

## Reflection

When I decided to do long term volunteer ministry in the USA I didn't have any specific expectations about what I was hoping to find there.

I just had this feeling inside me that I wanted to do it. There was a chapter of my life that wasn't complete, yet.

This is why I started my journey and came over to America, almost a year ago.

Before I left my home, I knew I would be the only volunteer for the year, but that didn't discourage me. During the application process, I had been in contact with the director of the program, Lisa, through skype conversations and e – mails.

Moreover, I was also in touch with Sr. Katharina, which I found helpful because she was also German and shared about her time as a RMC with me.

So, for me, it felt like I already knew some people over on the other side of the Atlantic.

On my arrival day, I was picked up at the airport and on my first evening all the Sisters were waiting to greet me. It was a very warm welcome and I was glad that my first experience was so positive.

I jumped right into orientation which kept me busy, so I didn't have time to feel homesick. Also the beautiful area around here helped me to settle in easily and reminded me of home. I was very glad for this present and did not take it for granted, knowing it was a gift. So I took many walks and runs throughout the year, which helped me to feel close to God being surrounded by all the beauty and power.

In addition to my decision to leave my hometown in Germany and come to America, I also decided to step outside of my comfort zone and volunteer in a ministry I had never done before. Prior to my time with RMC I worked as a kindergarten teacher for 10 years. This year I worked as an Activities Assistant at St. Joseph's Manor and I can now say this was one of the best decisions I ever made.

I loved working with the Seniors at St. Joseph's Manor.

My co – workers and the residents welcomed me warmly.

It took some time, but little by little my confidence grew until I was able to run activities on my own with the residents.

We had a lot of fun together, playing different card games, baking, doing exercise or laughing together about my pronunciation.

It was always a strong positive feeling for me, after running games to hear: “ It was a great afternoon, thank you for all your games and your time.”

Moreover, I have good memories of some parties we threw for the seniors. I especially liked the Senior – Prom. Everybody was dressed, the room was decorated and we all had so much fun dancing. I did not matter whether people were sitting in a wheelchair or not, everybody was on the dance floor.

I never imaged that this ministry could fit me so well.

I'm very thankful for those experiences and the relationships I formed with the residents. The residents have touched my heart and it has been a gift knowing I touched theirs, too.

I want to thank all of the Sisters of the Redeemer for their warm welcome, which helped me feel at home right from the beginning.

I'm thankful for all the times we could spend together and the lunch and evening meals we could share.

You cared so much about me, always inviting and including me in everything. It was because of your generosity and hospitality that made my time here so memorable.

I would also like to say thank you to my small community upstairs. We had such a nice time together.

I'm going to miss our Wednesday Community evenings.

There was always good food, prayers which touched me, game nights and a lot of laughter.

I want to say thank you to all my co-workers and my Supervisor for your warm welcome and for all your help throughout the year.

You always had an open ear for me and made time for me.

I'm very glad that I could do my year of service at St. Joseph's Manor.

Another thank you goes to the residents of St. Joseph's Manor who welcomed me with open arms and open hearts.

I will never forget all the smiles, talks, games, happy hours, laughter and time we shared with each other.

I also want to say thank you to Sr. Anita, who was my Sister Companion this year.

I enjoyed our one on one meetings and all your good ideas on how to prepare a prayer.

I appreciate that you always took time for me, despite your busy schedule.

Moreover, I especially enjoyed our trips to Lancaster, which gave me the opportunity to see the beautiful countryside.

And finally I give a big thank you to Lisa, the director of the RMC Program.

You were a big help for me during my year of service.

You care so much about the volunteers and make their time unforgettable.

You are a very good organizer and everything you do, you do with your heart.

It is because of all the people I met, all the experiences I had, all the relationships I've formed and all the places I've traveled to, that made my year one of the best years of my life.

So, when I prepare to leave the USA I don't want to focus too much on all of the goodbyes I have to say, rather I want to focus on all the beauty I saw, the lives that touched me and the lessons I've learned during my time as a RMC.

When I leave to head back home to Germany on Thursday I will not only be taking my big bag of luggage home with me,

I'm going to be carrying with me a lot of great memories about my positive experiences from my amazing year and a heart full of friends.