

PREACH THE GOSPEL
IF NECESSARY USE WORDS

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FrancisCorps
Young Adult Franciscan Volunteer Service Experience



WHY DONORS GIVE TO FRANCISCORPS

One of the favorite sayings at FrancisCorps is: Thank You Benefactors! It goes all the way back to our founding by Brother Jim Moore who wanted to ingrain in the volunteers a sense of gratitude for everything that they had. All of it food, shelter, gas for the car and the occasional ice-cream treat at the local Syracuse Gannon’s was all the gift of our benefactors. This same spirit of gratitude continues today.

So why do people donate to FrancisCorps? What do they get out of it?

It depends on the person. For example one of our most faithful supports have been Dan and Cindy Accordino, who along with several gracious families in the Syracuse area have been very generous to our volunteers. This past July the Accordinos hosted an “end-of-the-year” BBQ for our volunteers. It was a great occasion since our Costa Rica

volunteers were here with us as well and so the whole group of FrancisCorps 14 was present. The Accordinos surprised us all with not only hosting the event but they honored our founder Brother Jim Moore with a generous donation to celebrate the 15th anniversary of FrancisCorps.

When asked why they support FrancisCorps the Accordinos pointed to the volunteers themselves. Though the work of the volunteers is great, many other charities also do good work. What is unique about FrancisCorps is what happens to the volunteers themselves. The Accordinos recounted how they really appreciated meeting the volunteers at their commissioning in August and at various moments throughout the year and then finally seeing how they grew as more mature Christian men and women by the end of the year.



SEE WHAT WE DO



JOSSELIN GARIBO

- Home:** Dallas, TX
- Interests:** Dancing, painting, photography and intramural sports
- Studies:** University of Texas at Dallas- Psychology and Child Learning and Development
- Service:** Mentoring refugee children at Northside Catholic Youth Organization in Syracuse, NY

There is one little girl who came to the states about the same time that I moved to Syracuse and at the beginning of the program she knew almost no English. A conversation between the two of us was a game of charades. Even though she didn't know the language or even knew me, right away she would hug me and come in with a big smile when she came in the classroom. It was amazing to know that you could connect with someone without actually speaking the same language. It is hard working with children when they do not listen and are running around and sometimes it feels like it's way too much. But at the end of the day the bad things are instantly washed away when one of the kids gives you a hug or a loving smile. It is not in the easy things that you find your strength but in the rough and bumpy rides. Knowing that these children and their family had to flee from their country has made me thank God even more about the life that I have.



REAGAN MILLS

- Home:** Swampscott, MA
- Interests:** Cooking and the "slow-food" movement, traveling, running
- Studies:** The Catholic University of America- English and Italian Studies
- Service:** Feeding the hungry at Assumption Food Pantry in Syracuse, NY

It was Teresa's first time at the pantry. She whispered that we were the only pantry open on Fridays. I asked if it was an emergency situation, and all she could do was nod in reply as her eyes filled with tears. She explained about her family's troubles and how she is the main caregiver for her step-daughter who has severe medical disabilities. She showed me pictures of her daughter, and explained that she hadn't been to a pantry in about ten years, but given the circumstances of her marriage and her daughter's medical situation, she had to swallow her pride and ask for help. In listening to Teresa, I clearly saw beauty, grace, humility, and love--she is caring for a daughter who is not technically hers, but she phrased it so beautifully: "I need her and she needs me", to which I responded "She's lucky to have a mother like you" "No, I'm lucky to be her mother." Being able to help someone who so clearly needed it, makes my job worthwhile.





MAIREAD RAUCH

- Home:** Fulton, NY
- Interests:** Plants, religion and the history of Central New York
- Studies:** Syracuse University-Environmental Resources and Forest Engineering
- Service:** Serving the dying at Francis House in Syracuse, NY

After he'd settled in and his family had gone home, "Al" found himself a bit lonely. So, the caregivers asked me to play cards with him. I'm pretty terrible at card games, but "Al" helped me along and as we played, he told me about his family and his life. Eventually, he set the cards aside and just started talking, saying that he was the luckiest guy in the world. It didn't matter that he was dying. He saw the gifts God had given him and he was grateful. He died a few days later. I consider it a privilege that I got to spend that time with him. "Al" and others like him have taught me and continue to teach me about what it is to be truly present to another. With all the distractions and deadlines that we live with, I thank God for leading me to FrancisCorps and letting me experience a true ministry of presence.



