FCV has reached 50,000 hours served!

By Pat Flicker, Program Director

For years, the Franciscan Sisters longed for a program that would offer young adults a long-term service opportunity coupled with a deep spiritual experience in the Franciscan tradition. It was Sister Clara Stang’s vision that helped develop Franciscan Community Volunteers (FCV) back in 2009. The time was right: the country was in a recession, college graduates were finding it hard to find employment, and nonprofit agencies were experiencing a higher demand for services amidst shrinking funding.

Since its start, 43 young adults have come from as far away as Nicaragua, Australia and Hawaii, and as close as Avon or St. Cloud! To date, the Franciscan Community Volunteers program (FCV) has served over 50,000 hours in the St. Cloud community. Non-profit agencies such as Boys & Girls Club, St. Cloud Catholic Charities Children’s Home, Casa Guadalupe, Mid-MN Legal Aid, St. Benedicts Senior Community, LSS Immigration Services, Anna Marie’s Alliance, Hands Across the World, Place of Hope, Catholic Charities La Cruz and Bel Clare programs and more have had FCVs helping to serve the poor and those on the margins.

This is my fourth group of FCVs. I replaced Sister Clara Stang in 2013. The strong foundation she built for the program has ensured continued success. What I am constantly amazed at is the fact that most young adults come to FCV feeling like they are going to change the world and upon completion of their year realize that, while they made a difference, they have been changed forever!

Thank you, Franciscan Sisters, for continuing to share your Franciscan Spirit not only with the volunteers, but with each person, young or old, that they have served. I cannot even begin to count the number of lives touched...all because of your Franciscan hearts! May we all go out and continue to serve in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare.

Sister Annella Bieniek (the FCV praying sister) and me at lunch when I first started
Life through a new lens
Catie Tobin (2009-10)

The FCV program had an immeasurable impact on me and, some seven years on, I still often find myself thinking about those six months in snowy Minnesota. Most of all, the program opened up Franciscan spirituality to me and its very special emphasis on the poor and marginalized and living simply.

This came about by living in community with Sisters Cordy, Clara, Ange and Loretta and the opportunity this offered to reflect upon both the work I was doing at my service sites and the life I was living through a Franciscan “lens”–a way of seeing the world, and all of us in it, which I’ve held onto ever since. Along with this, I have many happy memories–of shared dinners with the volunteers and sisters, retreats at Ottertail (in the snow) and Umbria (in the sun), visits to the Motherhouse, cross country skiing attempts and general merriment.

Personal and spiritual growth
Spencer Burchart (2009-10)

Congratulations to FCV on 50,000 hours of service! It’s hard to believe that it’s going on eight years since I was a Franciscan volunteer! I often reflect on what a blessing it was to be part of the inaugural group of FCV. That year was a period of tremendous personal and spiritual growth that helped shape who I am today. The FCV pillar of service to others remains a constant in my life as I serve in my career as an Air Force dentist. I am grateful for the experiences I had at my service sites, Place of Hope and Caring Hands Dental Clinic, and for the love and support shown by the sisters and my fellow volunteers. May God continue to bless the ministry of the Franciscan Community Volunteers and all of those who help support it!
When I think back about my time as a Franciscan Community Volunteer, what I remember the most are the people. I’ve never met another group as kind, selfless, welcoming and committed to social justice than the Franciscan Sisters. Five years later, I know I’m still part of the community and am welcomed back with open arms anytime I visit the St. Cloud area. I also made lifelong friends with fellow volunteers in the program. I frequently see two of the volunteers who served with me in the program, and I’m so grateful to have them in my life. For the past three years, I’ve had the privilege of giving back to the program by serving on the advisory board.

I entered the FCV program at a very crucial point in my life. I had just graduated with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and longed to use my newly learned skills and passion to help others, specifically children. Little did I know that my year as a volunteer would allow me to learn to help someone that I never imagined helping. That someone was me.

As I progressed through the year, I realized that if I wanted to show God’s love to others, I first needed to work on finding myself. I began to learn to balance the world of self-care and how to love myself, with the help of a loving intentional community supported by Franciscan values.

Since my volunteer year, I have a lot to be grateful for. I have a wonderful husband, Andy, a beautiful son, Noah, and many friends and memories that allow me to be the best mom, wife and child of God I can be.

