

The meaning of community

It's a word that morphs but ultimately embraces

By Emily Trefry
CVV Volunteer

The other night (our last night before moving to a new house), most of my community found themselves together in the "moon and stars" room. Each year, the two communities switch houses where they live midway into the year. As we gathered spontaneously this last night, we reflected back to one of our first nights together in August, where we sat in the very same place.

A place that seemed new and unknown, amongst people we just met. Back then, we were still getting to know each other. We played a game called "Two Minutes in the Hot Seat," where everyone has two minutes to ask one person any question. The only catch is that if the person doesn't want to answer a specific question, perhaps because it is too uncomfortable, she can fire it back at the asker, who must answer it.

As we sit in the same spot over five months later, questions like "what's your most embarrassing story?" or "who was your first kiss?" are no longer on the tip of our tongues. Instead, someone suggested that we make each person talk about what would make them most uncomfortable. This suggestion really made me consider where we are as a community.

As a community, halfway through our time in CVV, I can say that we are so comfortable with each other that we aren't afraid to be *uncomfortable*. In fact, sometimes we even seek it. I think about all the times we sat around the kitchen table in WoHo (what we affectionately called our first home) airing out our differences with each other,

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”



Emily (facing at left) with her community at Mount St. Vincent's

with church teaching, with future plans and other topics we would have avoided just a few months ago. We aren't afraid to be vulnerable, to be open and to share with one another—the good, the bad, the exhausting and the energizing.

Recently, everyone in my community had the opportunity to return to wherever they came from, the places they called home. I think we would all agree that being able to see family and friends was amazing and necessary.

However, there was something missing. In going back to places we once called home, we found ourselves simply scratching the surface in our discussion and sharing. We were told of the great, selfless things we were doing and asked about what we would be doing next year.

Upon hearing these reactions, I began to crave my community—the ones who understand the confusion involved in future plans, the ones who grapple with what it means to be a volunteer and how good intentions aren't really selfless or necessarily good at all.

Looking back, I cannot define the point in which strangers became family, or some doors and walls became a home. All I know is that it happened. I can

recognize that when I return to CoHo (our new home) each night after an exhausting day at work, I seek my community. I seek out the ones who will ask me the hard questions and share in my experiences. I miss them when I'm not home and the quiet of an empty house is at times eerie. When I refer to "going home" I am able to recognize that it is not a place I'm going to, but a community—one that loves together, questions together, shares, laughs and occasionally cries together. 🙏

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Ultimately the heart leads home

By Caitlin Porter
CVV Volunteer

Home is where the heart is: it's the cliché used to reassure people that no matter where they live, near or far, they can create a home.

For 22 years, my parents have lived in the same house in Audubon, NJ. This home has laughed and cried with us throughout the years. Belonging to the matriarch of the family, it was the center of many family gatherings; but as all the kids grew up and created their own lives and families, the get-togethers shifted to their homes. It was the matriarch of homes that all too soon passed its traditions onto its children. It was my home.

Moving from New Jersey to Washington D.C. for my new college home was an easy transition for me. It was a city I had fallen in love with when I was sixteen years old and I had stability. I had a roof over my head, money in my bank account, a supportive family and I was receiving an education.

My decision to move far away from my family and friends was a surprise to me, but my desire to serve those who are poor in a larger capacity led me to Denver. I



Refugees at Lutheran Family Services with Caitlin.

packed my suitcase with a few essential items, my values and my knowledge.

I knew that when I arrived in the Mile High City I would be working with refugees and asylees at Lutheran Family Services.

I didn't know how broken their stories would be. The refugees I work with every day have different yet similar stories. The places they come from vary, but the underlying reason they had to leave their homes, their families, their cultures is the same: persecution.

Transitioning from place

“Home expands beyond physical space. It is found within.”

to place has been easy for me but the refugees struggle. While they are living in safer environments, cultural and economic barriers create difficulties. Constantly worrying about family members still in violence-torn areas and starting over in America plague our clients.

With these concerns flooding their minds, it's difficult to feel stable, to feel at peace and to feel at home. Stability is essential when people think they are creating a home; it is necessary to remember that a home expands beyond a physical space. It is found within.

This is where the Lord plays his role. God looks different for my clients at LFS, but it is God to whom they must offer their worries.

A particular example came when a client was discussing how hard it has been transitioning to life in America, that life in Africa was almost easier. Economically it had been difficult because he had not been able to work because of a medical condition and he had a large family to care for. He said to me "I pray to God every day. It is all His work."

With that, this client received the news of a job interview. His smile was indescribable.

His smile reminded me that he was at home with himself. Home is where you are. Your mind may be elsewhere, but where you are present is where the Lord finds you and makes His home in you. 🙏

A prayer for service to mean more than case

By Jenne Wiedemeier
CVV Volunteer

"Hey! Jenne! What are you doing here?" I heard as I was sitting on the bus. I looked up from the book in my lap only to see two youths walking toward the seats next to me.

"I'm on my way to the shelter. I work at noon today," I told them, smiling that they decided to say hi.

"Well we're going there, too," they laughed, "but we're going home!"

