

The Greatest Among You Will Be Your Servant



Christopher News Notes

SERVING OTHERS THROUGH OUR JOBS OR IN OUR FAMILIES IS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE. But what happens when we expand outside our regular areas of service to include those facing challenging situations, be they near or far, friends or strangers? Jesus told His disciples, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:11), so He also calls each of us to help others with kindness and humility. And if we do, we should find that the greatest path to love comes from selfless service.

A Family Tradition of Service

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." —1 Peter 4:10

For the Van Woert family, it all started with a pillow. Chris and Maureen Van Woert were students at Siena University (then Siena College) in Albany, New York, when they took their first service trip with Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit housing organization that helps build or restore homes for families in need.

The crew of college students arrived in Hilton Head, South Carolina, where they demolished an old house and salvaged supplies for donation. At night, students slept on the floor of a local church, where, one restless night, Chris accidentally stole Maureen's pillow.

What started as a running joke among friends became the beginning of a love story. Chris and Maureen started dating, married in 2001, and still keep in touch with the friends they made on their Habitat trips. In fact, Chris was so wowed by the impact of his service that he helped establish an official Habitat for Humanity chapter at Siena. And in 2025, the Van Woerts' daughter Maura—a sophomore at her parents' alma mater—completed her first volunteer experience with Habitat for Humanity. "Waking up every day bright and early to give back and help a family in need in such a tremendous way was something that fills me with an overwhelming sense of pride," Maura told *The Evangelist*, the newspaper for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany.

Some of Chris and Maureen's fondest memories came from their service trips. The bond they made with other students was rooted in fun memories but also impactful moments. Chris recalled pouring concrete next to the woman whose house they were building. "We're literally laying the foundation for their future life," he said. "To know you're standing in what is going to be their bedroom, or where their kids are going to put their head down at night, and to know I'm alongside you here doing this, there's no better feeling."

Bob A. was a man with intellectual challenges who made the world a better place. He worked as an orderly in a Birmingham, Alabama hospital, performing routine tasks with great care to make patients comfortable and cheer them up.

Bob treated them with consideration and respect, remembering their preferences and problems. More importantly, he cared deeply about their welfare. His interest and concern had a way of warming the impersonal atmosphere of the hospital whenever he came into a room.

If a patient had no family or friends who visited regularly, Bob often brought a small gift, such as a few flowers or a newspaper. When one of his patients was moved to another part of the hospital for some reason, he found time to stop by for short visits during his lunch hour or when he went off duty. "It's my calling to help the sick," he once said. "It wasn't God's will that I could be a doctor, but I help the doctors."

Chris added that he and Maureen teach all their children about the importance of giving back: "I tell them all the time we're doing the Lord's work. We're providing for those who are less fortunate. We've been blessed, and we need to share those blessings."

Sisters with 'A Servant's Heart'

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me."
—Matthew 25:40

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the levee system left 80 percent of New Orleans, Louisiana, underwater. At the time, Sister Vera Butler, a Presentation sister originally from Ireland, was serving in the city at St. Joseph's Church. She and her fellow sisters evacuated prior to the storm. When they returned to the parish, they were surrounded by flooding and destruction.

But Sister Vera persevered in her mission of performing Christlike acts of service. If the church wasn't available, she would find another place out of which to aid the suffering. So, she set up a trailer in the church parking lot with the other nuns. At first, they handed out water and cleaning supplies, but over time, the women got to know the community and expanded their efforts.

Sister Vera started helping residents fill out FEMA and insurance forms, while also providing them

with clothes for job interviews. The sisters would also walk through the community seeking out anyone who needed assistance—and offering it to them.

Though Sister Vera now lives and works in San Antonio, Texas, her legacy of service in New Orleans continues in the Rebuild Center at St. Joseph's Church, which provides food, health screenings, showers, laundry, and pro bono legal services to those who are still suffering the storm's after-effects two decades later. Sister Vera recalls the people she met in New Orleans with great affection. She told the *National Catholic Reporter's* Carol Zimmermann that even after all these years, "My heart is still there."

Meanwhile, a few states north, the small town of Brooklyn, Illinois, is plagued by poverty and neglect. But Daughter of Charity Sister Julia Huiskamp serves as a beacon of light in the encircling gloom.

Sister Julia has been ministering in Brooklyn since 2023, after establishing The Thomas Terry Community Center, a safe haven for residents and children in the Thomas Terry affordable housing complex. Despite being 90 years old and witnessing the town's increasing desolation, Sister Julia remains undeterred. She told Dan Stockman of *Global Sisters Report*, "It's the kind of work Jesus had in mind in Matthew 25," when He tells His followers to feed the hungry and care for strangers.

In her daily routine, Sister Julia drives residents to doctors' appointments or laundromats. She helps residents apply for low-income assistance programs or shows kids how to use the computers at the community center. Vera Banks, the previous mayor of Brooklyn, wished she had a dozen people like Sister Julia, who she described as having "a servant's heart."

A Store For Serving Others

"Do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, but through love serve one another." —Galatians 5:13

The public may know country music star Brad Paisley for his hit songs (such as "Me Neither" and "I'm Gonna Miss Her") and his wife, Kimberly Williams-Paisley, for her acting career (*Father of the Bride, 911: Nashville*). But Nashville, Tennessee's residents admire the couple for something much more selfless: a general store for those in need.

Both Brad and Kimberly grew up with a foundation of service. In West Virginia, Brad's parents took him to hospitals and nursing homes to perform for patients and residents once he developed his musical talents. And in New York, Kimberly's mom involved her with Meals on Wheels and volunteering at a soup kitchen.

So, while living in California more than 10 years ago, Brad and Kimberly became worried that their own two sons were getting spoiled. They decided to have them volunteer at Unity Shoppe, a Santa Barbara nonprofit in which customers could

choose their own groceries free of charge. The boys loved working there and, soon after, mom and dad joined in as well. The Paisleys decided to bring this idea to Nashville and create their own "grocery store with dignity," as they described it in *Parade* magazine.

More than a place for food, The Store—as The Paisleys fittingly named it—would offer comprehensive solutions to hunger and poverty for guests. That dream finally came to fruition in March 2020 when The Store opened for one week—until COVID shut everything down. In addition, Nashville had just suffered an outbreak of tornadoes, so families were reeling from the combination of pandemic isolation and destruction.

The Paisleys didn't give up, however; they pivoted and lit a candle rather than cursing the darkness. In The Store's first year of operation, volunteers and workers delivered one million meals and truckloads of supplies to residents in need. That momentum remained after life returned to normal and The Store began welcoming shoppers. "There's so much need," Williams-Paisley said. "We're serving over a thousand families now."

The Store now offers additional support services to guests, such as music therapy, financial literacy, and medicine management. Seasonal pop-up events are organized in the area for back-to-school supplies, Christmas toys, and pet care. It's a testament to how the roots of food insecurity run deeper than just at the grocery store. Taking the time to serve all the elements of those unmet needs helps implement sustainable changes. "This is our problem, as a society," added Paisley. "[It's] something we've got to fix."


"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

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"People say, 'What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do."

—Dorothy Day