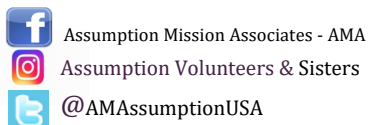




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*"The Blessed Virgin
calls us to rise with her
to a celestial life by
placing our thoughts
and affections in
heaven."*

St. Marie Eugenie



The AMA UPDATE

August 2017

Letter from the Director

Dear AMA's, RA's, and AMA Families and Friends!

Happy Summer! Another volunteer year for AMA has come to an end as Liz and Elliot return home to the U.S. In this issue, we'll hear a heartfelt reflection from Elliot's parents on his two years of service, and also revisit a reflection from AMA alum Laura Kelly Fanucci in anticipation of the Feast of Our Lady of the Assumption on August 15th.

It has been 160 days since I started as Director of AMA but who's counting? My days have been filled with getting to know the Sisters and witnessing their presence to others at the vital programming they bring to the people of the Worcester. I have also met their many friends -- the Assumptionists, the Cana community and countless others who hold the Sisters dear. I've been involved in the preparation for the 200th Birthday Party of St. Marie Eugenie and Mother Therese Emmanuel. The congregation is holding a pilgrimage event for young people in France, and I'm going along with the Sisters and 11 young lay-people. Learning how to do the group dance choreographed by the Philly people has been the biggest surprise of my job. I don't remember that in the job description!

A highlight of my time so far has been getting to know Elliot and Liz from afar via Skype, email and Facebook. We have had three opportunities to chat and I can see why the Sisters speak so fondly of each of them—they are very special young people! I thank them for their kindness, openness and patience as I learn how to accompany AMA's on their journey of service. As they began to wind down their year of service, they're using a handbook to help with their transition back to life in the States. The Sisters and I are looking forward to our "debrief day" in August, and hearing all about their year abroad.

Liz is already preparing for her graduate work in physical therapy at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut this fall and has been reading and studying about muscles! I am in awe of her drive and dedication to her new path while still giving 100% to her work in Newcastle.

During his last few months Elliot remained focused on finishing up his labeling project at the school. He commented that he wanted to make the most of his remaining days with the great friends he made over the year. At our last chat he shared a plan to show some of them a party game he played in college before he left. He said it would be a toned down version, much to the relief of this new Director!

Liz and Elliot, we want you to know that we will be holding you in our thoughts and prayers as you both transition to life back home and begin this next chapter of your life. May you be buoyed by all the experiences and people you have met this past year. If life seems challenging, and anxiety creeps in, turn to our Blessed Mother and her great example of complete trust in God. The moment that Mary said "yes" to God, a life of transition and uncertainty began for her, but God had great plans for her here and in heaven! By your "yes" to AMA, you placed all your trust in God, so keep saying "yes" and know that you will be given all the strength, courage and perseverance you will need to face what might be coming next. I leave you with this prayer. - Sandy

Peace Within

May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be confident knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us. (based on the writings of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Saint Teresa of Avila)



Sr. Mary Ann with Liz during her visit to England in March.

Elliot's Parents Reflect on His Year of Service

“It was fulfilling as parents to see our son was following in our footsteps.”

Allison Simmons-Uvin writes, “As parents, we have always made sure that our children were safe, healthy, and had as many opportunities academically, recreationally, and socially as we could afford and believed were necessary. We also made it a focus to instill a sense of purpose that was broader than the individual aspirations our children had. Both of us also lived and worked abroad to broaden our minds and expand our world views by living in cultures and working with people who had world views and experiences that were – at least initially – different from ours. We also emphasized the importance of service to others and a respect for nature and the spiritual and religious mind sets that can help with realizing our purpose here on earth.

So, when Elliot decided to pursue his Worcester experience as a volunteer, we were proud parents. When Elliot decided to continue his service overseas in the Philippines under more challenging circumstances, we were delighted. It was fulfilling as parents to see our son was following in our footsteps. We could not be happier with his choices. We know this experience has changed him forever. His world view has broadened and his compassion has deepened. We could not be more appreciative than we are of the great opportunity AMA provided.”

Johan comments: “There is nothing more rewarding for a father than seeing his son intentionally pursue volunteer experiences that involve a sense of purpose that is greater than his own.

We have been thrilled with Elliot's experience as an AMA these last two years. It is important for people to go and live outside of their comfort zones and to see how other people live and see the world. For Elliot, it was also important to see how faith is part of one's life and to understand the importance of community whether that was in Worcester or in the Philippines. Faith and community, indeed, have been the constant themes in Elliot's journey as an AMA. Although miles apart, the adjustment to both communities was a journey of uncertainty, hope, love and acceptance.

For us as parents, it is important for us to see the growth in him in his adaptation to new experiences and working through challenges and difficulties that come with living and being a part of a new and initially unfamiliar community. It was also great for us that Elliot came to see how similar we all are in so many ways and that common values, acceptance of people and their lives is what holds us together.

When he first arrived in both the Philippines and Worcester, it was a challenge. The difference between how he lived in college and in Worcester was stark. The difference between living in the U.S. and living in the Philippines was even starker. He was initially unsure of how he would adjust to eating rice each day. We could see how that could be a challenge but we wondered why facing a class of forty-five 6th graders who were waiting for him to command the class and teach English was not his first concern.

