

MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS

volunteer handbook

SERVICE

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SPIRITUAL
GROWTH

COMMUNITY

SIMPLICITY

Mercy Volunteer Corps Handbook 2024-2025

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About this Handbook

This handbook is intended to provide Mercy Volunteers and sponsoring service sites with an overview of Mercy Volunteer Corps. The policies set forth in this handbook cannot address every circumstance that may arise. Questions regarding specific circumstances should be directed to the designated Community Coordinator.



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Mission Statement

In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, members of Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC) enter into relationship with people who are experiencing injustices, in any form. In a spirit of mutuality, volunteers cultivate mercy and justice in the world by embracing compassionate service, social justice, spiritual growth, and a simple lifestyle in community.



About Us Statement

Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC) promotes social change by placing and supporting volunteers for one year of service with people who are experiencing injustices, in any form, in the United States and Guyana, South America. Mercy Volunteers work in education, healthcare, and social services while growing spiritually and living simply in community. MVC also offers short-term summer experiences to more deeply explore the Mercy Critical Concerns of Earth, Immigration, Nonviolence, Racism, and Women through an eight-week commitment.



Vision Statement

Rooted in the spirit of Catherine McAuley and challenged by the Mercy Critical Concerns (Earth, Immigration, Nonviolence, Racism, and Women), Mercy Volunteer Corps is committed to achieving a more just and merciful world. We invite volunteers to join with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to:

- extend compassionate service to those who are experiencing injustice, oppression, marginalization, and disenfranchisement;
- encourage interculturality and solidarity within Mercy Volunteer Corps and the communities in which volunteers are serving;
- build community with one another through mutual and intentional relationships;
- offer accompaniment and presence with people experiencing injustice and those working towards a more just society;
- embrace the growth inherent in purposefully living out our shared values and recognizing our interconnectedness through reflection and action;
- integrate the learned values of service, justice, spiritual growth, simplicity, and community into their life experience; and
- develop an ongoing personal relationship with the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Community as an integral part of the Circle of Mercy.

"From day one at Mercy Volunteer Corps, I have been given constant offers of help and advice. I have been welcomed by members of the community, from MVC, my service site, and my neighbors."

Katrina Thaibinh: Baltimore, Maryland

Theology of Mission

Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, board members, and volunteers embrace the values of compassionate service, social justice, spiritual growth, and a simple lifestyle in community. The mission of Mercy Volunteer Corps is rooted in the Christian tradition and inspired by Catherine McAuley's commitment to following Jesus by challenging injustice and unjust systems through compassionate service.

In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Mercy Volunteer Corps commits to respond as a community to the tremendous disparities of wealth, power, and privilege in our world. In the spirit of Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps seeks to model service that is characterized by mutuality and accompaniment. We strive to respect the life and dignity of all we encounter, ever conscious of God's presence in all of creation. Through our values, we reach out in love and mercy and learn to receive love and mercy from others. Opening ourselves to God's transforming grace, we hope to be instruments of peace and agents of change, seeking a more just and inclusive world.



CORE VALUES

History of MVC

In 1978 the Sisters of Mercy (Merion, PA) founded Mercy Volunteer Corps as a ministry which invited lay people to be a compassionate presence to those who are suffering and to address the needs of those experiencing injustices. In 1993, MVC was incorporated under the sponsorship of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, thus establishing it as a ministerial arm of the Sisters of Mercy. Over the next decade, MVC grew to offer service sites on both coasts and throughout the United States. In 2000, MVC's first international service location was established in Georgetown, Guyana. In partnership with Mercy Ecology, MVC began offering a short term placement opportunity in summer 2021 at Mercy Ecospirituality Center in Benson, Vermont. Since its beginning and with the hope of building community through service, MVC has placed over 1200 volunteers in more than 150 different service sites in 23 states, South America, and Central America.

Core Volunteer Values

Mercy Volunteers make a commitment to all of the components of the MVC program. This commitment is expressed through the interconnected values of compassionate service, social justice, spiritual growth, simplicity, and community. Volunteers commit to the program, their community members, their coworkers and clients at their service site, and their local support team.

Compassionate Service & Social Justice

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides volunteers an experience to act in solidarity with those who are experiencing injustices, in any form. Mercy Volunteers commit to achieve a more merciful and just world. Volunteers are placed in service sites compatible with their gifts and the needs of the site. They generously serve in a full-time capacity at various social service agencies, health care facilities, and schools. MVC and the service sites call the volunteers to service characterized by compassion, mutuality, and respect. Rather than “giving to and doing for,” service with MVC is about the mutual empowerment of volunteers and clients, both giving and receiving, and advocating with instead of for the people they encounter in their service.

Volunteers bear witness to the daily struggles of those who are experiencing injustices and are challenged to consider the multiple systems contributing to their oppression, marginalization, and disenfranchisement. Together with the entire Mercy community, including Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Companions in Mercy, and ministry partners, they seek to respond with faith and creative actions to help bring justice and in turn peace to the global community.

Volunteers commit to:

- serving full-time (40 hours/week) at a sponsoring service site;
- meeting the responsibilities of their role as outlined in the position description and guided by their site supervisor;
- embodying a spirit of solidarity and mutuality in their service; and
- striving to be merciful and just in their own attitudes, language and actions to keep their work credible.



Spiritual Growth

Mercy Volunteers commit to personal and spiritual growth during their year. Volunteers are invited to foster this deepened awareness and integrate their faith with their experiences of service, passion for justice, and in the context of a community dedicated to a simple, sustainable lifestyle.

Volunteers strive to be attentive to and reflect on the presence and movement of God (the Divine) in their daily experiences and to share these insights and their own spirituality in their volunteer community.

Mercy Volunteer Corps draws its charism and spirituality from the Sisters of Mercy and their founder, Catherine McAuley. The Sisters of Mercy live an apostolic commitment of service to the Church and the world. They are called, in particular, to serve those who are poor, sick, and uneducated, especially women and children. As a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, the Mercy community invites volunteers to serve with them within this charism.

