

Over the past few weeks, Sister Dorothy and I have gotten into the routine of saying prayers together in the evening. I have learned to navigate my way through the various parts of the prayer book, and the routine has become a relaxing way to end the day. On one particular evening, I found myself falling into the routine, and when it came time to say the “Our Father,” I clasped my hands together as I’d been taught to pray from a young age. As I unfolded my hands, Sister Dorothy mentioned that she prays the “Our Father” with her hands open, whether raised in church or laying on her lap in private prayer. It’s a way to show that you are open to giving and receiving God’s love rather than holding onto it too tight. Ever since that evening, I have made sure to pray the “Our Father” with open hands and let the rest of my being follow, and I am still amazed at how different the words feel when I let myself go.

A couple of weeks ago, I volunteered to give the reading at evening mass. During my time as a part of this community, the Sisters have been so open in sharing their faith with me and I have enjoyed listening and absorbing all that I can. But when I walked up to the microphone and looked out at all the familiar faces in the seats, I felt like it was my turn to share my faith with them and their turn to listen. When my grandparents came for a visit, my grandfather also volunteered to read at mass. He has been giving readings for over 40 years now, and later on during his visit, he told me that proclaiming the gospel is more than just about reading the words. You need to be able to put yourself in the perspective of the person who wrote it and speak in a way that reflects their intended meaning.

There is so much more to hear when you slow down the pace, and I’ve found the same to be true with my day-to-day life at the Motherhouse and at the places where I volunteer. Each day of the week entails a different set of tasks, and just as there always seems to be a lot of work to get done, the day is equally filled with things to appreciate and enjoy. It is hard to balance those two competing impulses; I want to take time to enjoy myself, but there is enjoyment in seeing the outcome of all my hard work. There are days when I come back to the Motherhouse feeling completely exhausted, but I know that there is more work and preparation I need to do—and, of course, more of the day left to enjoy. Taking a nap helps revive my physical energy, but since my work involves emotional and spiritual energy, I’ve had to learn ways to keep my mind and spirit strong, too.

One skill I’ve acquired is learning to start fresh. If one part of my day doesn’t go as well as planned, I don’t let it weigh me down as I move onto the next part of my day. With the [Potter’s Wheel](#) youth program, I am working with different groups of children and doing different activities over the course of a single morning, so I try to face each situation with the same hope and enthusiasm. I’ve learned to seek out small victories, like the look in someone’s eyes when they finally understand something or when they are engaged in the activity. One boy in our youth program comes from an unstructured home life, and whenever he decides that he doesn’t want to do an activity, he closes himself off from everyone else. But whenever he is enthusiastic about something, his eyes and his entire face seem to smile. When I had the children do a math activity with dominoes, he and his brother ran over to get a puzzle. I lifted the puzzle onto a shelf

and said that it would be waiting for them after they finished this activity, and instead of hearing the usual complaints, the older brother began sifting through the dominoes for the pieces he needed and holding them up proudly when he found them.

At times, the youth program feels like chaos. The children have so much energy but don't want to put that energy toward anything related to school. Sometimes, I feel like our interests are at odds with each other and they are out of our control, but the kids we work with do have an underlying goodness within them and I enjoy seeing it shine through. When I was trying to do an astronomy lesson about planet facts with the children, I couldn't get them to stay focused. I called over to Haley (one of the volunteers I work with) to rescue our lesson before the kids' attention slipped any further away, and she was able to bring back the enthusiasm that I had been losing to frustration. After all, the kids just wanted to have fun, and in my future lessons, I made sure that I felt enthusiastic about the material before expecting them to feel enthusiastic about it too.

Even though the kids can act reckless at times, they also have so much compassion to give. One morning while Haley and I were doing crafts with the younger children, two of the older children came running in from outside saying that someone had to come quick -- there was an injured bird out by the playground that needed help. I followed them out into the field where everyone else was huddled in a circle, and in the middle, there was a young bird with a wounded shoulder hobbling through the grass and calling out. The kids wanted so badly to help it, and they looked to me to do something. I wish I could've helped ease their concern, but I explained that we had to leave it alone so the mother could care for it. As I walked back to the classroom and the activity that we had planned, I thought back to the previous day when the retreat master had talked about leaving yourself open to adventure and awe, and now I'd lived both.