CASSIE SCHEMSEL

- Home:** Maria Stein, OH
- Interests:** Singing, saxophone and games
- Studies:** University of Dayton: Religious Studies
- Service:** Mentoring teen moms and children at Posada de Belén in Alajuela, Costa Rica

Every day that I walk into this home for teen moms, I feel blessed to see God all around me. I'm often humbled by the things that the girls teach me; yet there is one particular lesson that sticks out to me in this moment. We have this young girl, Angie, who is one of the most compassionate people that I have met and she is only two. When she sees another kid crying, she never fails to comfort them. She pats their back, rubs their head or holds their hand. If someone has been pushed or hit or had their toy taken away, Angie defends them or gives them her toy. I learned from a little two year old, that compassion isn't just a buzz word or something we talk about only on Sundays. The capacity to love and comfort is a natural part of all of us.





SEE WHAT WE DO



LAUREN MELAUGH

- Home:** Medfield, MA
- Interests:** Running and painting
- Studies:** Stonehill College: International Studies , Art History and Business
- Service:** Mentoring Teen Moms and children at Posada de Belén in Alajuela, Costa Rica

Sabrina is a curious and charismatic three-year-old girl. Each day proves to be a little more interesting with Sabrina’s clever antics, especially when she pretends that she suddenly needs to sleep each time we are leaving the playground just so that she can enjoy more time in the sun. This typically thirty second walk back to the classroom turns into a twenty minute adventure as she becomes distracted by jumping on the crinkled leaves and starting conversations with all who pass by her. While she makes each day more challenging, each day is filled with many more laughs, goodbye hugs, and hilarious stories to share with my community thanks to Sabrina. Her thoughtful and playful personality makes it impossible to be angry with her, just as God’s love for us is powerful and unwavering. The unconditional love of God is intangible and incomprehensible, but I am lucky to see it every day in Sabrina’s face.



TAYLOR SHORTEN

- Home:** Prospect, KY
- Interests:** Ballroom dancing, music, travelling
- Studies:** Boston College- Psychology
- Service:** Mentoring youth at Niño con Cariño in Alajuela, Costa Rica

Carolina is a strong and unapologetic leader among the girls at my placement site, Al Niño con Cariño. And she did not like me from the minute I began my work there. In our first interaction, she held her scowl in my direction until she was sure I received her message. But God made her vulnerable to me for just a moment and it changed everything. Sick and vomiting, I took up the role as her caretaker. She didn’t say a word until I kissed her cheek before leaving and she let slip a quiet “Gracias”. She let me in after that day, telling me of her abusive boyfriend and violent past, revealing her need for healing. She broke my heart, but also put it back together with her trust. God provides us with opportunities and the free will to make use of them. They don’t always come in the easiest or most obvious forms, but they are always there if you look for them.





TAYLOR MARTIN

- Home:** Zionsville, IN
- Interests:** Dancing, running, board games and corny jokes
- Studies:** St. Louis University: Political Science and International Studies
- Service:** Supporting “at-risk” families at Rostro de María in Alajuela, Costa Rica

As part of FrancisCorps, we participate in group daily prayer. This time each day allows reflection on who we are working with and how we see Christ in the actions of all those around us. One of my favorite moments when I saw God in my work involves one of the little girls in my preschool class. Rosa is a very quiet little girl who does not speak at an audible level with adults. She will sometimes converse with her fellow students but often she puts her face in her hands and whispers when speaking. During recess on Friday, the kids were playing a game that consisted of them running back and forth between the swings and me. The little girl Rosa decided every time she ran to me, that she would give me a hug. After six hugs and being tired from all the running, she sat with me. I knew this was God’s way of showing me why I was there. Rosa is beginning to feel safe around me. Rosa is a reminder for me on why I am here in Costa Rica.