Grounded in a spirit of hospitality, Mercy Volunteer Corps welcomes people of all faiths and at various points of their spiritual journey. Therefore, part of this sharing in community is a willingness to be vulnerable as well as to be open to differences in faith and spirituality. This patchwork of perspectives encourages meaningful conversations and enriches one's own practices and prayer.

Volunteers commit to:

- tending to their spiritual growth by consistently spending time in personal reflection, spiritual practices, and prayer;
- sharing their own gifts and cherishing the gifts of others; and
- actively participating in MVC retreats and various Mercy-sponsored events.



Community Living

Mercy Volunteers live together in community and commit to forming intentional relationships characterized by kindness and mutual respect. Mercy Volunteer Corps supports volunteers in creating a common framework for sharing their lives, managing a household, and making choices that reflect the values of the program. Volunteers are encouraged to approach decision-making in a manner which seeks the common good over individual preferences. Volunteers combine their community stipends to purchase food and household items and their transportation stipends to cover transit passes or gas (depending on location). As part of their commitment, they must come to a consensus about the use of these communal funds. The personal stipend is for the volunteer's personal use. Volunteers are challenged to engage in honest and open communication. At times this requires volunteers to embrace vulnerability, name tensions, and engage in respectful dialogue. Learnings around communication and interdependence are often carried into a volunteer's relationships, jobs, and life experiences beyond their Mercy Volunteer Corps year.

Volunteers commit to:

- taking part in community activities, including two community meals each week, weekly spiritual sharing, community business meetings, and informal social times;
- discussing, establishing and evaluating the concrete aspects of their communal lifestyle and holding one another accountable to this commitment;
- communicating openly and honestly and embracing a willingness to share their lives, experiences, and spirituality with their community; and
- participating in community and individual meetings with their local support team and MVC staff.

Simplicity

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides volunteers an experience to live a counter-cultural lifestyle which seeks to value people more than possessions; to be mindful of the intricate web of life to which all of creation belongs; to engage in sustainability practices; and to honor stillness and contemplation. While the necessities are provided, volunteers must examine and make intentional choices about their personal and shared use of resources, time and money. Careful consideration should also be given to what material possessions or conveniences a volunteer brings with them. Volunteers choose to live on their monthly stipend (personal, communal, transportation) and do not supplement it unnecessarily with personal savings or money from outside sources. Mercy Volunteer Corps encourages volunteers to carve out consistent time for quiet reflection and connecting with the natural world around them as a way to cultivate peace and relationship.

Volunteers commit to:

- living on their monthly stipend allotment without additional funds;
- exploring sustainable practices, conserving natural resources and limiting travel;
- seeking to live a life centered in relationship; and
- examining their role and the implications of their choices and actions within their broader neighborhood community, the environment, and the global community.



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging

To more fully embrace our identity and Mercy's Critical Concerns, Mercy Volunteer Corps commits to dismantling racism and acting against systems which marginalize, dehumanize, disenfranchise, and oppress.

"We strive to witness to mercy when we reverence the dignity of each person, create a spirit of hospitality and pursue integrity of word and deed in our lives."

Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Our DEIB commitment is deeply rooted in the desire for a kinship culture that seeks unity and oneness while celebrating our abundant and beautiful diversity.

Equity Statement:

Mercy Volunteer Corps, in alignment with our mission statement, denounces all forms of hatred and oppression. We commit to dismantling racism and acting against systems which marginalize, dehumanize, disenfranchise, and oppress. With full support of the staff, Board of Directors, and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, MVC commits to be an anti-racist institution and to foster a sense of belonging that leads to a just and peaceful world community and the liberation of all beings.

Acknowledgement of History and Bias:

MVC acknowledges our impact has not always aligned with our intent when we have perpetuated bias and supported structures and policies which maintain white privilege and power. We have been complicit through our recruitment process, mentoring, staff culture, board makeup, and donor pools.

We recognize that foregoing a salary to serve in a yearlong program assumes a level of privilege and even the term "service" can imply a problematic power dynamic. In addition our program structure, both historically and presently, has most benefited those who identify as white and middle to upper class. Furthermore, volunteerism lacking critical reflection can breed harmful saviorism ideology.

