

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 people who live in poverty and are marginalized.

Finding God's presence in a pandemic

"I am He, I am He who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

Isaiah 46:4

By Erin Lynch

CVV Year 25 Volunteer

Life has drastically changed in this time of COVID-19. The slight chaos that comes with being a full time volunteer, has come to a halt. We have been forced to slow down and adapt to what is needed. As time at home has increased and trips outside have decreased, everyday life has slowed. Life has changed and so have I.

After six weeks of being home, I have reflected deeply on two words -- grief and gratitude.

Most often it seems these words are opposites.

But as I grieved the loss of a family member, the loss of work at Laradon, the loss of normalcy, I have found a hole that has been filled with gratitude -- finding gratitude for the many things I have and realizing the importance of cherishing those things.

As the weeks have gone by I have found God in little ways and have increased my prayers of gratitude.

Each day I see little signs of God's presence. I am reminded that this situation is only temporary but how I react, and allow this situation to affect me could last much longer.

I see God in a community dinner on the balcony of



▲ Erin Lynch writing on the Wall of the Disappeared in Juarez, Mexico.

CoHo on a warm spring day. We squeeze around the two little tables and the sun sets just to the west.

I see a glimpse of God in my three-mile run around City Park, as I run by Ron, who works at the construction site on the zoo grounds.

He always greets me with a big smile and a "Have a great day!" What a nice reminder among the chaos that kindness and acknowledgement is an important part of us all.

I get a glimpse of God in my once-a-week visit to the St. Elizabeth basement, helping to prepare meals for their sandwich line.

I see God in the opportunity for connection with family and friends through a group Zoom with my college friends, a phone call with my grandmother, or a letter from my mom.

Each and every day God gives me many things to be grateful for. So in this time of

Each day I see little signs of God's presence.

grief and change I am thankful for the chance to feel gratitude for the goodness in my life. ⬆

Erin Lynch works at Laradon

Inside



In this strange new world of the Covid 19 Pandemic, the CVV Year 25 cohort is deeply affected by its lessons and you will see that throughout this issue:

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There is goodness in this



By Betty Goodwin

CVV Year 25 Volunteer

God is good. There is goodness in this.

Just about nothing in life seems normal right now. My walks to and from work are quieter than ever. Monday Reflection and Discussions are over Zoom. My work hours have changed. My housemate and I cannot sit inside a coffee shop during our one-on-one. I can't even go to Mass.

“Be still and know that I am God.”

How many times have we all heard this Bible verse?

Yeah, yeah, I get it. Thanks, God, for the reminder.

But right now, living in the midst of COVID 19, throughout the extreme uncertainty, chaos, frustration, and fears of the unknown future, I feel God inviting me into His stillness.

The stillness that goes extremely against my Type A, go-go-go, adventure, can-never-sit-still self.

Be still.

What a perfect and pure time to be still.

During my hours at Samaritan

House, I am more still than ever.

Instead of worrying about endless job applications, spending hours applying for food stamps, or denying my client his 14th bus pass of the week, the atmosphere and energy around Samaritan House has changed recently.

There's been more time to have intentional conversations and to share space.

There are conversations with Nate about his dream to get a motorcycle and ride it from Denver to California.

There are conversations with Father Michael about his time in foster care when he was a little boy.

There are conversations with Karson about his great love for chocolate and Diet Pepsi.

There is space to go outside on the front lawn and play football with Jeremiah, Noah, and Kaleb and have them teach me to throw not like a girl.

There is space to take the kiddos from the family floor to the playground and pretend to be our favorite superheroes.

There is space to hold baby Nicole and watch her cheeks and thighs get chubbier by the day.

I'm certain that if the world were still spinning as normal,



▲ Top: Year 25 housemates wearing the now-familiar face mask. Above: Betty, in the red sweater, and housemates learning to love masks.

the fruit and beauty of these conversations would probably never have found space.

