Blog
Ministry



During their commissioning Aug. 17 Mass in Worcester, Massachusetts, Assumption Mission Associates carried their canvases with their mantras to the altar as the gifts were brought up. The author is pictured third from the left, with the mantra "Pay attention." (Provided photo)



by Samantha Kominiarek

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico. This is Samantha's first blog post. Read more about her.*

The subject line of an email from Sandy, the director of the Assumption Mission Associates, that I received in early August read, "Important Request — Project for next week."

She was asking each of us eight volunteers to discern a mantra before we arrived at orientation in Worcester, Massachusetts. This mantra could be a phrase that would provide us with hope and encouragement throughout our year of service with the Assumption Sisters in various locations around the world.

I thought about this a lot. I wanted to pick a phrase that would encapsulate all I hoped for from my year of service in Chaparral, New Mexico, but would also leave open some possibility for all that was unknown about living in a community about 20 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border.

The words "pay attention" came to me as I thought about my time in spiritual direction with Jackie, a campus minister at St. Joseph's University, my alma mater. I told her that sometimes, prayer is challenging for me because I don't know the right words to say, or I feel overwhelmed by all the people and experiences I want to pray for.

Jackie introduced me to the poet Mary Oliver and her poem "The Summer Day." In this poem, Oliver describes a grasshopper she is observing. She writes, "I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention." I loved the words "pay attention" because they are a simple reminder to notice the movements of God and to spend my life in awe of this beauty.



The beautiful view from the front porch of Casa Maria Eugenia, a community center in Chaparral, New Mexico, and the author's home for the year. (Provided photo)

At orientation, we created artwork on canvases with the words of our chosen mantras. Then we had a meeting about journaling with Sister Nuala. Inside the cover of the journaling pamphlet she had put together was none other than "The Summer Day." I could not believe that out of all the poems in the world, she chose to share this one.

Then she asked me to read it out loud. I was unable to read through the whole poem without becoming emotional.

At lunchtime, I told Sister Nuala why I started crying while reading. I explained that even though I knew it was silly, I was worried the Assumption Sisters might think it was strange for me to pick my mantra based on a poem that admitted to not knowing what prayer was.

She pulled me in for a hug. Then she pointed to her white hair and said, "Look at me. My hair looks like this. I am learning new things every day. Especially about prayer!" This moment made me feel certain that "pay attention" was the mantra I wanted to guide my time in Chaparral.

Since arriving in Chaparral at the beginning of September, I have been paying attention as I grow in this new space. In the mornings, I love watching the sky transform with magnificent colors as the sun rises and the temperature rapidly increases. Throughout the day, I keep looking up and seeing the fluffy white clouds in the blue sky that looks as though it goes on forever. I am paying attention to the comfort the sky brings me, even in this still-unfamiliar setting.



Mrs. Ochoa's class at the local middle school (Provided photo)

At the local middle school, I pay attention to the ways the teachers are culturally responsive to the challenges that exist in this community. The language arts teacher, Mrs. Ochoa, has her students read pieces of literature that talk about the journeys of migrants and refugees. She opens up the discussion to her students

because she knows that they themselves, their parents, or their grandparents may have taken similar voyages. I pay attention to the ways she tells and shows her students they are not alone.

I also pay attention to the curiosity the students have. They ask, "Why would you want to come to Chaparral?" I tell them, "Because I want to build a relationship with you." I say I am blown away by the beauty of their home. I speak about the ways their community has welcomed me with hugs, kisses and so many smiles. I notice the way they receive these words as if I am telling them something they have never heard before, although I am sure they know all of this and find it is more natural to pay attention to other things when they live here every day. I feel gratitude to be able to have this conversation with them.



Celebrating Sister Diana's birthday with a special lunch with, from left, Sister Diana, Sister Chabela, the author, Mattie (also an Assumption Mission Associate), Sister Tere and Sister Nha Trang (Provided photo)

When we eat lunch with the sisters, I pay attention to their energy and their dedication to God, their community and each other. Their faith is lived through their actions in the community, such as cooking and serving dinner every other Wednesday to share with up to 300 refugees in El Paso, Texas, which is about 30 minutes from Chaparral. They care for each other, which is shown through their actions of cooking delicious meals to eat together. When our lunches end, I feel full from the delicious food, especially the vegetables that Sister Nha Trang bought from the local farmers market and the dessert Sister Diana and I enjoy extra because we each have a sweet tooth. I pay attention to the way my heart also feels full from their love, even when I am missing my family.

These words have guided me throughout my time so far by allowing me to notice things I might not have otherwise thought about. I am looking forward to seeing how this mantra will continue to direct me, but also challenge me to pay attention to new things in new ways as I continue to grow.

[Samantha Kominiarek is doing a year of service with the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico.]

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