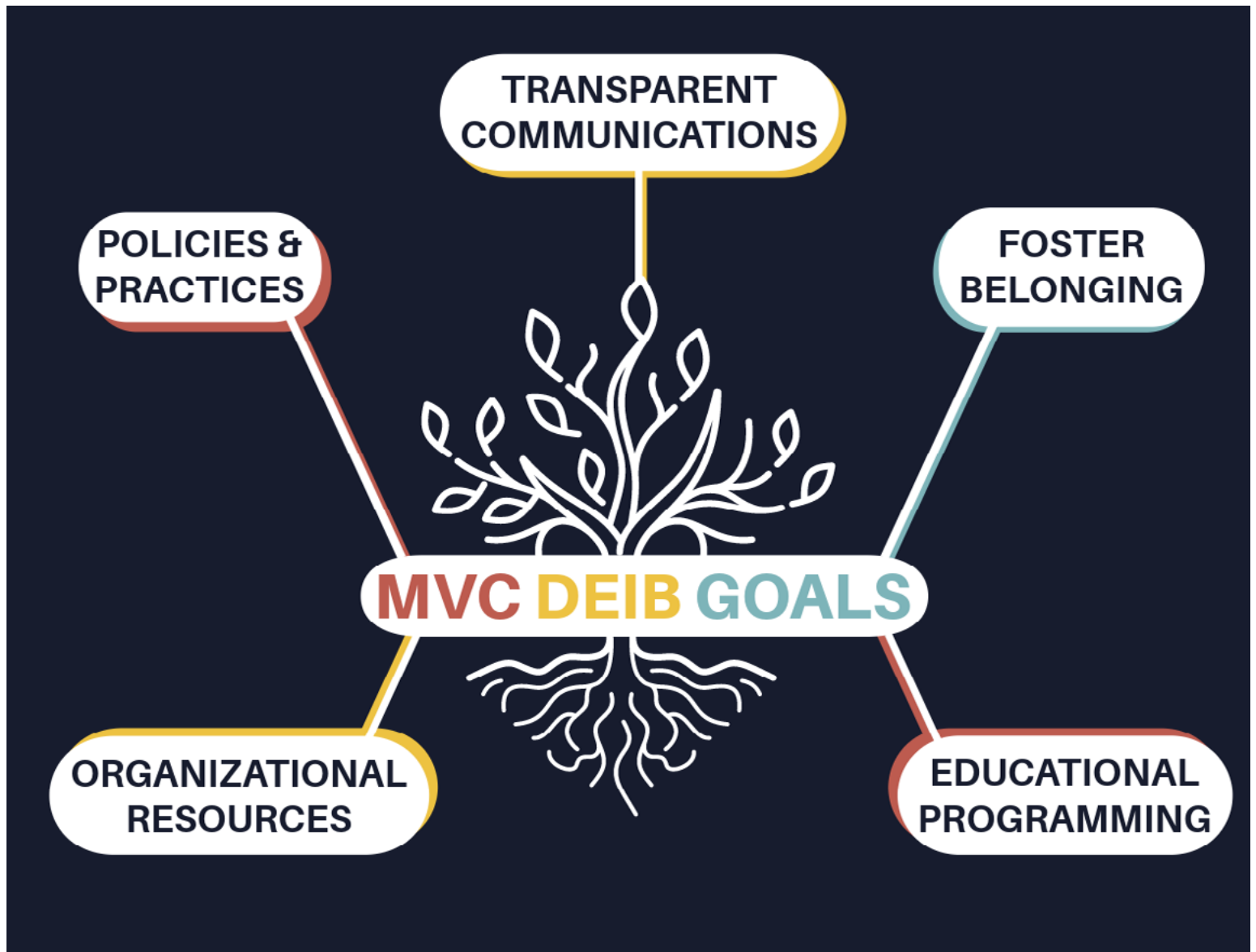


Equity Journey:

MVC understands that becoming an inclusive, intercultural, and anti-racist institution is a continuous process. Following years of awareness building and education, we moved to a concerted effort in 2020 with staff attending implicit bias and anti-racism training. We then engaged in a reflection process about our vision of equity. These reflections revealed areas of inequity in our program policies and practices which need to be addressed. This led us to scrutinize and update our identity statements and publications to more clearly reflect our values and commitment to equity work.

MVC is committed to strengthening the service experience, particularly for Black, Brown, Indigenous, AAPI, and LGBTQIA+ identities. To be an organization where all people are uplifted and find belonging, we have started implementing additional layers of support including identity mentoring and processing groups.

MVC is investing time, finances, and resources to become an inclusive, anti-racist institution. To view our five-year plan with measurable objectives and target completion dates, go to mercyvolunteers.org/equity.



About the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

As a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, MVC seeks to act in accordance with the priorities of the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Companions in Mercy and ministry partners set forth in its Seventh Institute Chapter. An excerpt of the formal statement from this gathering in April 2023 follows:

Cherishing the wisdom and spirit of our 2017 Institute Chapter, we reaffirm our call as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to “deepen our relationship with God and one another, and to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world.” In a world that is groaning under the increasing weight of war, violence, racism, the pursuit of profit over people, and the destruction of Earth, “we are called to pursue integrity of word and deed in our lives.”

We hear a call to:

- Renew our understanding of our Mercy charism in order to foster the growth of communities of belonging.
- Deepen our relationships in a spirit of *Encuentro* and embrace our identity as an intercultural, international community.
- Increase our efforts to address the reality of racism in ourselves, in our Institute, in our Church, and in our world.
- Acknowledge our failure to practice nonviolence, educate ourselves in this area, and commit to peace building personally, in our own community, and in our world.
- Recognize and defend the dignity of all people.
- Work to ensure our lives and our ministries reflect inclusive love and abundant justice for LGBTQ+ people, recognizing this may manifest differently across country contexts.
- Deepen our ecological conversion with a broader understanding of extractivism and the complicity of our lifestyle. In addition to a continued realignment of our investments, seek other ways to confront and eliminate extractivism.

Recognizing that all changes begin with ourselves, we commit to invest our personal and communal energy, resources, and prayers in these actions to build the reign of God.



PROGRAM POLICIES

Policies and Principles of Mercy Volunteer Corps

All volunteers and sponsoring service sites shall agree to abide by the policies and principles of Mercy Volunteer Corps. These policies are intended to complement, and be read in conjunction with, any policies governing volunteers adopted by the sponsoring service site.

Equal Opportunity/Nondiscrimination Policy

Mercy Volunteer Corps does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or belief, gender identity or expression, age, ability, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. In addition, to ensure full equality of opportunity in all operations and activities of MVC, every person who is employed by, volunteers with, or is associated in any capacity with MVC shall be selected under fair procedures that provide equitable opportunities to all people.

Work Standards and Ethics

All Mercy Volunteers are expected to maintain high standards of cooperation, attendance, responsibility and integrity in fulfilling their volunteer obligations to Mercy Volunteer Corps. Volunteers are expected to perform the job duties required by their volunteer position and to comport themselves with the spirit of MVC's mission statement and core values, as determined by MVC in its sole discretion. No volunteer may undertake any activity while engaging in MVC business that is, or gives the appearance of being improper, illegal, or immoral or that could in any way harm or embarrass MVC.

Anti-Harassment

MVC is committed to an environment and climate in which relationships are characterized by dignity, respect, courtesy, and equitable treatment. It is the policy of the organization to place volunteers in an environment free from all forms of unlawful or unwelcome harassment, including implied or expressed forms of sexual harassment. MVC expressly prohibits any form of harassment. Any volunteer who feels that they have been subjected to harassment of any type, whether by another volunteer, an agent or employee of the sponsoring service site, or any agent of MVC, should promptly report the incident to their Community Coordinator and/or site supervisor. If the volunteer is uncomfortable reporting harassment to their Community Coordinator, or if the volunteer is dissatisfied with the resolution of the issue, they should submit a written complaint to the MVC Executive Director, Marian Uba, by emailing marianuba@mercyvolunteers.org. MVC will conduct any necessary investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate action.

