“How can I take these stories from Minneapolis to Omaha, apply them to my own community, and make an impact on those around me? My Service & Justice Trip taught me three important things. First, the most important questions are the ones that are the hardest to answer. Second, asking tough questions like the ones above should come hand-in-hand with doing service. And finally, even though the questions may remain unanswered, it is important that I take them with me wherever I go.” - Iwa Chanthavong ’16
Often when returning from a trip, travelers take something back with them to help them remember what they did and who they met. The Newsletter theme for the 2014 Service & Justice Trips Program was inspired by what the participants brought back to Omaha: questions about social justice stirred by conversations with hosts; pieces of harrowing life stories they heard; and reflections of how service and solidarity impacted their lives--these are the mementos our participants returned with and the memories that keep their trips alive.
WHAT WAS YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE?

“Meeting all the residents and creating relationships with them, and now being able to see the person, not the disability.”
-Participant, Mosaic; Axtell, NE

“I really enjoyed visiting the border and seeing the lifestyle of a whole other country just two feet away. I think it’s something everyone should see.”
-Participant, Columban Border Immersion; El Paso, TX

“The greatest moment for me came when speaking to a mother and son who were homeless. It was through their words and actions that homelessness came to have a real name for me: their names, their faces.”
-Participant, St. Martin’s Hospitality Center; Albuquerque, NM

“I felt the most alive and connected to this community when I was volunteering with a five year old boy who had no idea what his situation really was. He was a happy-go-lucky kid. He could not speak or say his last name, let alone spell it. Working with him, I learned that I was needed and I saw improvement just in the short time I was in his classroom. I will forever remember his innocence and hope.”
-Participant, Hubbard House; East St. Louis, IL

“Reflections and learning about other peoples’ lives and how they affect my life.”
-Participant, Habitat For Humanity; Stroud, OK

HOW HAS THIS TRIP IMPACTED YOUR SENSE OF MISSION, PURPOSE OR VOCATION?

“It gave me a more firm realization that I want to serve the underserved.”
-Participant, Siena/Francis House; Omaha, NE

“This trip has impacted me a lot as we had a chance to hear multiple stories that connected with me in many ways. It reinforced my purpose.” -Participant, Minneapolis, MN

“It strengthened my desire to be an awesome teacher—kids need somebody who is in their corner all the time.” -Participant, Hubbard House; East St. Louis, IL

“I want to do service after college; no exceptions. After this trip, I truly feel called to embark on this journey.” - Participant, St. Martin’s Hospitality Center; Albuquerque, NM

“I feel I need to be an advocate for the marginalized.” - Participant, Daughters of Charity; Mobile, AL
Who and Where

**SPRING**
- 144 students
- 18 locations across the United States

**FALL**
- 211 students
- 29 locations across the United States

Want to see more pictures and reflections from the Service & Justice Trips?

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**Who from your host site community provided inspiration and/or challenge?**

“Coordinator Kush Desai challenged me this trip. He made me think deeper. He constantly questioned me. His constant questions allowed me to rethink life and to see if I’m really on the right path.” - Participant, Catholic Worker House; Cleveland, OH

“Bob the Catholic Worker and Marcus the firefighter both have an immense amount of intelligence, skill, and insight in every facet of life, yet they choose to live simply and humbly without excess, wealth or reward.”

- Participant, Oscar Romero Catholic Worker House; Oklahoma City, OK

“Ruben Garcia, form Annunciation House, really spoke from his heart of his personal experience with immigrants. He made us really want to get out there and advocate for immigrants.” - Participant, Columban Border Mission; El Paso, TX

“John and Laurel. They both challenged my way of thinking. I normally don’t like to get into political conversations, and although I didn’t converse much on the political topics, I listened and absorbed a lot. It was interesting to hear their views, especially views so different from the ones I have heard.”

- Participant, White Rose Catholic Worker House; Chicago IL

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**OH THE PLACES WE GO...**

**AND THE PEOPLE WE MEET**

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“I thought I would make new friends, help a group of people, and feel good about myself. Instead I made best friends, served a group of people, and I feel invigorated.”  
-Participant, Cleveland Catholic Worker House; Cleveland, OH

“Visiting the actual border fence and seeing the stark differences between the two sides was one of the best experiences. Being so close to Mexico physically but it being such a different world was very impactful to see”  
-Participant, Columban Border Mission; El Paso, TX

“My heart aches for people who struggle in ways that I could never imagine going through. But there are these moments where people make something from nothing, a beauty of the human condition. It is this essence that I held onto, and now I see the world differently from this experience. The little things matter. We just want to be happy, and search for the solution. In the end, people are just trying to make it through this place we call Earth, dazed and confused, while looking for the match to light their darkness.”  
-Participant, EXCEL; Calhoun City, MS

Above: Kathleen Caffrey ‘17, part of the Lincoln ShadowBrook Farm trip, pulls a wagon to fill with squash. The group harvested a wide variety of vegetables during their week stay.

Left: The Cleveland, OH, Service & Justice Trip group happily prepares lunchtime sandwiches for the guests at the Catholic Worker House.

Below: Ty O’Neal ‘16 tutors a student at her site in Calhoun City, MS. The group spent the learning about education disparity.

