



# AMA Update

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## Letter from the Director

Dear AMA's, RA's, and AMA families and friends,

"All good things must come to an end." We have all used this idiom from time to time in our lives. The phrase coined by English author Geoffrey Chaucer is used as a reminder, or an expression of acceptance, that everything is temporary. As Serafina and Myra begin to wind down their time in Worcester and Newcastle, they will be looking back on the many memories they have made and will begin the process of saying good-bye to the people at their projects and new friends they met.

This month's quote by St. Marie Eugenie reflects what an AMA year is all about—the giving of oneself to the other without reserve. I have had the privilege to accompany Myra and Serafina over these past months and witnessed their self-giving to the people they have served. Whether it was providing healthy snack options (fruit smoothies!) to the kids at Mentoring or welcoming children with disabilities to experience Kids Kabin for the first time, these and many other acts bore witness to the selfless love of Christ through these women!

We thank you both for your dedication, creativity, and the love you gave during your AMA experience. We wish you both well as you embark on your next adventure!

**"I abandon myself to you without reserve. I ask you for the grace to serve you alone...to adore you and bring others to you."**

**-St. Marie Eugenie**

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11*

## Five Months in the Woo!

It's been 5 months since I started my AMA journey in Worcester. I can't believe how the time has flown by. Working with the Sisters has been such an incredible and indescribable experience. Seeing the love they have for their neighbors and the community at large is infectious. Each sister I meet has become an inspiration and role model to me. I learn from them to love the human spirit in whatever way it is presented

Serafina with the Sisters, Holy Cross volunteers and our Girls With DREAMS group.





Serafina pictured here with her ESL class.

Each program I've been a part of has welcomed me with loving open arms. Especially the ESL program. After every class I would tell my ESL students "good job today"; they would always respond with, "Thank you Teacher, you do good job too!" Being able to converse with them and learn about their lives through our limited interactions has brought me so much joy. Watching them develop their skills and grow in their confidence has been remarkable. I will truly miss my students and I hope they continue their progress.



Since most of my programs have ended, I am spending most of my time in the garden. Being a part of nature, it feels like there is always something that needs to be done, something is always overgrown. Thinking about that can be overwhelming, so I go back to the plants in the soil that I put there. I water them, weed them, prune them and talk to them. It is a lot of work and I am constantly reminded that I will most likely not be able to reap the benefits of what I sowed but it doesn't bother me. I tell myself that gardening isn't for me, it's for the glory of God. I would like to cook and eat what I've grown for myself, but I like sharing it more. Giving people access to free healthy food has always been a goal of mine and being able to do that with a community garden is a dream come true.



At this moment, I am in New Mexico with our sisters in Chaparral. It's very different here, it is rainy and overcast and everyone is delighted to see it. The sisters speak Spanish to each other and I can understand some of it, but a lot is lost on me. I am going to be helping them with the summer camp they run for the community. The first week of the camp is also the week the sisters intake a new group of refugees who have just come across the nearby border with Mexico. Tonight at dinner we talked about our interactions with refugees; hearing their stories from the people they've met and helped reminded me of all the people I've met seeking safety and prosperity. There is so much wrong with the system in place, but being here with sisters dedicated to giving humanity and love to people in such need of it brings me hope that human migration won't always be as difficult as it is made to be.

*"I tell myself that gardening isn't for me, it's for the glory of God."*

## Lessons on Love

I'm coming up on two months left of my service program. And it truly feels like time is flying by so quickly. These two months will feel like two seconds. In one of my community's recent weekly prayer meetings, we reflected on our experience as an educational endeavor. We looked at it as if it were another year in school, perhaps a very long service-learning project. I thought this was an appropriate way to think back on our time because the Assumption Sisters began with a mission of educating children and opened up several schools, and still run many schools around the world today.