Criminal Background Checks

MVC performs a national criminal background check and sex offender registry check for each person that commits to serving with the program. With written authorization from the volunteer, results are shared with the volunteer's service site as well as the local support team.

Drugs and Alcohol Policy

MVC strictly prohibits the possession, use, manufacturing, or distribution of illegal drugs during the volunteer's term of service with MVC. Although the consumption of alcohol and legal recreational drugs is not prohibited during a volunteer's commitment, volunteers are prohibited from consuming or being under the influence of alcohol and legal recreational drugs while engaged in MVC work-related volunteer activities. Volunteers also assume responsibility for their own behavior while consuming alcohol and legal recreational drugs outside of their MVC-related activities and understand that being under the influence in no way lessens their accountability to the MVC community. MVC will not excuse acts of misconduct committed by volunteers whose judgment is impaired due to substance abuse.

Student Loans

Volunteers are strongly encouraged to contact their loan holder(s) prior to their term of service to determine the best option for them in managing their loans. Among the options, the volunteer may be eligible for income-based repayment, deferment, or forbearance. The volunteer is responsible for determining the eligibility of their student loans, for obtaining and completing the relevant paperwork and signatures, for submitting the forms to the appropriate office for processing, and for making any loan payments. Upon request, MVC can provide written confirmation of the volunteer's participation in the program.

Optional Practical Training

A person must be a resident in the United States at the time of their application to Mercy Volunteer Corps. Optional Practical Training is a benefit available to international students in F-1 immigration status who are enrolled in, or completing, a degree program in the United States. Should the candidate meet the additional criteria, MVC accepts applications from individuals who are seeking OPT status. If accepted, MVC staff makes their best effort in securing a placement that would support the OPT application. Please note that the volunteer is responsible for all required paperwork and fees associated with the OPT application.

Volunteer Health Emergencies

MVC is committed to promoting the safety and well-being of all volunteers and volunteer communities. The MVC staff should be apprised of emergency situations (e.g. medical emergencies, hazardous site environments and/or community residences, natural disasters, criminal acts, sexual harassment). The risk management plan received during Orientation should be followed in the case of an emergency. The specifics of all emergency plans are to be discussed and reviewed in detail by Mercy Volunteers and the MVC local support team during the local orientation. Any additional relevant information or changes are to be communicated to the Community Coordinator.

On-site Emergencies:

- obtain emergency medical care ASAP (first aid, immediate medical attention, etc.);
- proceed to appropriate medical facility;
- contact the local support team for guidance and consultation;
- once the injured is stabilized, the local support team will contact the Community Coordinator and apprise them of the situation as soon as possible; and
- after the emergency is assessed, the local support team will encourage the volunteer to contact their Emergency Contact Person designated on the Emergency Medical Form. If the volunteer is not capable of contacting the designated person, the Coordinator will contact the Emergency Contact Person if permission has been granted on the form.

Emergency medical forms are kept in the volunteer residence and with the local support team and MVC staff. Mercy Volunteers are encouraged to share the contact information of their community members and local support team with their emergency contact person.

MVC-Initiated Release from Service

MVC retains the right, in its sole discretion, to ask a volunteer to leave the program if they fail to uphold the program's policies and the commitment to MVC's mission statement and core values.

Volunteer-Initiated Termination of Service

A volunteer's decision to end their commitment prior to the end date has far-reaching impact to include not only the volunteer, but the clients and staff at the service site, the volunteer community, finances supporting the community (such as rent and communal fund), and the MVC program. MVC encourages a volunteer who considers leaving MVC to first talk to their Community Coordinator to discuss ways of improving the experience. In the event that a volunteer initiates an early termination of service, the volunteer is responsible for a two-week notice, the cost of travel home, and a subsequent month's share of rent and utilities.

Service Site-Initiated Release from Service

If a volunteer is released from service by their service site, but the volunteer has fulfilled their commitment to MVC's mission statement, core values, and the other applicable components of the program, the service site must provide the volunteer and MVC with two-weeks notice. Under these circumstances, MVC will attempt to secure a different service site placement for the volunteer in the same general locale. If a service site intends to release a volunteer from service for misconduct, or for failing to fulfill their commitment to MVC's mission statement, core values, or other applicable components of the program, the site should notify MVC, so that MVC can investigate and take appropriate action accordingly.

COMMUNITY POLICIES

Responsible Tenant Practices

Volunteers are considered tenants in their housing and are accountable for the upkeep of the house, informing the owner about problems or needed repairs, and any other tenant responsibilities. Volunteers are expected to maintain good communication with the owner and local support team regarding housing issues. Volunteers are responsible for thoroughly cleaning the residence at the end of the service year. If the volunteer housing sustains damage caused by the volunteer(s) or their visitors during the course of the service year, the cost of necessary repairs will be the responsibility of the responsible volunteer(s).



Personal Property

It is important to note that all items of personal property are the responsibility of the volunteer. In accordance with the commitment to a simple lifestyle in community, Mercy Volunteers are asked to carefully consider the personal property they bring with them during their term of service, particularly valuable and/or convenience items. MVC encourages volunteers to bring only essential items during their term of service and discourages them from bringing items that are irreplaceable or of significant value (whether monetary or sentimental). Neither Mercy Volunteer Corps, the Sisters of Mercy, the service sites, nor the owners of the volunteer housing assume responsibility for the replacement of a volunteer's personal property should it be damaged, stolen, or destroyed. Any U.S. volunteer with concerns about their personal property should consider protecting the property with renter's insurance.

Pets

Pets or animals of any kind are not permitted in a Mercy Volunteer Corps community.