I would be bogged down in my everyday need-to-get-everything-finished-ASAP mindset, and I wouldn't have the chance to stop, have more meaningful conversations, share intentional space with others, and be still.

“And know that I am God.”

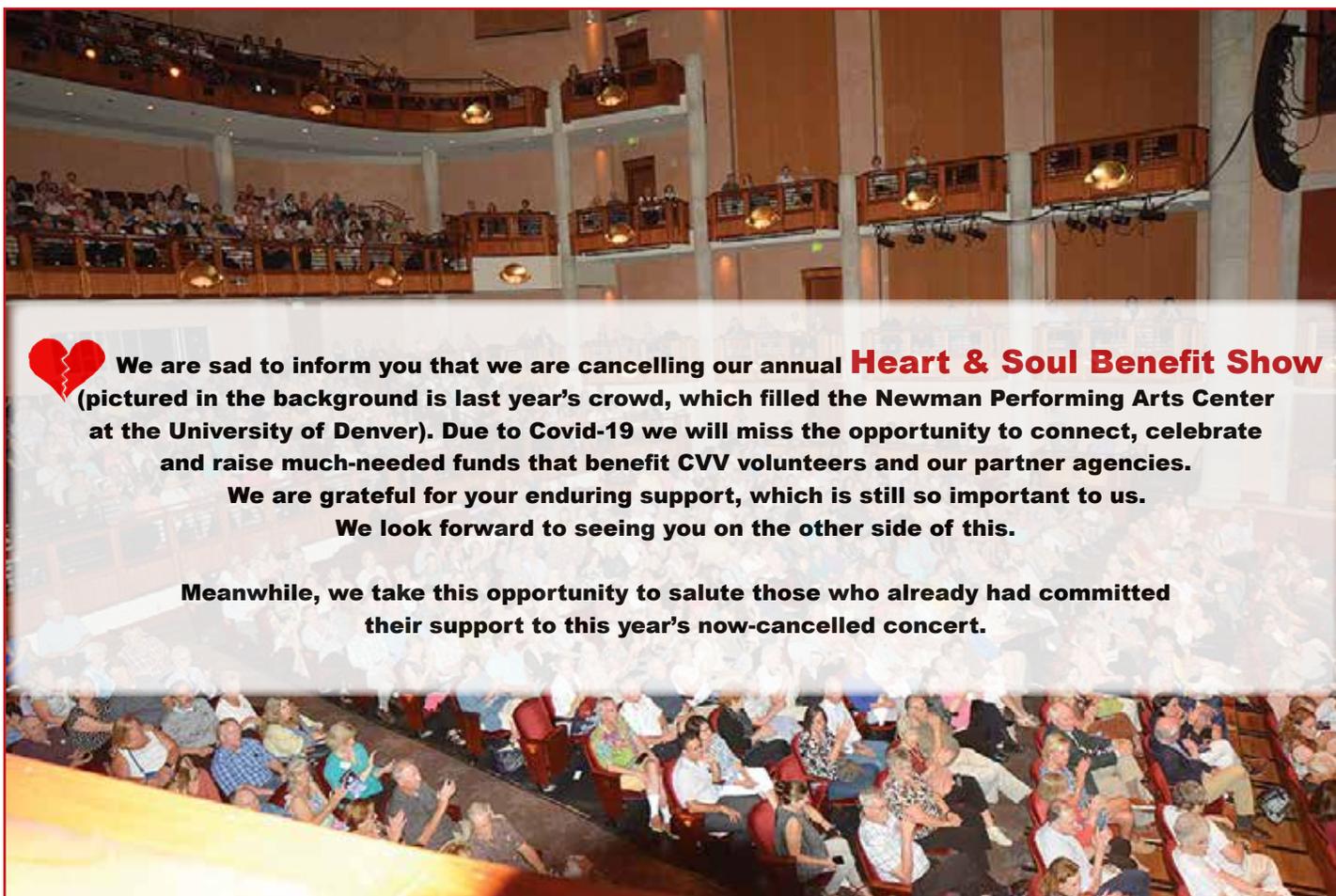
I do know. Very much so. I know that He is a God of goodness, faithfulness, and abundance. He is here amidst the

disorder and disruption of our world right now. He is walking throughout Samaritan House every day – sometimes with greasy hair, dirty fingernails, or a mask covering his face.

