It was cold and rainy. The wind blew the tent away almost as soon as it was set up in front of the entrance. And, in spite of all of that, the 8th Annual Taste of St. Cloud was a huge success.

I am not sure if people came and just stayed because of the weather, but the atmosphere this year seemed to be more of a family party than a fundraiser. Tables were pushed together and you could hear laughter throughout the Coyote Moon Grille as stories were told and people caught up on each others’ lives. Each year I am amazed at the support of the community for the sisters and the ministry that was and continues to be.

I want to take a moment to say thank you to Coyote Moon Grille owners Mike and Mar Dols, manager Adam Meyer and event coordinator Andrea Tharp. You have blessed the Franciscan Community Volunteers Program with eight —yes eight—AMAZING Tastes of St. Cloud! You have opened your hearts and your facility to our program each year and have helped make it the success it is today.

You may have heard that the Taste is moving—a good problem to have, as we have outgrown the space we are in.

The Kelly Inn of downtown St. Cloud has generously opened its doors to us for next year—with seating for up to 800 and a generous parking area. Thank you, Charlie Spanier. We look forward to many wonderful Tastes of St. Cloud at the Kelly Inn!

Highlights of the 2017 Taste of St. Cloud

- 16 participating restaurants
- 520 tickets sold
- 21 corporate sponsors
- 74 baskets for our silent auction
- 56 volunteers helped at the Taste

QUILT RAFFLE WINNER:

The gorgeous handmade butterfly quilt made by Sister Mary was won by JoAnn Dahl.
As this year comes to a close and I reflect on the past 10 months, I am startled by what stands out most to me: community. I signed up for the FCV program because I wanted to make use of my newly minted Spanish degree and live in an intentional community. The Spanish part worked out great—I’ve probably helped over 100 Hispanics get health insurance through my service site, Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid. The spiritual part of the program has been wonderful as well, helping to stretch my Protestant mind and let me come to appreciate the beauty of Catholicism. But what has surprised me most is how much the community aspect has meant to me here. I am an introvert, and all through college thought of myself as a loner who didn’t need people to keep myself amused and content. During this past year, however, I have seen so many occasions where two, three, four, five + have been better than one. This FCV group has talked me into doing many things that would have either not occurred to me on my own or would have been impossible without others.

Our group activities have been anything from biking to Lake George and playing Ultimate Frisbee (and learning just how out of shape we all were after a sedentary winter) to impromptu jam sessions instigated by Isaac where I had fun learning to play a washtub bass. Birthday card planning sessions for Pat and the sisters have made me come to appreciate how nice it is to combine talents with others—my ideas would go nowhere without Jenny’s artistic abilities. Witnessing the general excitement of the ice cream truck driving down our street made me remember how many little joys I’ve given up in the name of practicality. JC’s talent for grilling ribs has let me sample a new culinary style I would not have dared to attempt on my own. Jenny’s sixth sense for excellent rummage sales and thrift shopping has landed me several nice dresses and useful items at an affordable cost, and Ann’s ability to laugh at herself has made me more relaxed about being silly. Without this community that persistently gave me opportunities to venture beyond the house and my service site, I would have had a much more barren experience.

The sisters, too, have made the place alive and a home, not just five young adults sharing a house. Even though we volunteers don’t often share recreational activities with them, their mere presence grounds us. When the sisters are gone, we lose some of our focus and direction (and almost forget to wash the dinner dishes). The house becomes not just physically emptier, but also emotionally emptier.

I have realized during my time here that I don’t want to be alone. I want to be in community; I want to have people who can continually remind me to drag myself out of my shell. And not just that, but I have realized that I now get lonely when no one is home. I find myself no longer content with television, my standard end-of-day go-to. Now I want to hang out and be with the volunteers, the sisters, Pat and Laura.

I can only surmise that God knew this would happen, which is why He had granted me a great gift: Pat invited me to return to the program next year, and I have accepted. I will be with a new group of volunteers with a completely different dynamic, but it will be a community chosen and guided by God, and I look forward to it.

Blessings abound from community
Anna Taylor, FCV

Check us out on Facebook! Visit us on the web! www.fcvonline.org
The gift of a Franciscan worldview
Isaac Vacheresse, FCV

When I arrived at the Welcoming House in January of 2016, I was on guard for whatever would come up against my way of thinking and believing. At that time I was discerning the priesthood, and trying to “find” God’s will for my life. I was very caught up in structured forms of prayer. I believed God was watching over me and judging my thoughts and desires, even the good ones, and I felt that I had to ignore what I wanted and sacrifice all for His will. This would be the only way to please God and live in His grace.