Additional Income

Since the volunteers' commitment to their service sites is full-time and they also commit to a simple lifestyle in community and spiritual/personal growth, they are prohibited from taking part-time paid work or enrolling in college level courses for credit. Volunteers may participate in recreational activities, community sponsored programs, non-credit classes, church ministries, or other outside activities that will provide personal and/or spiritual enhancement as long as the time, relationships, and expenses involved in such activities do not interfere with the volunteer's priority toward their commitment to the tenets of MVC.



Guest Policy

Family and friends are welcome at MVC residences. Because the integrity and comfort of the community as a whole is always a priority, all community members must engage in conversation about the visitor's stay prior to arrival. Visitors should stay no more than one week. Visitors (except spouses) are required to use separate bedrooms. Volunteers and visitors are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity in the residence. Any visitor who violates the community policies will be asked to leave the residence.

“The more you open your heart and your ears, the more you will see the beauty in the authenticity in the relationships that are being formed. These relationships are important not only at your service site, but within your community as well. One of the most gratifying feelings is knowing that at the end of a rough day or your best day, you have a community to go home to that shares your understanding of what you are going through or what you are experiencing. Your community grants you a sense of mutuality and an immense amount of support that is not found just anywhere.”

Lauren Scheunemann: Detroit, Michigan

DATES OF SERVICE, ORIENTATION, RETREATS, and LOCAL SUPPORT

Dates of Service

The term of service is one year, beginning August 6th and ending between July 15th and 31st. Volunteers may apply for a second year. Volunteers should discuss the ending date with both their service site supervisor and their local support team during the first month of service.

Orientation

All volunteers will attend Orientation from August 6 through 11 for the 2024-2025 service year. Orientation introduces volunteers to the Mercy Volunteer Corps commitment to compassionate service, social justice, spiritual growth, community, and simplicity as well as to the charism of Mercy. During the week, volunteers have the opportunity to meet one another, the MVC staff and members of the extended MVC community. Each day includes structured time for presentations, activities and small group discussions as well as free time for reflection and socializing. Volunteers provide their transportation to Orientation. Travel from Orientation to the site is the responsibility of the service site.



Midyear Retreats

During the year, Community Coordinators and local support teams collaborate in planning regional retreats for the volunteers. Volunteers will attend two midyear retreats between Orientation and Transition Retreat. These retreats are held to nurture bonds among geographically close communities, to help build and sustain the individual communities, to provide volunteers with an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences and to support volunteers toward continued growth.



Transition Retreat

All volunteers will attend the annual Transition Retreat. The retreat invites volunteers to contemplate the joys and challenges of the year, to honor the ways they have been transformed by the people they have met and the stories shared, and to give voice to these learnings as they begin to integrate them into choices for their future. In stepping into their role as MVC alumni, the volunteers are encouraged to continue to live lives rooted in a spirit of mercy and hope.



Local Support

A local team welcomes the volunteers, supports them in their personal and communal growth, and engages them in the local Mercy community. The support team meets monthly with the volunteers to companion them on their year-long journey as well as provide guidance with housing and transportation issues. Team members include MVC alumni, Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, and Companions in Mercy.



U.S. PLACEMENT

Housing

Housing is simple and furnished. There is adequate community living space and in most cases volunteers have their own bedroom. Most often volunteer residences are located near or among the people with whom the volunteers work. The service site pays the cost of rent, water, electricity, gas, and internet service. Volunteers pay their own cellular phone plans.

On-Site Transportation

Transportation to and from work and all travel related to basic individual and community needs (e.g., grocery shopping, doctor visits, occasional outings in the local area) will be provided by the sponsoring service site. In areas where public transportation is easily accessible, a bus/train/subway pass is purchased. In other locations, a vehicle is provided by the Sisters of Mercy or by the service site. As part of the local orientation, the volunteers will receive written guidelines for the use of the vehicle by the provider. Volunteers are discouraged from bringing their personal vehicles to their new location. Volunteers need to speak to their Community Coordinator or local support team if they wish to bring their personal vehicle. The request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Please be advised that Mercy Volunteers are not permitted to transport clients in their personal vehicle or a vehicle provided by the Sisters of Mercy.

Community Fund

Volunteers are paid monthly. Payment arrangements are discussed and the volunteer's first check is disbursed at Orientation. A volunteer receives \$150/month from their service sites for their community stipend, which is combined with stipends from their community members, creating a common fund to pay for food and other household expenses. In cities with a higher cost of living, volunteers will receive \$175/month. Money remaining in the community fund at the end of each month may be used for unexpected household expenses or community outings. Ideally, volunteers should end the year with no more or no less money than they began. In the event that a community has excess funds at the end of the service year, the funds will be distributed equally among the community members.



Personal Stipend

The sponsoring service site pays a volunteer a personal stipend of \$125/month. The personal stipend is for personal use and is considered taxable income.

Medical Insurance

The service site covers the cost of a volunteer's medical insurance. The volunteer will be enrolled in the medical insurance plan offered by Mercy Volunteer Corps. Coverage begins on the first day of Orientation and extends to July 31. The volunteer may elect to decline the MVC insurance and remain on their parent's plan. The parent will be reimbursed the volunteer's portion of the monthly premium, up to the cost of the MVC plan. The volunteer must provide documentation of the monthly premium and the number of persons covered on the plan to the Community Coordinator in order to receive reimbursement. Under no circumstances is a volunteer to be without medical insurance. Volunteers are responsible for their own eye and dental care expenses.

Deductible: The service site covers the deductible required by the medical insurance policy, up to the cost of the MVC plan if the volunteer remains on their parent's plan.

Copays: The volunteer is responsible for \$25/month of co-payments (doctor visits, new prescriptions initiated during their term of service, and emergency room visits). The site covers the remaining cost for required medical care if co-payments surpass \$25 in a given month, up to \$1000 for the term of service.

Pre-Existing Conditions: If a volunteer suffers from a pre-existing medical condition, the volunteer is responsible for all costs associated with that condition to the extent that they are not covered by the medical insurance.