At GROW Camp one morning, Sister Jeanne talked with the children about the importance of weeding and gave them the task of clearing the weeds from around our plants. I paired up with one of the girls who typically has a hard time staying on task, but as we worked together, she quickly became attached to her little plant. She told me that she used to have a plant named Buddy. She was sad when it died, but she said it was in Heaven, and now she dedicated herself to caring for this plant and refused to leave its side until she pulled every weed from around it. The children have shown that same kind of compassion with each other, too. One morning when a young girl tripped, one of the young boys walked up to her and said, "Here, hold my hand," and they continued on together. Later that day when another young girl came down with a fever, an older girl spoke to her in Spanish and looked after her for the rest of the afternoon.

My favorite part about teaching—and learning—is when the lessons come to life. I experienced this myself when Sister Eleanor, Sister Mary Ann, Sister Dorothy, and I went to the Museum of Labor and Industry. There was a traveling exhibit featuring the stories and work of local area nuns, and as I looked at the pictures and artifacts, I felt like I had three personal tour guides who helped me further appreciate all that I saw. I enjoyed our visit to the Steel Mill exhibit as well, but I didn't connect with it on a personal

level until two days later when I went with Sister Dorothy to the Lordstown SCOPE. There, I met a former steel mill worker who had been a pipe inspector, and the emotions he expressed (pride in his work and disillusionment at the mills closing) made me reflect back on the exhibits I'd seen even more vividly.

With my own students, I began a lesson on astronomy by asking them who likes to look at the stars. One girl said that she and her dad watch them when he goes outside to smoke, and the following week when I resumed my astronomy lesson, that same girl said that she had been teaching her dad all she'd learned about constellations. We also had the children come up with their own constellations and write a story about it, and it was so nice to have everyone—all ages and ability levels—working together at the same table on the same project. Sometimes at my writing class, the women I typically work with bring adult friends or their own children. We had a mixed-age group on the day when I had them working on a prompt about how young people spend too much time in front of the TV. Having both generations at the table made for good discussion in addition to the positions they addressed in their own writing. Another week, I had the women write to the prompt of what it means to be a good parent. As they expressed their views of parenting, you could feel the love and compassion they have for their children coming through. One woman wrote a beautiful reflection about how she has always loved her children but she hadn't always known how to care for them.

Outside of my work, I've made sure to leave time to have fun and relax. On Fridays Sister Lois and I have gotten together to watch Indians games, and between watching the game and carrying on our own side-conversations, we always find something to laugh about. The Associate Picnic gave me the opportunity to meet new people and to get to know people that I had seen around but never had the chance to talk to. The picnic began with a swimming party, and for awhile, Sister Nancy Dawson and I were the only ones in the pool. We walked back and forth across the pool and talked about our interests and places we'd traveled. Later during the picnic, everyone gathered in the dining room for an icebreaker where we had to find five things in common with someone we'd never met before. I paired up with Mary, who works in the Motherhouse health-care wing, and then with Sister Helen. Ever since that evening, I've made several visits to the Sisters who live upstairs in health care, and every visit with them is a pleasure. I feel so happy and carefree in their presence and even the small things—like when Sister Marcia claimed that the iced tea Mary gave her didn't taste like iced tea—are absolutely hilarious in the moment. When the group was working on making cards, Mary found a "Live, Laugh, Love" stamp and said that it reminded her of Sister Julia. When Sister Julia looked at it, though, she said it "wasn't in her nature," and we all laughed and shook our heads at how untrue that was.

One night, I joined Sister Lisa Marie and a group of other Sisters to watch *Of Gods and Men*. It was a wonderfully poignant film about a group of Trappist monks during the Algerian Civil War, and I especially enjoyed it because it gave me the chance to hear my familiar French, a language I'd studied for five years. A week earlier, Sister Norma had invited me to go with her to the Spanish Mass at St. Brendan's, and even though I didn't understand the Spanish, I could feel the meaning of the words as the people

around me worshipped in the language that was familiar to them. My college friend from Costa Rica would often go to church with me on Sundays during the school year, and she once told me that even though she knew all of the rituals, she just didn't know them in English. After having a similar experience with the Spanish Mass, I finally understood what she meant.

One day at my writing class, I told the women to write about what it means to be successful. I noticed that the Peruvian woman wasn't writing anything, and when I asked, she said that she didn't understand the word "success." I used Google translate to find the Spanish equivalent, and as soon as she heard that word ("prosperidad"), she had plenty of ideas to share. From my experience teaching writing and from working across language barriers, I enjoy sharing in the gift of communication and the ability to understand another person's ideas and needs. Everyone should have the opportunity to express themselves in a way that is comfortable to them, and I do my best to be a patient listener and a channel through any divides. Sister Diane, who works with Alzheimer's patients, said that even though some of the patients aren't able to speak, they communicate in other ways, sometimes very subtle. Once, she was afraid that a toothless woman she worked with was trying to bite her, when really the woman was trying to give her a kiss.