Above: Maria Barnett ‘15 carries hay while working on the farm at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN.

Above: The Columban El Paso, TX, group pauses to reflect during a border meditation.
**Snapshots of Service**

**Right:**
Sophomore Alex Ma helps build a house with Habitat for Humanity in Stroud, OK.

**Below:** The El Paso, TX group helps salvage scrap-wood from an old sofa for their hosts, the Columban Fathers.

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**Sharing Humanity**

*Bridget Battafarano, ’15, spring participant*

Scene: Albuquerque, NM; St. Martin’s Hospitality Center (Day shelter for people experiencing homelessness)

As the shelter was about to close one day, a man was walking out with his backpack. The strap suddenly ripped and he looked up and let out a frustrated breath. Seeing him, I said, “Hey, you know the shower station is closed now, but there are sewing supplies in there and if you come back tomorrow, you can use them to fix that strap. Or I could sew it for you if you want.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks.”

I thought that maybe this man would return and fix his strap. I was proud of myself for offering my services, for offering a helping hand. I did not think much more of it. What I was not expecting was that this man would come back the next day and search for me in the incredibly crowded shelter because his backpack really was in dire need of some stitches. So, stopping my project of the moment, I went with this man – whose name I learned is Randy – retrieved the necessary supplies, and sat down with him to sew.

As we sat, Randy told me a bit about himself and we shared conversation with those sitting around us. I sewed the first strap on his backpack and realized the loop at the top was only half attached.

“Do you want me to reattach this?”

“No, I’ll never use it. You can keep it. You can stitch my initials in it. To remember me.”

At first, I found this suggestion odd, but only very briefly. Randy had become, in my eyes, a man who was not to be pitied but admired and befriended. When I went to sew his backpack straps, I think I was, unconsciously, thinking of this as something I could do for someone else. It turned out that what I was doing was simply being with Randy and the others. We were sharing in our common humanity, we were being with one another as human beings. None of us were “getting on the other’s level” or changing ourselves to try to relate better. I felt a sense of utter equality and peace in knowing that this was not about solving anyone’s problems or leveling the playing field because there were no differences that mattered between us in those moments. We share the same air and growing space, the same world, and that is enough to tie us in ways that we cannot sever.

I had run out of thread on the first strap and the remaining thread options were dark blue and pink.

“So, you want the pink, right?” I said with a smile.

“Ah, no. The other – actually, yeah. Sew it in pink, so I remember.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

And there it was. An exchange of remembrances so simple that it may not mean anything to anyone else. But my backpack loop with the initials “R. J.” crudely embroidered, is a constant reminder of this man, what he taught me, and the humanity we all share.”

(This originally appeared as a blog on the CCSJ website)
After seating ourselves cross-legged in a small hut, a tarp is pulled down to the ground, sealing out all hope that light can enter. The grandfather rocks radiate heat in the center of the room, as if they are attempting to give us all sizzling, hot hugs. Sparks fly as the Sun Dance Chief throws a handful of ground sage onto the rocks, emitting a strong odor that sears the tips of our noses. Finally, the three tribal elders begin chanting their songs in the ancient Ponca language, uttering the words with such a force it feels as if they could fly all the way to heaven.

They praise God for his many gifts and ask him to be generous with his people. Every so often, the Sun Dance Chief pours a cup of water onto the rocks, filling the room with steam so hot it makes our faces feel as if they are being peeled off. Sitting there, amongst the heat, the noise and the darkness, we entered into a ritual that has been celebrated for hundreds of years.

Even before we entered the sweat lodge, our host explained to us how each person within the ring is connected to the others through the songs and prayer. Though the conditions within the sweat are harsh, he stressed to us that it was a sacrifice of one’s physical and mental strength to remain within the sweat. By leaving, we would break the prayer link created throughout the process.

As we shared in these beautiful moments with the people of the Omaha tribe, a deep sense of the depth of ways in which we can worship God grew inside me. For the first time I fully appreciated how much culture impacts the smallest inlets of our lives, down to the way we send our prayers to the Lord.

A Language beyond Words

Serenity McAndrews, ’17, fall participant

This Fall Break the CCSJ sent photo journalism senior Nico Sandi and Graduate Assistant Mike Rios on a trip to get footage of our students at their host sites across the country. Circuiting 2,500 miles of the midwest, visiting 11 sites from Stroud, OK over to Chicago, IL, the two had the chance to interview participants, Host Site Partners, and program alumni alike. They will be putting together a mini-documentary about the Service & Justice Trips in hopes to tell the story of the program and its impact over the years. The video will premiere on Sunday, February 22nd 2015 at 3:30 PM in the Harper Center’s Hixson-Lied Auditorium. All are welcome.
Although not one of our official pillars listed above, we have a lot of gratitude for those of you who have nurtured our program over the last 31 years! We could not do this without your support financially and spiritually. Students have done their part this year contributing their student fees, speaking at Masses, offering manual labor for donations, and participating with local businesses to raise money. In 2014, among the 355 students, we distributed over $20,000 in need-based and leadership scholarships. We continue to seek ways to fundraise the money needed each year. We are grateful for your partnership, prayers, ideas, and contributions as you are able.