Medical Emergency Fund

The sponsoring service site earmarks \$100 per year, per volunteer, to be used in the event of a medical emergency. Emergency money is not allocated to the volunteer unless there is a medical emergency. Medical emergencies include emergency dental treatment, emergency eye treatment, or a mental health emergency. The volunteer should contact their Community Coordinator to gain approval for the allocation of the emergency money.

Taxes

Each volunteer is responsible for any personal tax liability, such as taxes owed on wages earned, social security or pension payments, or investment income.

Extending the Circle

Mercy Volunteers are invited to extend the circle of Mercy Volunteer Corps to their family and friends through fundraising efforts. This fundraising allows family and friends to partner with their volunteer in the experience and assists Mercy Volunteer Corps in providing a quality program that makes the service possible. Each volunteer is encouraged to raise \$500 in support of programmatic expenses. Volunteers will be provided with resources for fundraising. At the completion of service, a volunteer will receive a \$100 allowance for every \$500 raised.

Completion Stipend

Upon successful completion of the full term of service, the volunteer receives a completion stipend of \$200. This stipend will be released with July's stipend. This stipend is considered taxable income.

Relocation

At the end of the term of service, the service site covers the volunteer's transportation expenses from the service site to their home. The Community Coordinator will assist the volunteer in booking the travel. If the volunteer chooses not to relocate to their home at the end of the term of service, they will receive a relocation allowance comparable to the cost of travel home.

Vacation

MVC requires sponsoring service sites to grant volunteers 10 workdays for vacation during the year. At some service sites, vacation days may be dictated by formal seasonal/holiday breaks. Sponsoring service sites must provide Mercy Volunteers with the same number of holidays and sick days, bereavement leave, and other compensatory time allotted to the site's full-time employees.

MVC-Related Time Off

Volunteers are allowed additional time off to travel to and attend MVC Midyear and Transition Retreats. On occasion, volunteers may be invited to represent MVC at events that promote and sustain the MVC program. A volunteer should consult their site supervisor to request release from work. The decision is left to the discretion of the site supervisor.

Renewal of Service

A volunteer who is interested in renewing for a second year should submit a renewal application to their MVC Community Coordinator by January 1 in order to ensure placement. Renewal applications will be accepted after that date so long as the position has not been filled.



INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENT

Housing

Housing is simple and furnished. There is adequate community living space and most often volunteers have their own bedroom. Volunteer residences are located near or among the people with whom the volunteers work.

Mercy Volunteer Corps and the service sites pay for the monthly cost of rent, utilities, and transportation. In a spirit of solidarity with the local community, volunteers use local phone service and are not permitted to maintain an international phone or data plan. The residence and service sites are equipped with wifi. If the volunteer housing sustains damage caused by the volunteer(s) or their visitors during the course of the service year, the cost of necessary repairs will be the responsibility of the volunteer(s).

On-Site Transportation

Transportation to and from work and all travel related to basic individual and community needs (e.g., grocery shopping, doctor visits) is provided by Mercy Volunteer Corps and the sponsoring site. Volunteers most often use public buses to travel.

Community Fund

Volunteers are paid monthly. A volunteer receives \$150 USD/month for their community stipend, which is combined with stipends from their community members, creating a common fund to pay for food and other household expenses. Money remaining in the community fund at the end of each month may be used for unexpected household expenses or community outings. Ideally, volunteers should end the year with no more or no less money than they began. In the event that a community has excess funds at the end of the service year, the funds will be distributed equally among the community members.

Personal Stipend

The volunteer receives a personal stipend of approximately \$85USD/month. The amount is reflective of the cost of living in the country.

Medical Insurance and Related Expenses/Emergency Fund

MVC assumes responsibility for the volunteer's medical insurance during the service year and seeks coverage that is specifically designed for living abroad. The insurance plan does not cover routine primary care and volunteers are encouraged to be up to date on all primary care needs before their departure.

Deductible: MVC covers the deductible required by the medical insurance policy.

Pre-Existing Conditions: If a volunteer has a pre-existing medical condition, the volunteer is responsible for all costs associated with that condition to the extent that they are not covered by the medical insurance.

The Mercy Volunteer Corps program retains a fund for emergency expenses that may arise. Examples of emergency expenses to be incurred by Mercy Volunteer Corps include: emergency health care treatment that is not covered through the international insurance policy, non-medical emergency evacuation, or emergency trip home due to a life-threatening illness or death of an immediate family member. Any questions about the nature of a volunteer emergency should be directed to the MVC Community Coordinator.

Taxes

Each volunteer is responsible for any personal U.S. tax liability (e.g., taxes owed on wages earned prior to and/or following the completion of the term of service, Social Security or pension payments, or investment income). Each volunteer assumes full responsibility for filing any required U.S. tax documents before, during, and following their term of service.

Extending the Circle

Mercy Volunteers are invited to extend the circle of Mercy Volunteer Corps to their family and friends through fundraising efforts. This fundraising allows family and friends to partner with their volunteer in their experience and assists Mercy Volunteer Corps in providing a quality program that makes the service possible. International volunteers commit to fundraising \$1,500 for each year of service toward the programmatic costs which support the volunteer's expenses. Prior to departure for service, the volunteer must have demonstrated a good faith effort toward their fundraising goal. Volunteers are provided with resources for fundraising. At the completion of service, a volunteer will receive a \$100 allowance for every \$500 raised beyond the \$1,500 requirement.

Preparation and Re-Entry

Commitment to Discernment

Mercy Volunteer Corps desires to partner with individuals who value and commit to an intentional process of discernment. This mutual discernment is characterized by a commitment from both the applicant and MVC to ongoing prayerful reflection throughout the application and screening processes on whether the applicant and MVC will be well-matched (e.g., in terms of needs, values, and readiness for international placement). This spirit of mutual discernment continues in the placement process and throughout a volunteer's term of service as questions and needs arise.

"I realized quickly that a year of service is not about changing an entire system nonetheless about "changing the world," but about committing to always having another person in front of you to love, and to never say no to loving one more person."