Home. Urban Peak, for many Denver youth, equals home. Yes, it is the place where they sleep,

but I doubt the three youth who slept on the sidewalk in front of McDonald's last week would call that piece of concrete home

So what makes the shelter so special that they'd grant it the title "home"? Is it the fact that there are showers there? Laundry services are available and they can receive mail? Or maybe the three meals that are served each day ... do they help make the shelter home? I'd venture to say that these material qualities are not the reason.

To me, home encompasses more than just the

location in which a person sleeps. Having relocated states in August (and also recently switching houses at CVV), I have come to realize that my concept of home revolves much more around feelings of comfort and belonging than simply the presence of a bathroom and a living room.

At home, I feel accepted. I feel safe and I feel valued. At home, I can be myself. My laughter is welcome. My struggles are validated. I feel like I matter.

There are currently 50 young people sleeping at Urban Peak, 50 lives that

matter. Youths enter the shelter from all different places in life. Some have run away from home, some were kicked out, some get dropped off after being released from jail and some come after too many cold nights sleeping in a tent. They walk through the door hungry, tired, frustrated, heartbroken and alone. Regardless of their situation, each deserves a place to call home. My hope for the shelter is that all the young people who come here might experience similar feelings of comfort and acceptance as I do.

Creating home for those in need

By Matthew Norris
CVV Volunteer

*"Father, into your arms
I commend my spirit."*

As Jesus lay upon the cross, after being tortured, humiliated, ridiculed and punished for the sins of the world, He called upon his Father to accept His spirit into the kingdom of Heaven.

Leaving His earthly body, His soul was returning "home." Over the years, I have reflected at times on the concept of home. Though I grew up in northeast Ohio and my family still resides there, I would hardly consider it home any longer.

Within the last six years I have lived in Austin, Texas; the south side of Chicago and now downtown Denver. At times, I consider myself a bit of a vagabond, never truly feeling comfortable in any city or place.

My relationship with God too, over this time period, has felt very similar. Though I would feel confident and comfortable during certain periods, I often felt complacent, dry, or empty in my faith. When I moved to Denver in August, I wanted to make a commitment to myself and to God, to focus more intentionally on this relationship. My hope was through prayer, I would be able



Matthew in reflection.

to grow spiritually and find myself more intimately connected to my *spiritual self*.

Life can often surprise us in ways we had not initially imagined. Coming to CVV, I had grand ideas of community, work and of course, how I would grow spiritually.

By the end of October, I found myself lost in my work, dry spiritually and somewhat empty in community. I needed an energy boost and was not quite sure where to find it. Lucky for me, after reading a few spiritually enriching books, I found myself growing closer to God.

I spent time in prayer and began to journal. When I

Working with individuals experiencing homelessness has made me reconsider what I define as home.

found myself complacent at work, I would envision myself serving Christ, as opposed to the "homeless" guests at the St. Francis Center. I discovered myself growing deeper in faith. I rediscovered the Eucharist and began to better understand the sacrifice Christ made for our imperfections.

Only three months later, I am finding myself continually growing closer to God and though I am far from where I would like to be, I am confident that through prayer and the Eucharist God will lead me closer to "home."

Most recently, working with individuals experiencing homelessness has made me reconsider what I define as home.

Some may say, "Home is where the heart is," but I would argue home is where God is present. Akron, Denver, Chicago and Austin are

great cities, but are certainly not home-though I do not suggest telling anyone from Texas that! I have recently discovered, that truly, in the arms of God is the home I want to strive for and where home can be found. Home is where you see Christ in the face of another, serving not a neighbor, but Christ Himself. Home is when you are creating heaven now, rather than waiting for life after death.

I am confident that as I grow spiritually, God is leading me to a new home where faith, hope and love abide, the greatest being love. The greatest is service in Christ.

This way of viewing home and faith has brought tremendous joy to my life and has made community, work and faith that much more enriching. I am excited to see where God will lead me and my hope is that it is deeply rooted in love for my neighbors.

In the end, I am learning that life is much less about *finding* or *searching* for a place where I feel at home and much more about *creating* home for those I encounter through love and service. This notion is my new home and I have every bit of confidence that it will lead me closer to God. 🙏

managing

I pray that my service involves more than simply case management. Yes, I have a caseload of youth whom I encourage and challenge and advocate for, but I want to do more than that. I strive to validate their feelings, to make them feel valued and important and most of all, to help them recognize that *their lives matter*. I pray that each young person I encounter feels welcome and accepted and feels like he or she can call Urban Peak home. 🙏

Youth from Urban Peak with Jenne.





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the CVV volunteers' **Spiritual Directors** ... the **Donald Lynch Family Foundation** ... **Knights of Columbus Council 539** ... **Café Sanora** ... the **priests** who preside at our liturgies ... **all** who donated baskets for the silent auction at the Border Pilgrimage Fiesta fundraiser.

Ways to support CVV

Give online: Go to www.covivo.org and click on "Donate Now" button or make a contribution with the envelope enclosed in this newsletter or volunteer your time at one of our CVV placement sites. Or just call us. Consider including CVV in your Planned Giving considerations <http://www.covivo.org/ways-to-give>

Save the date
Heart and Soul
Thursday, June 18, 2015
Newman Center

"There is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice or that permits us to do more than we reasonably can." St. Vincent de Paul



CVV Needs

- Single, fitted and flat sheets
- Toaster
- Blender/food processor
- Frying pan
- Tea kettle
- Straight-edge hoe (we use it for chopping ice).