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Gen400

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### Providing for the Disadvantaged -Expanding Mercy Core Values in our Community

The Mercy Core Values of Georgian Court University are principles that are instilled into students and staff from the moment we begin our journey's here. They are of great importance and have created a foundation for our community and ourselves as we strive for our education. These values help create a space for the students at Georgian Court University to contribute and fulfill much more than standard educational requirements. They help shape us into beings that aim to give back, to stand up for what is right and ultimately, to find the deeper meaning of our purpose in our communities and our lives. Respect, integrity, justice, compassion and service are these values that we strive to bring to light and maintain throughout our lives, during our time at GCU and beyond.

My understanding of justice, compassion and service has definitely evolved over this semester. I've always been passionate about caring for others and improving lives around me. My drive for looking to help those in need increased this semester because I was critically thinking about the things we've learned in class and decided that I wanted to apply these same principles in my life. Examples of things that shaped my changed view was our Unit 2 presentations, everyone's were very touching, along with our selected texts. The world genuinely needs a lot of people advocating and applying these values around them and I want to exceed the basis expectations for myself and my community.

These Mercy Core Values unquestionably contribute to living a good life. Although living a good life may be different for everyone and can be based on a variety of things, these

Mercy Core Values once again set a foundation for meaningful, compassionate service that can contribute to respect and justice and maintaining integrity. One reading from class highlights selflessness and the need for compassion among one another to improve the value of life was “Shoulders” by Naomi Shihab Nye. This poem is about how a father is caring for his tired son in the rain, in this poem it states, “We are not going to be able to live in this world if we’re not willing to do what he’s doing with one another” This quote shows us the deeper meaning of compassion and how it must be upheld for everyone. In this world “The road will only be wide. The rain will never stop falling.”, there will always be challenges, hardships and obstacles that we will have to endure. In order for us to feel at peace with our life value and validity, we must uphold the ideal reflected in this poem and our Mercy Core Values.

These Mercy Core Values were highlighted and applied notably in my service projects this semester. I was pleased with my various service on campus. I coordinated the Student Athletic Advisory Committee (SAAC) 2021 Canned Food Drive. During this, my Executive Board and I made flyers and helped advertise to all the athletic teams. We collected an abundance of food donations which was then brought to the local Catholic Charity in Lakewood. The employees and people there were extremely grateful for our contributions and needed these donations. I also helped with making baskets for the Thanksgiving Food Drive that was coordinated by Campus Ministries. I helped put food donations into baskets for families who needed Thanksgiving food. This was a fun process and was touching because we were able to provide for families who are hungry or might not have enough money to have a nice holiday meal. Lastly, I contributed to the Afghanistan Refugee Coat Drive that was coordinated through Gen400! I put flyers on donation bins and placed them around campus. When bins become full I would collect the donations and deliver them to a secondary location. This was a very promising

drive because we have received so many donations for it! This showed me that we had made an impact on our community by advocating for the refugees in need, people felt the need to contribute and make change. Among the various service opportunities, I was involved in, they undoubtedly assisted me in my reflection of the Mercy Core Values and ultimately shaped my perspective on them by showing me how we can provide for those in need while upholding these values. I was driven by the desire to contribute passionately and provide service to those in need. I desired those meaningful experiences with the GCU community and local community members and I wanted the same feeling to spread to others. I believe this is what ultimately encompasses our Mercy Core Values, which is our ultimate goal. Once we achieve this we can begin to ask the bigger and more difficult questions like; “Why is this happening?”, “What can we do to prevent this?”, “How can we contribute more” etc. This will expand our critical thinking and push ourselves and our community to fulfill these needs.