Anna Fedoryk: Guyana, South America

Discernment Days

In addition to the commitment to mutual discernment, there are formal steps in the discernment process. The process begins with a conversation with MVC staff and the completion of the application. The initial screening of the application includes a video interview. Appropriate applicants then attend one of three virtual Discernment Days (February 17, March 1 or April 13, 2024). The Discernment Day offers a reflective environment where candidates gather to learn more about the program and share with others who are discerning a call to cross-cultural service. After attending the discernment day, the applicant participates in a second interview, after which MVC shares its final decision with the applicant. At any point during this discernment process, MVC may recommend applicants consider the program within the United States.

Cross-Cultural Training

MVC is committed to quality and thorough cross-cultural preparation for international volunteers, to ensure a rewarding experience for the volunteer, the local community, the service sites, and MVC. Mercy Volunteers placed internationally attend a preparation program for cross-cultural service and living held over the summer ahead of their August departure. MVC provides for the travel and program costs for this training.

Immunizations

MVC will provide a list of required immunizations. Volunteers are responsible for the costs of all immunizations.

Re-Entry Allowance and Retreat

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides each volunteer serving internationally a re-entry allowance of \$500 at the end of each completed year of service. Mercy Volunteer Corps sends returned volunteers to a re-entry workshop for all international volunteers who have completed their term of service. MVC assumes responsibility for the travel and program costs. This workshop is typically offered about 3 months after the date of re-entry. The workshop provides a prayerful retreat setting where volunteers have the opportunity to share and process their experiences in service and their transition since returning to their dominant culture.



Solidarity Policies

Commitment to Not Travel Home

In a spirit of solidarity with the local community, volunteers commit to not travel home during their term of service. MVC maintains this policy for the reasons stated below:

- travel abroad is a luxury not available to many people among whom the volunteers live and serve;
- the process of acculturation and immersion to living in a new culture is challenging and takes time;
- regular contact with or a visit to one's home culture can disrupt this critical process; and
- a choice to utilize funds outside of the stipends provided could disrupt the cohesion of the MVC community, particularly when only volunteers with substantial family or personal funds could even consider traveling home.

Travel to Surrounding Countries

In the same spirit of solidarity, volunteers commit to not travel to nearby countries during the term of service. If a volunteer wishes to travel to surrounding countries it should be done upon completion of the term of service before returning to the U.S.

Visitors

Though volunteers commit to not travel home, friends and family are most welcome to visit. Visits are a great opportunity to welcome family and friends to the service experience and provide a context for visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the volunteer's life along with the culture and daily realities of the local community. We ask that visitors plan trips no sooner than January in order to allow time for the volunteer to adjust to the local culture and lifestyle.

Dating and Personal Relationships

A Mercy Volunteer is sent by MVC to an entire community of people. This is the fundamental relationship for the volunteer and all personal relationships must be considered in terms of their effect on it. Friendships within the community are encouraged and when balanced with the primary MVC commitment can be a significant part of the experience and enhance the volunteer's ability to live out the core values. Mercy Volunteer Corps does, however, expect that volunteers will not enter into dating relationships within the local community during their term of service. Such relationships often interfere with the volunteer's ability to maintain their commitment to the core values and may have serious implications for MVC's relationship with the local community as well. Cultural differences in norms around dating also influence this policy.



SHORT TERM PLACEMENT

Mercy Volunteer Corps offers summer service experiences in the following placements:

Mercy Ecospirituality Center in Benson, Vermont. This six week experience focuses on care of the Earth. Volunteers tend vegetable gardens, care for farm animals, assist with farm projects, offer hospitality for retreatants and strive to live in harmony with creation.

ARISE Adelante in Alamo, Texas. This eight week experience focuses on immigration. Volunteers serve in the summer program, assisting in planning and carrying out activities for children ages 3.5-14 years while coming to better understand the realities at the border.

Housing

Housing is provided at no cost to the volunteer. Residences are simple and furnished. There is adequate community living space and in most cases volunteers have their own bedroom.

On-Site Transportation

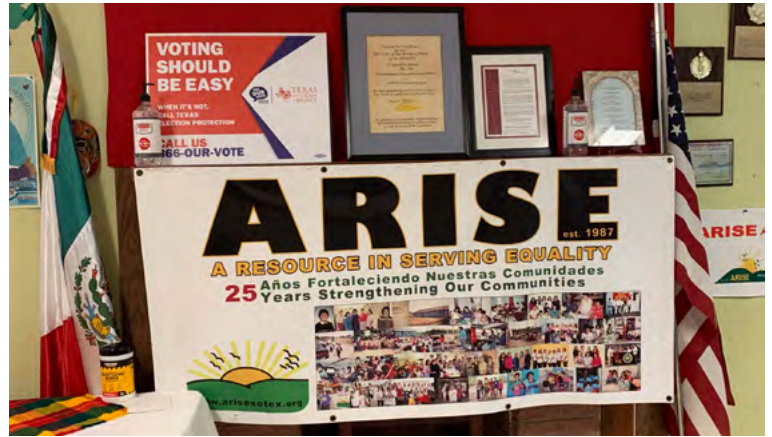
A vehicle is available for travel related to work along with basic individual and community needs (e.g., grocery shopping, occasional outings in the local area). Volunteers will receive written guidelines for the use of the vehicle.

Stipends

Transportation and community costs (groceries, household items) are provided for on a weekly basis. Volunteers receive a personal stipend distributed at the start of the term (\$300 for Mercy Ecospirituality, \$400 for ARISE) and will be reimbursed up to \$500 for travel to and from the service site at the start and end of the experience.

Medical Insurance

Volunteers are responsible for providing their own medical insurance during their term of service. Under no circumstances is a volunteer to be without medical insurance.



MEC is truly a sacred space that will transform your understanding of and connection with the Divine in all of nature. If you like to wake to the sounds of the world coming alive as you breathe in the clean crisp cool air of Vermont and prepare for a day of working closely with the land, nurturing and caring for the farm animals, or soaking in the silence of a gentle breeze then this is the place for you.