I can confidently say that life is good in the Father's House ... or should I say ... at Samaritan House, the two of which for me, are the same.

God is good. There is goodness in this. 

*Betty Goodwin
works at Samaritan House*



We are sad to inform you that we are cancelling our annual Heart & Soul Benefit Show (pictured in the background is last year's crowd, which filled the Newman Performing Arts Center at the University of Denver). Due to Covid-19 we will miss the opportunity to connect, celebrate and raise much-needed funds that benefit CVV volunteers and our partner agencies. We are grateful for your enduring support, which is still so important to us. We look forward to seeing you on the other side of this.

Meanwhile, we take this opportunity to salute those who already had committed their support to this year's now-cancelled concert.

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Reflections

Editor's note: Every year during Lent, each volunteer reflects on one of the Stations of the Cross in light of how they engage in work and reflection.

**By Kristin Watt
and Syd Hunter**

CVV Year 25 Volunteers

As I picture Pilate the minute he is persuaded to make his decision to release Barabas to the crowd, I think about those in power who unknowingly or knowingly crucify marginalized populations daily.

Jesus died because he was a radical. He challenged unjust systems, corrupt leadership, and dared to believe that everyone had inherent dignity. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and companioned the outcast. He also challenged the status quo, and threatened the power of those in charge so severely that he was killed.

I think of those who make decisions that may not see the weight of them. Many people with decision making power may be like Pilate, wanting to do the right thing but are persuaded otherwise by the masses.

How do we find the courage to live as radically as Jesus did? How do we challenge the unjust systems we live in even if it means a kind of death? Social death, career death, even bodily death, all are possible when radically following Christ's example.

Years of small and gradual decisions of people in power have left the GrowHaus neighbors of Elyria-Swansea living in poverty and pollution. They live in fear of being displaced through the slow and painful process of gentrification. They live in the shadows and their voices are not heard.

In our work and in our community, we are constantly choosing to attempt to live like the radical Christ. In many ways, it is giving voice and presence to the unjust systems we live and work in. It is in living simply and recognizing the humanity in all people. It is in this radical living that we lean into the death of our own ignorance, the death of our laziness, and the death of who we were before we started this journey. This death has been hard and uncomfortable at times, but has also offered immense joy and purpose.



▲ Kristin Watt, left, at The GrowHaus. Syd Hunter, right, at work at EarthLinks in a bee suit.

In the Bible, we are fortunate to see that the story is not over. We know what happens next, and that is where we receive our hope.

I see the significance of death, and consequently, new life in my participants. Death is commonplace at EarthLinks. Death of old lives, of living on the street, of abusive relationships, death of addiction and hunger, and sometimes even bodily death when their physical being simply cannot fight anymore. I see a radical act in all of these deaths. I see belief in their worthiness of a better life, I see hope for true belonging, and I see trust in surrendering to new

life beyond this world.

Unlike the Easter story, we really do not know the ending of this one. That is where we step in and provide what little service we can. Where can we be there to provide hope to people at the mercy of decisions of those in power?

Jesus' radical living gives great meaning to his death and our own. I pray that we find the courage to live radically and lean into the deaths that offer new life. †

*Kristin Watt works
at The GrowHaus*

Syd Hunter works at EarthLinks

Volunteers react to their



▲ Some of CVV Year 25 Volunteers at the Border Wall in El Paso.

By Aidan Cunningham
CVV Year 25 Volunteer

My first visit to the border was long overdue. Growing up in Arizona post-9/11, post-NAFTA, and during the mid-life crisis of the war on drugs, the issues at the border had such a constant presence in my life that they subsequently had no presence in my life.