Looking back now, the only time that I was silent and listening was when I was waiting for God to confirm or deny my vocation to the priesthood. Once I let go of being in the state of constant “discernment,” I began to live as I felt called to. I became more open to listening to God and trusting the interior inspirations and guidance I felt since I wasn’t following a set path anymore. This created the opportunity to take risks and live with uncertainty, instead of feeling confined and secure in a certain way of thinking and acting.

With time I learned that God is the best communicator we can ever know. He speaks intimately with each person and is a constant voice in our lives. As I have broadened my perspective on vocation, I have become aware that I am a co-creator in my vocation, and that I’m living it every moment. I have discovered that God respects me and the paths I walk.

He loves me into existence. As Richard Rohr says, “God loves THAT you are, not WHAT you are.” This freed me from the constricting walls of my own mind and I opened myself for the Christ-like ability of the sisters and Pat to meet each individual where they are in their life journey, but not leave them there. I have integrated the Franciscan worldview into my daily life, which says that everything belongs, and that the present moment is where we encounter God.

This gift of the present moment, allows us to live each small act and interaction with great love, because we are able to give full attention to the people or tasks within it. This has, and still is, transforming my life every day. The people and children I have worked with throughout my time with FCV hold a place in my heart that will be carried into eternity. The volunteers I have had the pleasure of knowing have influenced me to become the best version of myself, and I would not trade our time together for anything in the world. The Franciscan Sisters’ spirit and simple way of living has inspired me to go deeper and learn more about faith as a way of life.

Thank you for all of your prayers during my time here; please keep them coming as I journey back to Alabama to attend school this summer!
Learning and growing
John-Caleb Vacheresse, FCV

What led me to join FCV? The promise and hope for change in my life. It had become empty, stale, meaningless, boring and pretty darn depressing. My talents were being utterly ignored and wasted; sobriety was a rarity and real joy was often short lived.

Living on my own was an excellent life-changing experience. However, I was so self-focused that I forgot how to truly live for others. My brother joined FCV about nine months before I did. It didn’t really cross my mind until the last couple of months into his year that I also needed a radical life change. With little over a month left to his experience, I really began to commit to the idea of leaving everyone and everything behind and trying something new. It wasn’t an easy process to convince my mind that this was definitely for the better, but I realized there was very little in my life bringing me any kind of real joy or peace.

So I left, I came to FCV and did something I’ve never done before. I took a leap of faith and trusted a God that at the time I didn’t deeply believe in. I trusted a plan that was not my own and I trusted people whom I had never met until coming to Minnesota. I have never been so happy with a decision in my life. I came to find peace, joy, patience, strength; and what I’ve received alongside those things is so much deeper than words can accurately describe.

I am eternally grateful that I chose to work at the Boys and Girls Club. I am even more grateful for the staff that I’ve gotten to work alongside of. Even though my love for my coworkers is strong, I am the most grateful for the children at the club. They have taught me life lessons I never expected to learn. They make me incredibly happy. Even when things are going wrong with the kids, I’m still happy to be there. It gives me a chance to have a deeper, more meaningful interaction with a child whom I might not normally get to interact with. All in all, I’m the most grateful not for the place, but for each and every human being I get to work with and for in that place.

Something I’d be okay bragging about a little bit is the kids that joined my art class. Some joined solely for the ice cream party that they heard I was going to throw at the end of it. But all of them stuck out for an 11-week program and made remarkable progress. As I taught them how to form and sculpt, I also taught them about acceptance. They ended up teaching me so much as well, mostly to do with patience and understanding. Near the end of the class the insults or jabs at each other’s work stopped and excitement and praise for the differences in their art flourished. It was absolutely beautiful. Their artwork has been included in the Boys & Girls Club’s art exhibit at the Paramount Theater, so not too shabby if I do say so myself.

At the end of the day it’s very clear what I’ll take with me from this powerful and moving life experience: love. The love of people, art, life, creation, nature, family, friends, co-workers and everything else. I didn’t have a real understanding of the true power of love before coming here. Now I’ve tasted and lived in it and cannot go back to how things were before. The FCV program, through its community style living, Franciscan values and absolutely amazing people involved in it, has shaped my view of how to really love, more than I could have ever dreamed of.

It’s cheesy and it’s cliché, but I know for a fact that when I leave I’ll use the gift of love to work on making the world a better place. One person at a time if I have to. Really though, if you want real lasting success that’s how it should be done. Giving each and every person the care, respect, truth and love that they deserve. With how quickly this program has zoomed by, I’ve learned one very powerful lesson: life is constantly moving forward, it doesn’t slow down for us, it doesn’t pause to let us soak it in, and it simply gives us what we get until our time is done. None of us live forever. So the question I now ask myself daily is: Why not use the time we do have to make this place better for all?
Openness to God and others

Jenny Wonsever, FCV

At the beginning of the year, each of the volunteers chose a word to guide our year. I chose “openness” and I prayed to learn how to be open to God. I never expected all the ways God would take my prayer and bring openness into multiple aspects of my life—or how much courage that would require of me.