SIMON PEARSON

- 2nd year of FrancisCorps**
- Home:** Duluth, MN
- Interests:** Poetry, music, public speaking, weight-lifting
- Studies:** College of St. Scholastica : Secondary Education and English
- Service:** Supporting men with addictions at Rostro de Jesus in Alajuela, Costa Rica

In one of the therapy sessions the men were asked to reflect on the criteria by which they select role models in life. After the therapy ended, we were waiting in line for lunch. I was miles away, daydreaming about someone, something. Bringing me back to earth was a voice, one of the men behind me in line. He told me that he would like a moment with me, and we stepped aside from the line. He began, somewhat sheepishly, to ask me, “Do you know whom I consider a great role model?” “No; who?” “When I see what you’re doing, I see the type of person that I want to be—a person who gives their time and all their efforts to make the world better. I see you as a role model, Simon.” Now it was my turn to be shy. Looking back at the situation, I thank God for putting me in the position to



aid others and to offer an example—to be considered a model for behavior and life means that I am following His example as I pray to do.



SEE WHAT WE DO



GRACE KOLECZEK

- Home:** Tinley Park, IL
- Interests:** Baking, music and hanging out with friends
- Studies:** Augustana College: Religion, Spanish and Sociology
- Service:** Working with poor seniors at Santiago Crespo in Alajuela, Costa Rica

The best parts of my workday by far are the small interactions I have with my señoras each day. One of them named Biseida never fails to brighten my day with her smile. She has Alzheimer's and can be a piece of work (like most of the señoras!), but she is also one of the most loving and charismatic women in my unit. When I give her hugs and kisses I usually remind her who I am by saying, "I'm your friend Grace, and I love you with all my heart!" One day instead of saying she didn't know who I was like she usually does, she saw me and said, "I don't remember your name, but I know you're my friend and you love me with all your heart!" Interactions like this one have opened my heart and taught me that small and gentle acts of love are some of the most powerful manifestations of God.



SAM KAREFF

- Home:** Boca Raton, FL
- Interests:** Sports, photography and politics
- Studies:** Georgetown University: Science, Technology and International Affairs
- Service:** Caring for abandoned children at Manos Abiertas in Alajuela, Costa Rica

Serving people with disabilities has been one of those truly life-changing experiences. Before beginning my FrancisCorps year of service with Manos Abiertas, I had never worked in direct contact with the physically disabled. While we toured the worksite during our orientation week in Costa Rica, I remember being struck by what I so incorrectly perceived to be helplessness and sadness on the patients' faces. I recall feeling worried and inadequate for such work. As I now enter my third month of service, I am delighted at how mistaken my first impression was. The people I work with are not only some of the happiest I have encountered but also among the most beautiful. They are not afraid to manifest their happiness, surprise, anger, or fear whenever they feel so moved. I hope that I will continue learning from them over the next nine months.





CASIE JAMES

- Home:** New Orleans, LA
- Interests:** Reading, running & fantastic shower singer
- Studies:** Tulane University: Psychology, Spanish and Pre-Medicine
- Service:** Manos Abiertas home for abandoned disabled children

Working with the disabled population at Manos Abiertas has taught me many lessons thus far. One patient in particular has tugged on the strings on my heart. Her name is Darling. She cannot walk, talk, or see. She eats through a feeding tube and breaths through a tracheotomy. I had convinced myself, prior to this program, that I knew what it meant to be human and deserve treatment. Darling came incredibly close to the outskirts of my definition of a person. Yet, she was entrusted to my care. I found it hard to look her in the eyes and convince myself she did not deserve my attention. In fact, I could not. I know that she is a human being, that she has dignity, and that she deserves respect. Her well-being is in my hands, and I do my best every day to make sure her needs are met.



MICHAEL HYDE

- 2nd year of FrancisCorps**
- Home:** St. Louis, MO
- Interests:** Soccer, hiking, reading, health-care ethics and African food
- Studies:** University of Dayton- Religious Studies and Marianist Transformation
- Service:** Community liaison at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center in Syracuse, NY

A patient came to the ER complaining about back pain. Because he did not have a primary doctor I was called to help finding him find one. In the conversation that followed he informed me that he only wanted a doctor if they would prescribe him narcotics . After spending easily forty-five minutes telling him that this was not possible I was very happy when he was discharged. I clocked out and could not wait to get home. As I left I saw him across the way and thought, "Please don't recognize me!" Well he did and he proceeded to strike up another conversation with me. At first I just wanted the conversation to end, but I asked myself if I was really being Christ to this person. I decided to actively listen to what this man had to say instead of trying to zone him out and it made all the difference in the world. At the end of the conversation I told him that I would pray for him which I admit I have never



told a complete stranger. His grateful response was more than enough to reinforce my passion for serving the poor.



