, Bill and Mary Frances, after 24 years with CVV, knew what they were talking about.

Today, I am now planning to move to Pittsburgh to work in finance and, I hope, explore my spirituality in new ways. This transforma-

tion did not happen right away, of course.

I gradually noticed, for example, that there was a large portion of alumni who are caring, service-oriented people, who don't work for nonprofits and do not seem, to my knowledge, to have sold their souls.

Recently, I taught a civic budget and personal financial-planning class to Spanish-speaking immigrants at my work site.

I assumed that the

**I gradually noticed alumni who don't work for nonprofits and do not seem to have sold their souls.**

students would be less than thrilled to be learning about budgets, especially from a 23-year old with no real experience.

To my surprise, they loved it. I left the class feeling as if the information I provided was not only helpful, but crucial to their lives as immigrants in the United States.

Perhaps ... my degree in finance could benefit others as much as a degree in social work?

Now, as I head into the end of my time with CVV, I am astonished by and proud of the transformations we have all experienced.

While CVV did not convince me to make a career change, it has taught me the importance of using my skills to support the underserved communities that I feel passionate about.

Looking forward into the final stretch, I can't help but be excited; if I've grown this much in the past eight months, I can't wait to see how I'll grow in the next three. †

*Irene Presper works at Aurora Community Connection*





Tom Olson, left, with students at Annunciation Catholic School.

## His final stretch is the right time to soak it all in

Tom Olson, CVV Year 24 Volunteer  
**I**f you can think back to when you were in the eighth grade, try to remember what it was like: You're one of the big kids, the seniors of your middle school, but soon you'll be back to the bottom rung of the ladder, a mere freshman.

It's an interesting time isn't it? Your early childhood is coming to an end and it seems your entire life is ahead of you, which can feel daunting and immensely exciting.

I'm reminded of that feeling when I talk to the eighth graders at Annunciation Catholic School.

They're feeling it right now. Grade school is ending; high school is waiting. They're all realizing their time at Annunciation is drawing to a close.

All they have to do is make it through the final stretch.

I've been working at

Annunciation since August and have gained a lot of experience and memories.

One memory in particular is when I had to help break up a fight in the gym. I've never had to do something like that before, and I was a little bit shocked at how I handled the situation.

It was as if I were moving in slow motion. I didn't spring into action as I should have.

I had a more passive reaction when I understood what was happening. It took a few moments to click in my head that I was the one who needed to intervene.

When I got into gear, things went smoothly, but the fact that I hesitated still stunned me.

Now that a few months have gone by, I notice, when, on the rare occasion a similar situation arises, I move much more quickly.

In fact, my reactions are often instinctive.

I don't want students

to get hurt, so there's no time to hesitate when safety is a concern. That's just one of the many lessons I've learned and ways I've grown since coming to Annunciation.

Even so, there's still a lot left to experience.

That's why these last few months are so important to me. I've got to soak up as much as I can while I'm still here. Time's running out and I'm anxious and excited for what comes next in my life.

So I guess I'm feeling like an eighth grader right now. I've been telling some of the eighth graders to make these last months count.

I tell them, "Don't let

Time's running out and I'm anxious and excited for what comes next in my life.

your future sneak up on you. Be ready to face it head on, but don't forget to experience these last few months for all they're worth, because they're worth a lot."

Maybe I should start listening to my own advice. †

Tom Olson works at Annunciation Catholic School

# HEART & SOUL 2019

## SAVE THE DATE!

THURSDAY • JUNE 13 • 7PM



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Good Shepherd Parish  
Humble Pie  
Mathias Lock & Key  
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Panera Bread  
RTD

**CVV March Madness**

The following universities  
participated in ser-  
vice trips coordi-  
nated by CVV this  
year:



De Paul U., Chicago;  
St. Ben's/St. John's, Minne-  
sota; Creighton U., Omaha;  
St. John's U., New York;  
St. Mary's U., San Antonio;  
St. Edwards U., Austin.

**We really need ...**



**Yes, even CVVers need to  
vacuum and we really need  
a vacuum cleaner. We are not  
particular about brand or size  
or age. Only that it works.**

“When we turn that gaze  
to migrants and refugees,  
we discover that they do  
not arrive empty handed.  
They bring their courage,  
skills, energy and  
aspirations, as well as the  
treasures of their own  
cultures; and in this way,  
they enrich the lives of the  
nations that receive them.”

-- Pope Francis