Issues like SB1070, Sen. John McCain's tough-on-immigration presidential campaign and the pardoning of Sheriff Joe Arpaio gave the rest of the nation a glimpse into the noise that served as background radio static to my entire life.

Studying the history of the border, and then actually going there moved the antenna

for me. The importance of events happening at the border had long been explained away simply as another one of Mexico's problems, but the reality during our pilgrimage was far from simple.

The events happening at the border, the persecution of asylum seekers, the detainment of innocents, and the separation of families, are our problems that have taken root on our southern border. They are complex and heartbreaking.

To file them away as another country's problem and to disassociate because we vote for the other side of the aisle is morally negligent. †

*Aidan Cunningham works
at Arrupe Jesuit High School*

God knows what he's doing

By Mollie Zoul

CVV Year 25 Volunteer

Intentional Community:

A planned residential community designed to have a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork. (Google definition)

I wouldn't recommend this definition. Over the past nine months I have learned how vast and broad the phrase intentional community truly is.

At CVV I live with eight individuals. We eat together, exercise together, go shopping together, watch movies together, pray together.

When I tell people this I'm usually given a weird look and asked "Why would you do that?"

I try to figure out a way to explain that we were called to join CVV, from all over the United States, each bringing our own gifts, talents, and experiences that we use to live out the mission of St. Vincent De Paul – but that is pretty difficult to explain in a few sentences.

When we first started this program, getting to know each other was sometimes awkward and felt a little forced. You ask each other



▲ Mollie Zoul with two of the children at Anchor Center.

standard questions and try really hard to find a common ground.

Next, you realize (quickly) that you'll have to share *everything*: Clothes, toothpaste, hair brushes, a living room, and a kitchen.

A few weeks in you start to share even more things; this time though, you're sharing events from work, client success stories, hugs, tears, emotional baggage, and prayer life.

Eventually your community

starts operating as a unit.

You realize that each person's gifts are needed for the group to work. When someone isn't present you can feel the absence.

Now we all know each other's strengths and weaknesses.

We know who likes hugs and who doesn't. We know how to make each other laugh and how to make each other feel loved. It isn't always easy to see God in others – especially when someone

**When staff say
"This year will
transform you"
they mean it.**

eats your leftovers or when you disagree on political matters.

But, I have slowly learned these past nine months that in intentional community, God is always present, even if you are upset with someone.

God exists in the relationships we have formed. He exists in the memories we have made, and ultimately He exists in the unconditional love that has grown among us.

We, CVV 25, are companions to those experiencing poverty, but to each other as well. The bond we have may never be able to be explained fully – but that is what makes it so beautiful and so special.

When staff say "This year will transform you" they really mean it.

God is so present in this group and honestly ... he did a decent job placing us all here together. ✦

Mollie Zoul works at Anchor Center for Blind Children

U.S.-Mexico border visit

By Pam Anderson

CVV Year 25 Volunteer

As I am walking on the U. S. side of the wall between El Paso and Juarez, I am also praying for them and looking at the beautiful landscape disrupted by this wall. I encounter a child-sized shoe in-between two posts.

I hear God whisper in the silence of my heart, "Take off your shoes, you are on holy ground." I am drawn back to the present, out of my daydreaming of running away to Juarez.

I take off my Chacos and start to walk. At first the sand is soft. Later it is painful pieces of glass. In moments of overwhelming pain, what keeps me going is remembering the mi-

**It's humans who
are suffering.
It is us.**

grant that might have lost his shoes, and I unite my suffering and his and to the Passion.

There was a moment on the walk back that I stopped and just broke down.