Homelessness is an extensive umbrella term than encompasses a myriad of situations for people. The current critical concern I'd like to address is the homeless and refugee crisis. Homelessness can include the basic need for shelter but also the need for clothing, food, physical and emotional support etc. and it can be based on many different things such as unemployment, drug addiction, mental health, refugee status, and so much more. There are so many reasons why people become homeless. This is important to me because first and foremost I care about others but I also care about my local community and throughout life everyone will need something at some point. You never know when you, yourself may become homeless and if I was ever in that situation I know that I would want to be treated with respect, care, compassion and kindness. If I can empower others to integrate these values, there will be a larger sense of community, respect and care. The “golden rule” is extremely important in this integration. By treating others the way

we would want to be treated, this will create the more loving, caring and compassionate culture that we desire and can spread through the nation and the globe.

I believe other people care about this issue as well, there are a lot of people/organizations that are looking to abolish this situation and there is always a need for more people to help. According to Scholar Martha Burt from Urban Institute, there are many things that the state of New Jersey has done to help those in need with assistance to homelessness. New Jersey has built more affordable housing per capita in high-opportunity communities near good schools and jobs than any other state in the nation, and uses a wide range of local, state, and federal funding sources to generate this housing. Other successful state strategies for addressing homelessness include rental assistance, capital/construction assistance, bond financing, local taxes, cross-jurisdictional planning, inclusionary zoning, and programs to address specific household needs (Burt). The research and policy options that this article discusses can help reduce current and prevent future homelessness. I am so happy to see that this state is taking initiative in creating change for the homelessness crisis. These are great steps forward and I believe these steps can be taken in all states.

If this problem continues unabated there will be consequences. This world is not perfect as we know it, there will always be hungry, uneducated, homeless, sex workers, cold, addicts, etc. and there will always be people out there who do not have the heart to help. There will always be people out there who will continue to criticize these people with stereotypes, who will refuse to help and remain selfish. This is a fact of the human race. These are obstacles people face every day, without this there wouldn't be a need with what I am trying to accomplish. These are obstacles for both givers and receivers in this instance. It can be hard to move people who remain as stone. This creates more work for the people trying to give and may result in less

outcome for those in need. There are millions of people in this world that are willing to help and millions more who need the help. There is plenty just in our community. Again, we cannot be scared of the big picture because it can be tough to swallow at times. But how do we eat an elephant? (figuratively because I'm vegan) One bite at a time. I believe banning together not just as a school, as GCU, but as a community (Lakewood, then to Ocean County, then to Monmouth County) and continuing to progress partnerships with programs and community outreaches that we can help this cause.

Today, people are so quick to judge those who are in need. There are major stereotypes around the homeless as well. For example, a few stereotypes of people who are homeless is that "They did it to themselves", "They probably spend donated money on drugs or alcohol", "They just need to get a job". These are things we've all heard and these types of stereotypes are not just said about the homeless but all sorts of other people. These are all people who are in a place in their lives that they may not be happy about and they may not be able to help it. That is why every community and every person must have the heart to help . This involves stepping outside of our own bubbles (socially, politically, physically and mentally) and finding way to provide for these people, get them back on their feet, fill their stomachs, make them warm, make them loved and cared for because wouldn't you want that too? The Journal of Men's Studies did a survey for homeless men in Trenton, NJ and it explores the nuanced connections between homelessness and incarceration as told through their life stories (Adler). In the studies discussion It says how it is clear from the interviews that the history and economic structure of Trenton affect the lives of the men who are experiencing homelessness. Limited job opportunities, a lack of affordable housing, and discrimination against ex-convicts are all examples of structural limitations faced by these men. Yet, it is also evident that cultural factors, especially adverse family relationships,

contribute significantly to the ensnarement of these men in the matrix of despair caused by the nexus between homelessness and previous incarceration (Adler). This shows that the hardships these men faced are almost predetermined, they are set up for failure and exposed to homelessness. A way that this could be diminished is for people to know about this issue and adjust accordingly. For example, when companies look to hire people and see they have been convicted of a crime, instead of simply passing by their application, they can look to give them a chance because these people are trying to turn their lives around. If landlords, hiring companies and other people that would be involved in these people's lives can expand their compassion and look to have integrity with equality for others, this problem can be addressed!

