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The Essence of Service

“All other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.” This powerful statement by Mahatma Gandhi encapsulates the true meaning of service - a selfless act that enriches your life without equal. As a Cardinal Newman High School student, service becomes part of our identity. We are educated not only in academics but also socially through service to our community. Service has become a cornerstone of my life, shaping my identity and influencing my future career. But how does service truly change us, and why do we find ourselves inspired to serve, not just to meet requirements but to make a real difference?

My discovery of the true meaning of service started from an age younger than most. Like many children, I was oblivious to many aspects of the world, and the concept of serving others was novel to me. It took a devastating event to change that viewpoint, and it came in the form of the Tubbs Fire in 2017. Losing my home to the flames, my family was left with nothing but the clothes on our backs and a few items we grabbed while running out of the house. While this period was a time full of uncertainty and devastation in my household, it brought forth some memories that shaped my perceptions toward helping others. In this period of profound

uncertainty, strangers became our lifeline, donating clothes, toys, and words of encouragement. Despite my immense gratitude, I could still not comprehend why so many people were helping me, a person they had never spoken to a day in their lives. That was until my family took a trip to a donation facility to get more supplies.

My sister and I were tasked with picking out items we needed, such as shoes and toiletries. As I sifted through the piles of donations, I realized how difficult it was to find what you needed as everything was haphazardly thrown about. I found myself organizing the donations so people could find what they needed. Simply seeing other fire victims finally able to find what they needed ignited a feeling of fulfillment in me. I began to carry in donation boxes, organize them, and even help people find what they were looking for. It was the first time where, despite needing help myself, I truly chose to serve others in my community facing a similar situation.

That day at the fire donation center flipped a switch in me. I discovered what service meant to me, putting the needs of others over your wants. When you can truly look at another person's situation and understand what they are going through, much like I did following the Tubbs Fire in 2017, it makes you want to help out all the more. While my initial call to service was born from empathy, I have since grown to also recognize that we have a fundamental obligation toward others. We have a duty to ourselves and those around us to leave the world a better place than when we came into it. Whether that be fighting injustice among people or directly helping the planet, there is some way we can put our skills into the service of others. We are all God's people and need to help each other to improve the world.

As our world grows ever more fast-paced and chaotic, service has become more vital than ever. Volunteer groups and organizations are the glue holding our communities together. When you serve others, you create connections to not only those you are assisting but also other people looking to help others just like you. Students throughout Cardinal Newman have built strong bonds with numerous service organizations through their regular and active participation in events that they choose to do. I know that my work at the Charles Schulz museum has helped me grow closer to all the employees there, all the while getting to help the children in my community. Furthermore, service acts as an avenue to build up our communities instead of tearing them down. Helping those most struggling in your community or working to improve the environment lifts everyone and leaves your community a much better place to live in for all.

On a personal level, service over self can be extremely difficult at times. You may feel overwhelmed by your day-to-day life and simply see it as unreasonable to focus your time on helping others. At least for me, my time spent in pursuit of improving the lives of others tends to have the same result on my own life. It takes the stresses of all my obligations and overcomes them with a sense of deep fulfillment. When I am doing community service, I am grounded in the moment as I know there is nothing I would rather be doing. My life goal is to become a biomedical engineer. I have a calling to help others, and although I can not help people through my work as an engineer yet, I can still fulfill my desire to help through other forms of community service, such as volunteering at the Charles Schulz Museum and founding the Rotary Interact Club at my school.

While I know this is not the case for everyone, for me, nothing brings me more joy than when I am actively serving my community. Why live a life solely for oneself when you can share your skills with the world and make a real positive impact at no expense? As I look towards the future, I am excited to continue embodying service in my career and personal life. I am certain that the joy I derive from service will remain unmatched, a testament to Mahatma Gandhi's statement that service rendered in a spirit of joy surpasses all other pleasures and possessions.

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