Elliot's Mom has reflected how she had the pleasure of visiting him in both Worcester and Sibalom and seeing how he had adjusted to both worlds. In the Philippines, he showed us his life, and the friendships and connections he made in what he thought was a very different world from his. We saw his appreciation for the culture and the ease of moving through it, although he is very tall there. We know it was not easy, we know he struggled, but we were confident he would grow to love his new environments and we were happy to see that he had.

Elliot's AMA years as a volunteer are coming to a close and we know he will miss it, but know he has developed relationships and connections through this experience that are life long and will help to guide his next adventures. It has been a wonderful journey for us as well. Congrats, Elliot, on another successful year.”



Elliot, his mother and his grandmother enjoying a Philippine beach

A Different Assumption for Today

by Laura Kelly Fanucci

You might assume, if you knew I was an Associate Missionary of the Assumption, that I had something to say about today's feast [*August 15 - The Assumption of Our Lady*]. But here's the truth about how I started my AMA year in France.

I came to Compiègne, jet-lagged and jumpy to start this post-graduate service stint, with just a wee bit of cradle Catholic baggage stuffed inside my giant backpack. Fresh from college graduation, ink barely dry on the diploma, I felt shaky-sure about faith but full of questions about church. What was the role of women? What was Catholicism's hang-up with sexuality? Where was my place in the whirling middle of it all? When I showed up in the pebbled courtyard of 3 Square Eglise Saint-Germain, I wasn't even sure what I was seeking. Clarity? Conviction? Christ-in-others? Maybe all of the above.

But what I found the moment that big front door swung open was one single certain truth: these Sisters of the Assumption knew how to welcome. They were all wide smiles and warm embraces and let-us-take-your-bags and can-we-make-you-a-cup-of-tea and we-are-so-delighted-you-are-here!

Until that moment I had known few French people and even fewer religious sisters. But suddenly these five women buzzing around me in long burgundy skirts and pale violet veils were bursting apart all of my stereotypes.

They were loving and laughter and compassion and generosity. They were a Mary-and-Elizabeth welcome every time I stepped over their old stone doorstep, before Mass or after work or any time they invited us volunteers over for dinner, which was so often I still hear Sr. Anne's wise words echo every time I set an extra plate at my table for an unexpected guest: if there's food enough for five, there's food enough for six. And if there's food enough for six, there's food enough for seven. You see?

Every year I think of the sisters on this feast day. The women I knew who gave their lives to the Assumption. They taught me a different way of being in relationship with others: the women praying and working beside them in their community, the children running around the pews in the parish, the adults with disabilities whom they served in L'Arche homes. They taught me how truth and love are embodied – in laughter, in dancing, in dessert, in daily prayer. And they helped me change my mind about Assumption. They helped me come to see that embodied love is what today is about.

I think back to a time when I tripped on Marian feasts like today, when I stumbled on my own assumptions of what dogma and doctrine meant. Then a year spent in community with women whose love for Christ and the church hummed in their every breath, who gave the length of their years and the strength of their bodies in quiet service to all who needed welcome – that year changed everything.

Did I know then that the sisters' faces – wizened and youthful and pale and dark – might be the closest I could glimpse to Mary's own? Over time my assumptions shifted, slowly like the soft rub on stone over a well-worn step. I weigh what I believe now – about women and sexuality and Christ and the church – with what I thought I understood then. And I realize that I see a feast like today in different light: shades of mystery and possibility. And above all love and relationship, which is the essence of who God is and what we are called to be.

Laura served as an AMA in Compiègne, France, 2003-2004 and is a graduate of Notre Dame University. Laura describes herself on her web-page as a mother, writer, wonderer. A seeker of God in the chaos of laundry and life with little ones. Learn more about Laura at <http://www.motheringspirit.com>. Her book *Everyday Sacrament: The Messy Grace of Parenting* is available from Liturgical Press, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble. Her latest book, *Mercy: God's Nature, Our Challenge*, published in 2016, is available from Little Rock Scripture Study.



TEAM RA RAISES ALMOST \$2000.00 FOR HOMELESS IN WORCESTER!



Team Assumption Sisters participated in the annual Walk for the Homeless in Worcester on Sunday, May 21st. Our team was packed with friends, Cana Community members and former AMA's! It was a beautiful day for making new friends along the three mile walk. Afterwards we enjoyed each other's company under a shade tree in Elm Park and ate hamburgers and hot dogs!

Left picture: front row - Mary Laprade, Claire Keating (Cana), Sr. Mary Ann, Sr. Nuala ; back row - Emile and Flannery Kearney Audebrand (AMA alum), Megan Hannon (AMA alum), Sr. Viviane, Ally Longchamps (Cana), Kraig Kissinger, Sr. Catherine, Mark Brown, Paul Piwko

Right picture: Sr. Therese, Sandy Piwko, Sr. Viviane, Flannery, Kraig and Emile

LIZ & ELLIOT HAVE VISITORS!



Liz and Sr. Mary Ann in Tynemouth, visiting the fair with Sisters Sylvia, Elizabeth and Jill of the RA Newcastle community.



Elliot's friend Mary Laprade joined his mother and grandmother on their visit to the Philippines last April.