I continue to live out lessons that I learned during my volunteer year by continuing to work with at-risk youth as a mental health practitioner through Catholic Charities.
**Accompaniment and partnerships**

Augie Lindmark (2013-14)

I recently lived in community with a group of medical students in northern Uganda. While together, we learned social medicine—the side of medicine that addresses structural causes of disease like racism, classism, and structural violence, among others. The parallels of social medicine and my time at FCV are abundant, especially the emphasis on accompaniment and partnership. Wherever we work and play, we always do so in some sort of community. FCV gave me a lens through which to seek such communities, and more often than not, they tend to be full of people moving together toward justice, much like the sisters of Little Falls.

**Encounters**

Kristen Wall (2013-14, 14-15)

FCV provided invaluable stretching of my imagination about ministry, preparing me to enter seminary for continued formation to become a Lutheran pastor. Encounters with Catholic sisters and volunteers, documented and undocumented immigrants and their children have changed the way that I read both theological documents and the newspaper and engage new local contexts here in Pennsylvania. I give thanks to God for the many models of prayerful discipleship, faithful service, and respectful community building that shaped me as a Franciscan Community Volunteer!
**FCV 2015-2016**

FCV: Front - Sister Rose Mae Rausch, Sister Karen Niedzielski, Pat Flicker; Back - Rebecca Ferrera, Isaac Vacheresse, Kyle Lamb, Sister Michelle L’Allier

**Gratitude**

**Hannah Schuleberg (2014-15)**

I am not sure how to put into words just how much being an FCV has meant to me. Moving from California to Minnesota was a huge leap of faith, and I am so grateful for God’s guidance in leading me to FCV.

I was not sure what to expect when I chose to begin this new chapter, but I was welcomed with open arms and was excited to see where I would be volunteering. Anna Marie’s Alliance was, and still is, a place that I greatly cherish. Working alongside wonderful staff and other volunteers made being in the Children’s program that much more rewarding. Although difficult at times, the experience I gained there has been invaluable for me. I was exposed to a world and terrible circumstances that I had not been exposed to before, but also to amazing stories of survival and the perseverance of the human spirit.

After my volunteering came to an end, I was fortunate enough to continue working at Anna Marie’s. Being able to stay connected with FCV was such a blessing, and I have built life-long relationships with these people as a result. The sisters and Pat have been such a huge support system, and I definitely can say that I would not be the same person I am today without being an FCV. I feel honored to be part of a community that has done so much for so many. I am forever grateful to have been given the opportunity to learn and grow alongside these wonderful women.

**Becoming more aware**

**John-Caleb Vacheresse (2016-17)**

Life as an FCV at the Boys & Girls Club-Southside is not always easy. Each day is different, and as a youth mentor I have had to learn patience and realize that there are good days and bad days.

When I first began my time at the club, I would get frustrated and it was easy to lose my temper and get angry at the youth. As time has gone on, I have realized that every young person here at the club has a story.

I am much more compassionate and less judgmental. The children of today have a lot going on in their lives. This will partially shape their adult lives and how they live. I have realized the importance of the Boys & Girls Club as a great place to let “kids be kids.” To laugh and play! Other areas of their lives may be out of control, but they are safe and cared about at the club!

The staff at the club is so supportive. Together, the youth and staff are like a family. I have been transformed by my year thus far, and when I see people doing something different than expected, I now find myself wondering what their story is.

“Each year I am amazed at how the FCVs are so community minded. We average over 185 youth each day, and the work we do is not always easy. FCVs understand that they are a part of this community and help build and create a culture of caring with our members.” - Christine Kustelski, director of the Boys & Girls Club-Southside
Franciscan Community Volunteers is based on three pillars: service, community living and Franciscan spirituality. Volunteers make a year-long commitment to work full time in local nonprofit agencies that serve the needs of those who are poor and marginalized while accepting the challenge of living simply and in accordance with Gospel values.

Community!
Philip and Lisa Lomneth (2012-13)

We are grateful for the experience of being Franciscan Community Volunteers and all the ways it has impacted our lives. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of FCV is community, both with the sisters and our fellow volunteers. We learned so much in the 11 months we were together through challenges, joyful celebrations and the everyday life in between. It was a blessing to share a year such as FCV with this group.

The sisters we lived with enriched our lives deeply in their sharing in community and home with us. Our lives were touched by their experiences and the ways they sought to form relationships with us. The sisters remain dear to our hearts as do our community members we shared the year with.

The service sites we worked at challenged us, helped us grow and allowed us to put into practice what we hear in the Gospels each week at Mass. In our daily lives together and in our work, we seek to put into practice the many ways we were formed in FCV. One way we've done this is through our involvement in the Catholic Worker House, here in South Bend, Indiana. We seek community at the Catholic Worker and to join our lives with the people we meet there. Being a part of the Catholic Worker has enriched our lives deeply. Having lived in community inspires us to continually seek to form community, be in community and to love our community.