This year has been overflowing with self-growth. Coming here, I had hoped to do good in the community and make a small difference in people’s lives. I hoped for personal growth but I was skeptical about God’s ability to change me. I knew He could use me to do good, but I wasn’t sure He could fix the mess I had made in my personal life.

Now I realize that I really underestimated God’s ability to work in my life. No mess is too large for God. I’ve had a tremendous opportunity this year to get in touch with myself. God has been helping me move from a place of self-disdain to a place of self-acceptance. Through God, I’ve found courage and strength to start accepting myself. I am learning to accept my emotions as they come, to let go of past mistakes, and to change the lens through which I see myself.

Learning to accept myself where I’m at in my personal journey has helped me to be gentle with and accepting of others that I meet. It is very easy to judge others. “They just need to do X, Y and Z, then they’ll get out of this situation.” We do not often realize that pain or trauma can change the brain’s wiring and functionality. People coming from a highly traumatic experience might lack the mental capacity to think logically in the present moment. They might be mentally unable to do X, Y and Z.

Working at Anna Marie’s Alliance, I have encountered many women and children that have suffered tremendous trauma. Some women can get right back up on their feet and can do everything they need to succeed on their own. Many women, however, deeply struggle from the wounds of domestic violence. These women need more support and assistance to be successful. They tend to make more mistakes and to be more frustrating to work with. What they need is simple: they need to be loved. They need a love that is patient, kind and forgiving. I often struggle with the tendency to be judgmental in my work with the children at Anna Marie’s Alliance. Being ignored, yelled at, and even sometimes hit by the children is frustrating. It’s easy to forget what they’ve experienced and to just deem them bad children. God has helped me be open and empathetic to the struggles of others. I am constantly reminding myself that these children are carrying many wounds, just as I carry many wounds. I make the conscious choice to love them anyway, just as Jesus loves us despite our flaws and failings. Whenever we find ourselves drawn into quick judgments, we each have a simple choice: we can make the easy assumption that others aren’t working hard enough or we can recognize that people can be anywhere in their personal journey and choose to be gentle, loving and forgiving when they make mistakes.

God and I are the only ones who can fully understand the struggles and wounds that I carry. We can never know the struggles of the people who enter our lives. Throughout this year, I have learned to love everyone wherever they are at in their personal journeys. My hope for myself and for everyone is that we can strive to love as Jesus loves: to always forgive and never judge.

I could never have learned this lesson without the love and support of the FCV community. Each of my fellow volunteers have inspired me to grow. JC’s bravery to be vulnerable during our first Sharing from the Heart gave me the courage to share my own vulnerabilities with the group and others. Ann’s passion for social justice inspires me to participate in causes that are close to my heart. Isaac’s beautiful faith helped me to see a new side of God and to grow closer to Him. Anna has been my rock. She helps to ground me when I’ve gotten too lost in my head. I know I can trust her to tell it to me as it is. Each of the sisters at the Welcoming House have brought incredible wisdom and beautiful examples of love to my life. Pat’s intuition has given me clarity when I’m lost in a mess of emotions. Without each and every one of them, I could never have come to see the world in such a vastly new way. And I want to thank all of you, sisters, associates, alum and friends for your prayers. God has blessed us all with amazing growth.
Moments of gratitude
Laura Shrode, FCV Program Assistant

“We are grateful for the ongoing process of becoming who we are, for the seasons within, for the great adventure of life that challenges and comforts us at one and the same time. We are grateful for the messengers of God—people, events, written or spoken words—that came to us at just the right moment and helped us to grow.”

-Selection from Prayer of Gratitude by Joyce Rupp

I find Joyce Rupp is often able to beautifully articulate what I am thinking and feeling, and I feel that this prayer is a wonderful summary of my year here. As I reflect on this year with FCV, one word comes to my mind and heart immediately: gratitude. So much gratitude!

This year I am grateful for:

- The chance to reach out to young adults all over the country, sharing with them the beauty and challenges of a volunteer year, listening to their stories and helping them discern whether a year with FCV would be a good fit for them.
- The opportunity to accompany five reflective, inquisitive, faith-filled, humorous young adults as they learned more about themselves and how God is calling them to live a life of service.
- The time for myself to grow in self-awareness of my gifts and areas that still need more nourishment.