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness "In January 2020, there were 580,466 people experiencing homelessness in America. Most were individuals (70 percent), and the rest were people living in families with children." That means that among the homeless reported just last year, 174,140 are homeless families. This is a national dilemma that needs to be addressed. In New Jersey last year there were 9,662 people experiencing homelessness. This is a need that I believed can be addressed here. To shed some positive light on this subject, there was an article published over 2 years ago through Wbur.org that said "Bergen County, New Jersey, was certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2017 as the first community in the country to end chronic homelessness" (Hobson & McMahon). Julia Orlando is the director of the Bergen County Housing, Health and Human Services Center and was the leading force in building the Housing, Health and Human Services Center. Orlando states "By having one facility in this suburban area to provide meals, to provide housing, to provide services in one location, we were able to better address the needs of a chronically homeless person, rather than having to have them transverse through the entire county of Bergen," she

says. “We provided a location that was a one-stop center, where that individual could get all of the services that they needed. And that really served to be, I think, a turning point in our work” (Hobson & McMahon). Orlando and Bergen county really banded together to help those in need. This was so touching to find and I think the fact that it is local is a huge deal for us! I think this can be expanded across the state and country if we can continue to work together like this. Although it may be hard to find just one solution, these examples can help us take steps towards change.

After researching about refugees I found a research article about discrimination and distress among Afghan refugees in Northern California. The research concluded that their approach has led them to conclude that perceived discrimination does indeed pose a significant threat to the mental health of current and former Afghan refugees. Discrimination may further exacerbate other ongoing post-resettlement stressors, while posing even more harm to traumatized Afghans (Alemi & Stempel). This is related to solving the problem of homelessness because in a sense, these people are away from their homes. They had to flee their home country for a myriad of reasons and they had to come to the US for better lives and a chance to live. If this was you, me or anyone else we would want to be welcomed with open arms and shown support and resources to get back on our feet and survive. These refugees are facing discrimination and distress due to our inability to find compassion. We need to find the compassion in ourselves and fight for justice for them because they need advocates! We can find a way to bring compassion to the lives of others, we can spread this feeling like wildfire through our communities and have this sense of welcoming and helpfulness towards those in need. These coat drives are just small tokens and if we can continue to advocate, to provide and help them get

on their feet, this can make a successful transition for refugees and a sense of community among all of us.

Although the problem of homelessness is being dealt with in certain areas here in New Jersey, this is still a national and worldwide dilemma. I also consider the other things that may be relevant towards being without a home. These include a need for food and clothing, which was an aim with my service projects. For those who are without a home they may not have the space for many clothes, the money for clothes, for food and they may be cold and hungry. With these projects such as the coat drive and food drive, we are giving back to the community by providing them with the necessary means to stay warm and full. If we can tie our Mercy Core Values to these problems, there will be a positive result of change. I believe it begins with compassion, we must all begin with the feeling to *want* to help, to *want* to seek change and see positive things happen. In my groups video for Unit 2 we used “The Impacts of Compassion and Service” by Jose Bright. Bright has formed an entire organization called “Teboho” in South Africa with goals to provide children in need with education. They provide sports and recreational activities as well as educational and fun trips. They also provide personal empowerment and social development workshops as well as wellness programs (Bright). This organization has provides more than just education, but a place for children to go, to learn, to grow, to rely on people and to have a safe place to learn who they are. Bright applies our Mercy Core Values in his work extensively. It begins with compassion, it is the most contagious aspect and he was so passionate about his program and helping those kids. He respects them and wants them to succeed. In doing so he maintains his integrity and fights for justice for them by providing them with education and support groups that they may have been deprived of. I’m not saying we should all go out and start huge successful organizations. But I think the things that we have going on campus are vital



stepping stones for assisting in the abolishment of these problems. By doing the food drives, coat drives, etc. we are providing for the needy and this should never go away. I know people are also more available to give during the holiday season but this should be something that can continue throughout the whole year, every year.

