Blog
Spirituality



On the last day of our silent retreat at Collier High School in Wickatunk, New Jersey, we ate breakfast together and spoke with the sisters. Top row, from left: Sr. Virginia Daniels, Sr. Debbie Drago, Sr. Ellen Kelly, Mo Berry, Maria Jose Miranda and Erin Hood. Bottom row, from left: Caileigh Pattisall, Makenzie Moore and Sr. Fran Lomeo. (Courtesy of Diane Conroy)



by Caileigh Pattisall

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June 1, 2022

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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 Caileigh's final Notes from the Field blog post.*

I've been feeling all sorts of nostalgia lately, especially since my last blog post corresponds with my last month of service with Good Shepherd Volunteers.

I've been thinking a lot about when I first applied to this program. I was 21 and had just graduated in a pandemic. I had vague ideas of what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be.

I turned 24 last month. I got to celebrate this birthday in a new city with new friends. I'm in such a different place now, and I'm grateful. I have grown in so many facets of my life, met incredible people, and had all sorts of new experiences.

I'm grateful for the initial community I have lived with this year in Washington Heights. My roommates are so different from me, and I have learned so much from them and their own life experiences. I would have never met then if I had stayed in Northern Virginia, if I had never taken this leap of faith. Living with them has been truly a gift, one where I've been able to gain perspective.



My roommates surprised me after a long day at work with our apartment decorated and this beautiful carrot cake. (My favorite!) It was so thoughtful and a great way to turn 24. (Caileigh Pattisall)

I'm also grateful to have met and worked with all the participants in the program at Barbara Blum Residence. I've never been so inspired by resilience and growth, and it's been incredible to bear witness to.

I'm also grateful for the experiences I have had through being a part of this organization. A few weeks ago, all of the Good Shepherd Volunteers were graciously invited to LifeWay Network's Event Towards New Life. The event was a beautiful gala in Midtown Manhattan, where we celebrated the accomplishments and work of LifeWay Network to end human trafficking. We also celebrated Good Shepherd Sr. Maureen McGowan, who represents the Sisters of the Good Shepherd on the board. It was fun to get dressed up and be together to support and learn about a great cause.



The Sisters of the Good Shepherd were so incredibly kind to invite the Good Shepherd Volunteers to the LifeWays Network's Event Towards New Life last month. From left: Sr. Maureen McGowan, Caileigh Pattisall, Diane Conway, Maria Jose Miranda, Makenzie Moore and Gabby Casper. (Courtesy of Caileigh Pattisall)

In the first piece I wrote for Notes from the Field back in December, I walked you through what a community check looks like at my placement site. I find myself checking in again and feeling proud of how far I have come in just one year. I'd like to pay homage and take you all with me through one last community check-in.

"How are you feeling?"

I'm feeling an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward this year and the people I've met who have inspired me to keep going when things got tough. I'm also, of course, feeling nervous for what comes next, but with that comes excitement.

"What is your goal for today?"

Today, my goal is to stay present. I want to cherish these last small moments of this year that I will fondly look back on.

"Who can help you with that?"

I think everyone I'm currently in community with can help me stay present. At home and at my job, everyone has done a fantastic job checking in and fostering a space where I want to be present.

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"What's your commitment?"

Each community check-in, we have to make a commitment to one of the Seven Sanctuary Commitments: nonviolence, emotional intelligence, shared governance, social learning, growth and change, social responsibility, and open communication. I would like to continue with growth and change. I hope committing to growing myself and my experiences can make me a better advocate and worker in the social justice field.

"What is your safety plan?"

Safety plans are strategies you can use to remain calm when experiencing a stressful situation. These can look like physical exercises, things you're looking forward to, or just simply something you can tell yourself. I remember reading a quote by writer Robert Brault: "Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."

It's hard to see sometimes through the stress or the trivial moments that these might be things you'll miss down the line. Through all this nostalgia, I'm realizing what it means to take each day in full, to actively try to be more present. Because over time, it's been the little things I've seen and been able to be a part of that have truly contributed to my overall growth.

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.