Chris Thompson: Benson, Vermont

Mercy Volunteer Corps

APPENDIX A

Mercy Volunteer Corps Application Process

STEP 1: Verify that you meet the following qualifications: at least 21 years of age for the year-long program (20 for short-term); a high school graduate; no dependents; and currently residing in the United States.

STEP 2: Submit the brief form on MVC's apply page to start your application. Following your submission, you will be directed to our online application.

STEP 3: Review the materials and complete the online application. For the year-long program this includes an application form, written responses, resume, transcripts, three reference forms and medical forms. For short-term, transcripts are not required and two references are needed. The online application does not need to be completed in one sitting and can be saved and continued at a later time. Medical forms should be submitted following acceptance for U.S. and Short-Term placements and submitted during the application process for International placements.

STEP 4: Submit your application. Mercy Volunteer Corps accepts applications and confirms placements on a rolling basis. The priority deadline for all placements is January 22. The preferred deadline for U.S. and final deadline for International and Short-Term is March 22. U.S. applications will continue to be accepted for open positions until the June 22 final deadline.

STEP 5: When your application materials are received by MVC, you will receive an email confirmation. MVC will begin to process your application. Once we have received your full application, it takes about 6 weeks to move through the entire process.

STEP 6: Once the initial review phase is completed, a MVC representative will contact you for a personal interview. The interview lasts 1-1.5 hours and is conducted via video call. Applicants applying for International placement also attend a virtual discernment day after their initial interview.

STEP 7: You will receive a letter via email, extending or declining acceptance into Mercy Volunteer Corps. You should receive this letter no later than 2 weeks following your personal interview (or discernment day for International placement).

STEP 8: Upon receiving a letter of acceptance, a MVC staff member will contact you to discuss service site placement. Your application will be sent to an agreed upon service site. A site representative will contact you for a phone or video interview. Following the interview, you and the site representative will contact MVC to notify whether it is a good fit no more than 48 hours following the interview. If it is a fit, you are placed. If the site is not a good fit for either party, further conversation will ensue and another site will be chosen.

APPENDIX B

Information for Service Sites

Contributions of a U.S. Year-Long Service Site

The following list represents an overview of the financial responsibilities of a service site. The specific service site obligations described herein, and throughout the Volunteer Handbook, are set forth in greater detail in the MVC Service Agreement.

Sponsoring service sites pay a \$16,000 flat fee to Mercy Volunteer Corps for each volunteer. Sites may pay this fee monthly, quarterly, or as a lump sum. MVC administers the funds. The flat fee payment includes the following:

- \$1200 site assessment fee;
- rent and utilities;
- personal stipend and community fund;
- transportation fund;
- health insurance and emergency fund;
- transportation from Orientation to service site; and
- transportation expenses to return home at the end of the year.

Site Selection Process

Mercy Volunteer Corps chooses a service site based on several factors:

- the resonance of its mission with MVC's identity statements and the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas;
- the city location offering multiple volunteer placement opportunities so as to allow for a volunteer community of at least four persons;
- the opportunity for the volunteer to engage in direct service as well as advocacy efforts;
- the formative experience, support, and supervision the site offers a volunteer;

- demonstrated gap between the needs of the local community and the lack of financial and personnel resources of the service site to meet those needs; and
- confirmation from that site that the volunteer's role does not deprive a local person from being hired into a salaried position.

*Please note that MVC prioritizes city locations where there is an active Mercy presence for site feasibility and the ongoing development of volunteers.

Service Site Application Process

New Site Request

To apply, new sites should:

- contact Mercy Volunteer Corps for a site application;
- review the most recent Mercy Volunteer Corps Handbook; and
- submit the completed application and include brochures, press clips, and other materials that will help Mercy Volunteer Corps to know the organization better

Upon review of the site application, Mercy Volunteer Corps will arrange a site visit from a member of the MVC staff if the site is deemed a potential good fit for the program.

Active Sites

Active sites in the U.S. must apply for renewal each year. Site applications will be emailed to each active site in late October. All applications must be received by the Community Coordinator by the first Friday of December to be considered for the following service year.

APPENDIX C

Programmatic Goals

At the end of the year, it would be our hope that Mercy Volunteers would have been exposed to an intentional way of life that included:

- a commitment to service offered in a spirit of mutuality, accompaniment and compassionate presence which seeks to bring us together in relationship and remind us of our interconnectedness;
- an understanding of how culture shapes all aspects of one's life and identity along with the friction and power dynamics that may arise with the meeting of cultures;
- analysis of how social structures and implicit bias lead to injustice, disenfranchisement, oppression, and marginalization;
- a critical analysis of and willingness to challenge systemic racism and white institutional values to promote racial justice and race equity;
- an understanding of the history and spirit of the Sisters of Mercy and a sense of the Mercy Volunteer's role as integral to the Circle of Mercy;
- a personal relationship with the Mercy Community and an invitation to the various ways to engage with MVC and Mercy as alumni;
- various avenues to engage in advocacy for systemic change in the areas of the Mercy Critical Concerns;
- enkindling a personal passion to be an advocate and agent for change as their liberation is rooted in the liberation of all beings;
- the acknowledgement of the toll of bearing witness to suffering and the critical nature of reflection and self-care practices in order to sustain one's ministry;
- an understanding of their own spirituality as an ever deepening aspect of themselves promoted and enriched by reflection, self-awareness, connections, rituals and practices;
- the general concept of spirituality as well as exposure to and appreciation of spiritualities different from their own including Mercy Spirituality;
- a deepened personal awareness that invites vulnerability and the creation of healthy, meaningful and respectful interpersonal relationships;
- a basic understanding of group dynamics and development of practical tools to manage conflict;
- simple living as a countercultural and life-giving way of being that is rooted in relationship and presence thus revealing our deep interconnectedness to one another, Earth and all creation;
- consideration of the implications of our actions on creation and a call to act toward living in harmony with the Earth through sustainable practices; and
- practical aspects of simple living i.e. budgeting, responsible technology use, sharing in meal planning/preparation, chores and home maintenance.



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