Myra with AV volunteers—Abigail, Darrel, Joseph and Rugile

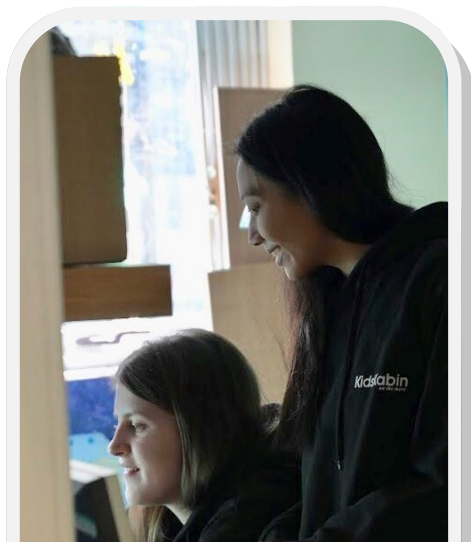
To guide us I asked: What are the most important lessons you've taken away from this year and what is something you still want to learn about more? We took a few minutes to think about the kind of people we were when we arrived and how we might've changed since, drawing on the values that St. Marie Eugenie tried to instill in her pupils in her very first school – strength of character, generosity, simplicity, truthfulness, and courage. For me, the biggest lessons I learned came down to choosing love – when dealing with difficult behavior from children at Kids Kabin, to navigating community life with two new people, and taking the time for self-care.

I have the privilege of working with very imaginative and friendly kids five days a week at Kids Kabin in a great facility that provides so many creative opportunities. As expected, I have to dole out disciplinary

***"I have to dole out disciplinary measures when kids are not at their best and their behavior is negative and destructive. It is in these moments when I sense a problem arising that I need to choose love over anger and bitterness."***

measures when kids are not at their best and their behavior is negative and destructive. It is in these moments, when I sense a problem arising, I need to choose love over anger and bitterness. It is frustrating when a child repeatedly doesn't follow directions. It is irritating when you feel like you're having to settle the same conflict week after week. It is hurtful when you hear personal attacks.

In response, I've learned that things won't always be fair in the sense that the same treatment cannot be given to everyone. Every child comes from a different background with a different way of navigating life. If there is a path of what is morally right, none of us are ever stepping in those footsteps at all times. Some of us stray a little more than others and we need guidance and love to get us back on it. Sometimes being too harsh— without recognizing where a person stands, without



Myra and Rugile in the Kids Kabin office.

acknowledging they got knocked off that path somehow (either of their own fault or from the influence of others), without showing mercy and understanding, can lead the person even further from the moral path. I've learned to be more of a judge in these cases. I learned to trust my instincts, to show compassion, to listen first when I'm inclined to demand, to inquire before I assume, to take a breath and have patience before letting my emotions get the best of me. Like St. Marie Eugenie, I had to believe "in the possibility for good in even the most difficult child".

***"Living in community must always come with sacrifice, which is a form of love."***

Putting three strangers in a house to live together for a year in a foreign country sounds like the premise of an overdramatized reality show that I would not want to watch, let alone be in. Yet, that was my life this year. And of course there were times of drama, but they are overcome by the times we've struggled together and enjoyed each other's company. Living in community must always come with sacrifice, which is a form of love. I was used to living more independently before I moved to Newcastle. I decided when I wanted to go grocery shopping and clean the house and schedule events. In the beginning of the year, it seemed like a simple adjustment to make these decisions together. But as time went on, we saw how set each of us were in our own ways and compromise became the most important word. The best compromises came when I knew I was considering everyone's needs and respecting their boundaries and preferences, and I felt that my community was calculating the same. No matter what negative feelings you are harnessing, it is important to put them aside and come together to move forward. It is easy to love someone when you do everything the same way, but it is a rewarding challenge to find a way to love someone who is different.



At any given moment of the day, I know I have a support system either from friends and family at home or from my community here in Newcastle. But I've also learned that I know myself best, and therefore love myself best. Being far from home can make you realize your own strength. I've discovered ways to pick myself up instead of always reaching out. I don't wait for anyone if I want to see a film I've been itching to see. If I wake up at dawn and want to cycle ten miles to the coast, I go for it. If I want to have a pint and watch the sunset, I feel completely content by myself. Not to say I don't invite others, but if no one is available, I know I am comfortable with my own company. Another way I seek out love for myself is simply by going to Mass. It is special knowing that no matter where I am in the world, when I step inside the Church I am surrounded by family and by people choosing to live by Christ's example.

As I look ahead to the next chapter of my life and think about how I can continue spreading the spirit of what I've learned during this year of service, I know I'll always carry the words of St. Marie Eugenie, **"Love never says, 'I have done enough.'"** I have given my time, my hard work, and a lot of love. From that, I am compelled to give so much more.

**Dinner with the Newcastle Sisters .**

