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“Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.” This quote is attributed to my school’s namesake, Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa was a selfless, faithful person, who did exactly what this quote states. I strive to live like Mother Teresa in this way. Even if it is as simple as a smile in the hallway, every day I try to do at least one thing to make a difference. The best part of doing a “small thing with great love” is when you see the person you helped smile and see how you have positively impacted their life. I simply want to help make someone smile every day. This has led me to seek out different volunteer opportunities and fed my growing love for service.

Throughout my grade school years, I have had many opportunities to share God’s love with others. When I was in fourth grade I joined the Random Acts of Kindness group (RAK) and loved it. RAK is a group at my school for middle schoolers who want to reach out and serve their school and community through small acts of kindness. We did a lot of these projects during our recess time, as a fourth-grader, giving up my recess once a week was hard. However, the feeling I experienced when giving to others was far better than recess. After doing RAK for three years my love for service had grown and I was hungry to do more to try to make an impact in my community. When I saw the seventh and eighth graders give their speeches for Magnified Giving I was excited to see that service opportunities didn’t end with RAK. Instead, RAK was just the beginning of my love for service.

I quickly signed up for Magnified Giving in seventh grade, and I had an amazing experience. Magnified Giving gave me the opportunity to earn money for a non-profit organization that we researched, interviewed, and volunteered at. I loved being able to give in a different way than I had before, not only being able to spread the word about an amazing non-profit but help make an impact on many more lives. I again gave up my lunch, recess, and study hall to participate in this and again what I received in return was much greater. I developed skills in public speaking, researching, and an even deeper love for service. I ended up earning \$361 for a non-profit organization called Stepping Stones, which provides engaging opportunities for kids with special needs.

Beta Tutoring is another service opportunity that I was able to participate in at Mother Teresa. Every Monday, after school, I would tutor three-second graders. I enjoyed this experience, though it was challenging at times. I enjoyed working with younger students and I definitely gained a better understanding and appreciation for teachers.

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These experiences throughout elementary school, have grown my love for serving, in my church and community. One way I have done this is by volunteering with a ministry at my parish called Include Me. This is a program that is focused on including kids with special needs and their families in the mass. I've had the opportunity to show friendship to kids with different abilities in my parish community. "Doing small things with great love" is an easy way to make all people feel included. I hope this ministry helps them know that they are valuable and loved in our church.

Family Promise, an organization which I have volunteered with through my parish, provides housing, food, and resources for people experiencing homelessness. This experience was something that I enjoyed, but also it opened my eyes to blessings that I had taken for granted, such as having a warm house to come home to, and such a wonderful school to guide me. This helped me to realize how blessed I am, and from this experience, I have stepped forward, more full of gratitude, than I was before.

I have also reached out into my community by volunteering for a non-profit called Pause for Parents and Play for Kids. It is an organization that works to support children with disabilities and their families. During the pandemic, I was trying to find opportunities to serve my community in a safe way and came across Pause. I was so excited to see all the opportunities to serve! I volunteered at Pause's Holiday Shop, by helping kids pick gifts out for their families which were at no cost to them through Zoom. It was amazing to see that, even though you are through a screen, you can still spread joy into other people's lives.

I hold close all the moments of being able to spread God's love through song by serving in my parish choir since I was eight years old. My choir director has many people come up to her, and say how much music impacted them, and how it has enhanced their ability to pray during the mass. I love singing, and it makes me feel even happier to know that, through my voice, I am helping others gain a closer relationship with our Lord. By helping others grow in their faith, I grow in mine.

These service opportunities have shown me how kindness is contagious, and how much of an impact every person can make. All of these opportunities have led to my great love for service which I will continue through high school, and beyond. It has also taught me the joy of doing small things with great love through serving others. I've had many role models in my school, church, and community who inspire me to do small things with great love. My hope is to be able to spread light and live the life God has planned for me.