Overall, I think working with local organizations and companies would be the next step in creating change. I think reaching out to Julia Orlando at Bergen County Housing and seeing if they would be willing to find partners in other areas and expanding their successful solution throughout the state. As students at GCU I know we can help advocate for this, show them that there is a need for this in other counties and then reaching out to create change among these organizations and companies would be the most effective step for big changes forward. Also continuing to give is always needed and appreciated. Continuing these drives and service around our community will maintain the need. I think the upside is that if people are willing to work together to solve this issue then all we have to do is communicate and make change! A downside could be if people are not willing to do such things, getting shot down can be hard but it definitely shouldn't make and end in the plan but would be a potential downside.

My experience of GCU's Mercy Core Values has partially contributed to the person I am today. I have only been at GCU for a short time (transferring in 2020) but in that time I have definitely grown as a person. I have grown through much more than just the Mercy Core Values though, I have grown as an athlete, as a student, both due to my personality growing and changing and discovering new things on my own but also integrating these values to enhance them even further. My most significant learning experiences have been due to personal involvement on multiple facets of Georgian Court University. I've also learned that doing this is very hard! This semester especially, I was learning how to balance all the things I was involved

in while also maintaining my own personal well-being. I was a full-time student, I was captain and starter on the volleyball team, I was working two jobs, one as a waitress and one as a TCS Peer mentor helping student with special needs on campus, I was also a freshman mentor and president of the SAAC committee and a main contributor in four different service projects throughout campus. This can sound overwhelming to anyone but honestly, I wouldn't change a thing about it. It has taught me so many things from leadership and involvement, time management and organization, having fun and giving back to the community but most importantly personal growth and application of the Mercy Core Values. All of these experiences have taught me different, valuable things. A few things I learned from these experiences include: learning what the needs and wants are of the student athlete's on campus and I learned and am still learning how to advocate for them to have a better college experience. I have learned that there is much more beyond the gates of GCU, we live in a very diverse community that is always in need of things, tangible things that we can provide. I have learned to open my eyes to these things, to develop that deeper sense of compassion in order to accomplish and execute the other Mercy Core Values. I have learned to have respect for all, professors and staff, students with special needs, regular students, student-athletes, people off campus and surrounding communities etc. I also look to advocate for all of them, maintaining and establishing my personal integrity and fighting for justice if needed. In "Handle with Care: A Conversation with Maya Angelou" she states "I'm not sure if resilience is ever achieved alone. Experience allows us to learn from example. But if we have someone who loves us—I don't mean who indulges us, but who loves us enough to be on our side—then it's easier to grow resilience, to grow belief in self, to grow self-esteem. And it's self-esteem that allows a person to stand up"

(Azzam). Not one single experience shaped me, my values and my ideals, they were all shaped by an array of events and contributions by myself and others to create my sense of resilience.

After graduation life is just commencing and I will be hopeful in pursuing a life of infinite Mercy in my personal life and my career. There is so much more to life than just a career, which I feel is something college students lose sight of when thinking of the bigger picture of life or what it means to live a good life. As Dieter F. Uchtdorf said “As we lose ourselves in the service of others we discover our own lives and our own happiness.” I think this cannot be truer, the gift of giving is so satisfying to my soul and if everyone else can feel the same way by contributing acts of kindness and giving, then we can have a better life and a better world. I plan to specifically continue pursuing community service such as food bank donations, sorting of food at food banks, serving food in homeless shelters, running coat drive donations through my hometown for the homeless, poor or refugees, doing park or lake cleanups around my area, walking dogs at the animal shelters, and many more things similar to these. These are easy ways to give back without having to commit too much time for people or myself on a busy schedule. I also plan to always be an advocate for those in need and for injustices. I will stand up for the *Black Lives Matter* movement, I will advocate for the homeless and the hungry, for the poorly treated refugees and the illegal aliens in the US. These are things I care about simply because it is the kindness of being human. These Mercy Core Values are five things that help create a foundation for a hopeful and involved community. But of these values I believe all things can be solved through love. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...And now these three

remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) We must commit this love for ourselves, for our families, for our communities and for the human race across the globe. With this can conquer anything.

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