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St. Vincent's Hospital Annual Youth Awards Essay

I've bounced between so many different fads and passions that I never had a long-lasting impact on much of anything. For a long time, it was hard to describe an aspect of my life where I have truly felt a larger and extended impact on my community or something 'bigger', but that has changed.

I transferred from public school to Catholic school right before my freshman year of high school – I needed a new start, desperately. In Catholic school I met some amazing people and started building a new me; my relationships with myself and with faith shifted. I found my self really connecting to broader mission work; I started working heavily with the theology department and found a real niche for myself. I continue to volunteer with masses as an altar server, volunteer with the school's breakfast run, and really any opportunity with the ministry. One such opportunity brought me to what I am truly passionate about, a club I helped found and continue to grow: Catholic Mission Outreach (CMO).

The first iteration of CMO truly started in the middle of sophomore year. A few of my fellow campus ministers and I were invited to the Catholic Women Speak conference at Fordham University. During the conference I was able to learn so much more about my faith from a completely different lens, a lens that allowed me to better connect aspects of myself with the aspects of faith I questioned. At the conference I realised Catholic Faith was so much broader than what I originally thought, and my womanhood was not a barrier in the church but a method for a different form of participation and devotion.

The lessons I – and my peers – learned at the conference were brought back to our school. The ten or so of us started meeting weekly to discuss the conference and how we might

emulate the issues and opinions brought up during the conference. Our informal conversations eventually grew, from a few girls talking about a shared experience, to a club organization with tangible impact on our school: CMO. CMO gave me so many opportunities to not only continue school traditions of service but to also begin new initiatives.

Within CMO I was able to initiate a fundraiser in school, one that we had never previously done. During November of 2025, I brought up the opportunity for CMO as a club to organize a fundraiser for a food pantry the school had worked with in the past, Hillside Food Outreach. I felt that we especially needed to work with Hillside at the time because many of their clients were on SNAP benefits, which at the time were suspended due to a Government shutdown and thus didn't have reliable access to food without Hillside. The fundraiser I had entitled "It only takes ONE", was a simple affair; for two days, CMO representatives collected a single dollar from anybody in the school building willing to donate. We were able to raise \$758 for Hillside Food Outreach, which bought groceries for dozens of families. "It only takes ONE" was the only activity I started anew, but CMO has continued and improved a plethora of fundraising and volunteer activities within my school, and I am so grateful and proud to be an active member. The "It only takes ONE" activity managed to spur a real desire in me to do more, and I did just that. After the fundraiser, a close friend – and fellow CMO representative – and I contacted Hillside Food Outreach and asked how we could do more. We started developing a relationship with Hillside Food Outreach, we met with the director of Hillside and developed our own fundraising mission and started to organize larger events. The project with Hillside is still fairly new, my friend and I are only beginning what we hope to be months –or even years– of work with the organization. The work with Hillside was only possible, and only started, because of my friend and I's connection to CMO.

CMO has continued the initiatives that were previously in place, making the missions more student run and increasing the impact. The Holidays season was especially busy for CMO, we organized additional food drives, celebratory masses, and volunteer events within the season. During the thanksgiving season CMO ran the turkey drives and the food drives. The food drive, in particular, was labor intensive; representatives worked in the school organizing and sorting food donations from hundreds of students to be given out to families in the local lower Westchester community. One activity that CMO was a part of, that I especially enjoyed, was organizing and running the day of service. At my school, the day of service is on weekdays, once a year, where instead of classes, all students participate in a school run volunteer activity. Some of these activities include making holiday cards for Elizabeth Seton children's hospital, decorating grocery bags for Hillside Food Outreach, and volunteering off campus at equine therapy facilities and food banks. As a CMO rep I spent the day of service (from 7:30am to 1pm) instructing groups of students on how to complete their assigned tasks, setting up activities, cleaning up activities, retrieving supplies, organizing groups of students, and discussing the organizations we helped.

Being a CMO representative has meant so much to me, it has become my passion and my favorite after school activity. Through CMO, I have felt like I truly made an impact on my school and my broader community. I feel that beyond being a religious organization, CMO is a service one. I have been able to spread compassion and empathy to so many people and only wish I can have a larger impact.