

Maureen McHeffey

Public Service Month Essay Contest

As I approach my graduation from Seton Hall University, I am able to reflect on all of the wonderful blessings that have come my way since I began here less than four years ago. I can look back and thank the University for its role in developing my sense of servitude to the global community and I can look forward and thank the University for all of the tools it has given me to become a servant leader. Perhaps one of the most significant experiences that I have had during my time as a Seton Hall student was participating in the Division of Volunteer Efforts 2005 Spring Break Service Trip to El Salvador.

While I had long known of my dedication to serving others, it was through this particular experience that my true passion was fully ignited. Before I left El Salvador to return to Seton Hall, I made a promise to myself that I would not forget the suffering I had seen in the eyes of the poor nor would I forget the passion that I had felt to do my part in alleviating that suffering. I have kept that promise by returning to El Salvador a second time, by fundraising for various projects and by coordinating a pen-pal program between Salvadorian orphans and American students studying Spanish; I continue to look for ways in which I can fulfill the promise that I made not long ago.

Those who have worked in developing countries such as El Salvador realize the incredible amount of need that they have for the same things that, as Americans, we take for granted; programs such as those which meet basic health needs and promote education may be nothing more than a dream for many of these people. One

characteristic of El Salvador that struck me as particularly underdeveloped was the lack of affordable and accessible healthcare for the majority of people.

In May 2006, I will graduate with a nursing degree and therefore, I will be in an ideal position to lead projects aimed at improving the health of the Salvadorian people. I plan to begin with the children who I served at a Catholic orphanage in San Miguel. Initiatives that I plan to undertake with the children include teaching proper dental care and hand-washing techniques as well as funding a clean water project, all with the hopes of promoting the health of the children and teaching disease prevention. Another idea I have includes working with communities to set up low-cost health clinics, which will be staffed by community members. This will provide access to affordable healthcare as well as an internal source of income for the communities. By no means will I be able to do any of this without the help of likeminded individuals who see the importance of this mission. With this in mind, I have begun to network with people who are either interested in participating in such an endeavor or have expressed an interest in funding such a mission.

Since realizing the mission that God has set before me, I have worked to develop the qualities that would make me the best leader that I can be. Two particular qualities that I have been blessed with are my strong sense of commitment and my sincere compassion. I have found my sense of commitment to be one of the driving forces behind the service work I have done in El Salvador. This quality has proven its ability to lift me up when I feel frustrated and to empower me through difficult times. My sense of compassion has guided many of my life decisions thus far, including my decision to pursue a nursing degree.. My inability to remove myself from the pain and suffering of my brothers and sisters has allowed me to remain loyal to this and other causes. Without

my determination and compassion, I am simply not Maureen and I stand no chance in accomplishing the huge tasks that God has laid before me.

I consider myself blessed to have found a home at Seton Hall University, where, through the grace of God and the intercession of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, I have been able to fully appreciate the importance of being a servant leader in this global society.