I grabbed my Benedictine Crucifix off my neck and put it on the Mexican side of border and prayed for those in Mexico, particularly Juarez, and all those who are seeking asylum. ✦

Pam Anderson works at Sewall Child Development Center

By Margaret Pierce

CVV Year 25 Volunteer

Angela's hand was small. It fit through the wall slats easily as she showed me her *dulces*. She asked me about *mis hermanos, cauntos muchos tienes, que se llaman?*

Angela shared her world with me through the boundary and we connected. It was the most powerful part of the trip. I went to the border thinking about how I would appear to them. How I should talk, smile? What was my accent like? What questions should I ask?

It wasn't until a little brown hand, delicate and perfect, reached across to share her story that I realized what I really needed to pay



attention to: The human connection.

The biggest theme I brought home with me is it's not them, those, or people across the wall. It's humans who are suffering. It is us. ✦

Margaret Pierce works at Urban Peak



Volunteering in a quarantined world

Eighteen Colorado Vincentian Volunteers continue to work, some at original job sites; some working from home supporting changes their agencies have made; some volunteering at sandwich lines, food resource centers and shelters, helping with prescription delivery and

various requests.

The volunteers continue to reflect on their experiences, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways our world is changing.

Thanks to these young men and women who are our hands and feet in the world today.

They are 18 awesome individuals acting as Pope Francis calls us:

“This is the force of the Spirit poured out and fashioned in courageous and generous self-denial ... Because this is God’s strength:

Turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things.”

“Go to the poor and you will find God.”

-- St. Vincent DePaul >



Some thoughts from our volunteers on what it means to be Vincentian:

- † To be in relationship with the poor.
- † Not radically changing the lives of those we serve.
- † Needing only the bare necessities so that your vision is not blurred by materialistic items.
- † Putting aside all assumptions, all judgments, all comforts, all fears, and all egos, simply to just be with other human beings.
- † Simply accompanying those most in need of companionship.
- † Loving others in the way they need to be loved, no matter what.
- † No poor or rich ... we are all just human beings who have deep needs to love and be loved.
- † A mutually healing relationship.
- † Being intentional with all that you do.
- † Being present to the simple ways God is speaking to you.
- † Seeing Jesus through the eyes of the individuals I meet.
- † Being simple in thought and action as well as being centered on Christ.
- † God revealed through the tears of a broken relationship, the curious question about faith, the joy of finding housing for the first time in three years. †

Haley Todd named director

CVV board of directors names Year 16 alum to continue the journey



▲ Haley Todd, above with her dog, Bella, has been named CVV's director. Below, at right, Haley with fellow CVV 16 alum at the 25th anniversary celebration in 2019.



The CVV Board of Directors is proud to announce their choice for the new director, Haley Todd (CVV alum, year 16).

Haley will soon join the CVV team as the journey continues into the future. Congratulations, Haley, and welcome to your new position at CVV!

Haley served as Assistant Principal of Emily Griffith High School, where she accompanied students and staff.

Previously, Haley worked with youth at Urban Peak, first as a case manager during her CVV year and then as coordinator of the GED program.

Previously she interned at St. Meinrad Seminary and studied

Education and Religious Studies at the University of Dayton.

She has a Master's Degree and certificate of Administrative Leadership in Policy Studies.

Pope Francis offered a challenge in his *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, "[Our faith] means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity, and solidarity."

We are grateful for a great team -- Haley, Ryan Martin, Margaret Mailander and Adrienne Havey -- to keep CVV moving in a direction of more hospitality to all, companionship with one another, and solidarity with those who are living on the margins. ↑

“

The opportunities for vulnerability and authenticity create a profoundly unique depth in [volunteers'] journey together ... I believe wholeheartedly in CVV and want to bring my gifts to be a catalyst for our future. Let's dream. Let's build. Let's be the bridge.

”

-- Haley Todd

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What do Winnie the Pooh and Meister Eckhart have in common? Us!

"How lucky we are to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." (Winnie the Pooh)

As we prepare to leave CVV as Co-Directors, we share the bear's sentiments. You all make it hard to say goodbye, so we won't! Rather we pray in the words of Meister Eckhart:

"If the only prayer you say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

Love and Blessings!

Bill and Mary Frances