Joining the volunteers for our Thursday night Sharing from the Heart reflections was a part of the “ongoing process of becoming who we are” that I truly appreciated. Hearing the reflections of the volunteers was one of the many ways I experienced hearing “the messengers of God” this year.

My life has been filled with moments of gratitude and growth this year, working alongside Pat, the volunteers, the Franciscan sisters and all of the FCV family. It is with a heart full of mixed emotions that I share I will be stepping away from my position as FCV program assistant this July and will be entering more fully into chaplain ministry in a hospital setting. Thank you for journeying with me this year. I look forward to staying connected to this program and to the FCV family in a different role in the future. Please know of my continued support and prayers, and please keep my ministry in your prayers as well! Thank you.

TASTE OF ST. CLOUD
God is ever-present
Ann Anosike, FCV

When Pat proposed the Children’s Home, a mental health facility, as a service site for me I did not want to do it, primarily because I did not think I was qualified to work with children who suffer from depression, anxiety, cognitive delays and/or hallucinations. While I still cannot say that I am qualified to work with this demographic, I can tell you that I am more adept in relationship building because of my experience at the Children’s Home.

Over the course of my time in Minnesota, I was surprised by the unsuspecting moments when it would hit me that I was really here. I was really experiencing this joy, this sorrow, this growth. I was here, in each moment, experiencing great abundance. When I decided to do a year of service in Minnesota, I came with a great hope that I would find much clarity about the direction for my life and an even greater hope that I would fall deeper in love with Christ. At various moments throughout the year, I have been stopped by the humbling knowledge that I was, in that moment, receiving gifts I had asked for plus those I had not even known to seek.

At the Children’s Home, I encountered the suffering Christ. There, I met kids with psychological trauma from being forced to grow up too quickly. One of my girls once tried to express to me what depression is like for her. She explained that depression is the insidious way negative thoughts and feelings can make her believe that she is hopeless and has no control over anything in her life despite what physical evidence may present. She sometimes becomes so despondent that she’d begin to idealize suicide. Additionally, while depression is a mental illness, it is often accompanied by the feeling of being physically over-burdened, as if being weighed down by a ton of bricks. I am told it is painful, exhausting and it can make simple tasks such as brushing one’s teeth a great feat. When the kids are having a hard time conquering their depression on a particular day, they would often spend most of their time in bed unable to do anything else. Depression is not just sadness that a patient can just stop feeling (a facile response that people sometimes give which can further isolate the patient). It is a great cloud of sorrow that follows the patient around and can be debilitating. Sometimes it is triggered by past trauma, and other times it can creep up without warning. The kids often questioned why they had to be the ones to go through such hardships, and almost none of them believed they deserved life or love.

Hearing stories of great abuse and neglect can sometimes leave me wondering about God’s presence in their lives as well. However, I also see such great resilience and perseverance within the kids. While the kids cannot see or even articulate these gifts in themselves, I have come to learn that God is ever-present, good and generous no matter how hidden. These kids have challenged me to meet my neighbors where they are even when I have nothing to add to alleviate their suffering. Serving at the Children’s Home and now the Day Treatment Program has taught me how to sit with the suffering Christ even when the silence is thick with pain and discomfort.

While I found many moments of grace in the suffering Christ at the Children’s Home, I have also consistently found the joyful Christ at the Welcoming House. Living in an intentional community encourages each individual to be his or her best self and to be a supportive and loving spirit to all. We also had our challenging moments when values collided. However, even those moments birthed an opportunity to go deeper, to love harder and stronger, and serve selflessly. This year of service has been a culmination of various things: a strong desire to do God’s will, a heart of service and many people who said “yes” including the volunteers, the Franciscan Sisters we live with and those who pray for us, the service sites we work at, our couple companions and our families. This year has taught me what my friend, Alex, once proclaimed. “When it gets hard, God is in that. When it’s beautiful, God is behind that.”
You can support FCV
- Partner with us financially—your dollars go a long way in supporting the poor and marginalized.
- Check us out on the internet... Let other people know about our program by liking, sharing and commenting on our Facebook and blog posts!

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.

Looking ahead
June 23  Last day at service sites
June 24  Big clean at the house
          9 am to 1 pm
          Anyone want to help?
June 25-28  Closing retreat—please keep us in prayer!
June 29  The next adventure begins for this FCV group
Aug 14  New FCV start!!
Aug 15-20  Orientation
Aug 21  FCV Commissioning Mass

SAVE THE DATE: 5-7-2018
Taste of St. Cloud at the Kelly Inn

Green tip
Did you know you can receive this newsletter electronically?
If you would like to save some trees, go to www.fcvonline.org.
On the right hand side of the homepage, you can enter your name and e-mail address to receive our newsletter electronically instead of through the mail.