Congratulations to our newlywed FrancisCorps Alums: **Matt Aujero (FC 12)** and Mimi Cullari (August 10 '13 in Washington, DC), **Huy Huynh (FC 3)** and Lizzy Green (August 3 '13) **Dan Menendez (FC 7)** and Chris Primiano (Oct 11 '13 in Beverly, MA)

Blessings on **Mike Lamanna, SJ (FC 12)** who took perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience into the Society of Jesus and is now studying philosophy at Loyola Chicago. Mike is finding consolation in the fact that Ignatius, as an adult, sat in Latin class with a bunch of school children, because his Latin wasn't good enough to become a priest!

Nathan Drahms (FC 9) and his spouse Angela are expecting baby #2 in April. In a bit of belated he also joined the Religious Studies Department at McQuaid Jesuit High School and started teaching theology last year.

Matt Bizarro (FC 2) and his spouse Jenn celebrated their 1 year anniversary and the baptism of their son Francis Leo in November.

Jordan Differding (FC 12) has moved on from his work as Assistant Director of FrancisCorps and is now studying Speech and Language Pathology at Loyola University, MD and is housemates with Jelly Snyder (FC 12) who is working on her PsyD also at Loyola Maryland.

Becca Burke (FC 9) is trying her hand in the for-profit world after six years in non-profit organizations. She is now working in Inventory Management at Gap, Inc. and is excited to get involved in the Gap, Inc Foundation soon and take advantage of their many volunteer and social service opportunities.

We remember in prayer **Jeff Sass (FC 14)** who passed away in a car accident on August 26, 2013 just

after returning home to Minnesota after completing his year with FrancisCorps.

After several years in L'Arche, **Amy Aubrecht (FC 12)** has embarked on a theological adventure: the art of earning a Masters of Divinity! She is currently in her first year of studies at Boston University, where the vibrant, supportive community has been a great fit. Daily, she confronts and explores many of the themes and experiences she was first exposed to in FrancisCorps.

Nicole Bonk (FC 6) and Jason have been happily watching their little guy grow, Benjamin will be 1 this December and are expecting another May 2014.

Ed Smith (FC 9 & X) is practicing Estate Planning & Real Estate Law in Naples, Florida. He is happy to have just shared his one-year wedding anniversary with his wife, Mandy. If any FrancisCorps affiliates find themselves in sunny, southwest Florida, please don't hesitate to contact Ed for some "Franciscan Hospitality!"

Sarah King-Politano (FC X+1) graduated from Harvard Divinity School with a Master of Divinity this past May 2013. She and her husband Tim are currently living in Madison WI and is in the midst of a yearlong Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Residency where I am training to become a hospital or hospice chaplain.

Another L'Arche person is **Molly LeBlanc-Medeiros (FC 12)** who has been at L'Arche Irenicon in Massachusetts ever since leaving FrancisCorps. This is her second year as Head of House at Gandhi and is on a team running Exploratory Retreats for L'Arche USA.

Michelle Bernier-Brown (FC 5) and Chris welcomed baby Ryan last November.

Trevor and **Joanna Keltos Tompkins (FC 3)** welcomed Clare Rutter Tompkins on August 27, '11.



WE WISH YOU A VERY BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

VOLUNTEER INTROSPECTIVE - A Survey of Former Volunteers of the Catholic Volunteer Network

"A Survey of Former Volunteers of the Catholic Volunteer Network," is a national survey commissioned by Catholic Volunteer Network (CVN) with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The survey looked at more than 5,000 individuals in CVN

member organizations.

Full survey results were released on Friday, November 8, 2013 at the Catholic Volunteer Network's annual conference in Silver Spring, MD.

To view the results, visit:

www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org