

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Lake Orion, Michigan



**Community of St. Mary
Sewanee, Tennessee**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

The organization is an Episcopal Benedictine convent. My tasks included: attending two chapel services every day, helping with setup and clean-up for the chapel services, cooking dinner for the sisters every Saturday, hosting weekly dinners for community members (called Radical Hospitality), and working with the groundskeeper, Leonard, in the organic garden and on the convent grounds. I also had to choose a subject of my own to study: I found my way into books about ecofeminist theology and natural healing. The other intern and I also had weekly Benedictine reflection with the prioress, which was in essence a two-hour class about the Benedictine Rule.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I accomplished a lot of practical work-- cleaning out overgrown gardens, harvesting beans, harvesting lavender, pouring and painting concrete cemetery crosses. I believe that I made a difference in the lives of the sisters at the convent by providing a new voice and a new perspective, and by adding some youth to the community. I also believe that I made a difference, though maybe just a small one, by learning how to live simply and in an environmentally-conscious way by working in the organic garden, cooking for myself and the sisters, and reducing food waste through composting. Throughout the course of the summer, I learned more than I ever thought I could about organic gardening. I learned how to treat grapes with copper sulfate (which is still organic!) so that they don't get killed by fungus. I learned how to harvest green beans correctly so that the plants produce more than one crop. I learned how to tie nets around fruit trees and bushes to protect them from birds, and also learned that sometimes you just have to share the harvest. I learned that crows will peck at Christmas ornaments and leave your tomatoes alone, until they get smart enough to realize the tomatoes are still there, which only buys you a week or two. I also learned the importance of living a balanced life, which is something I have been missing for a long time.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

One of the biggest issues I faced was having to have difficult conversations with those I was interacting with regularly. There were times during the summer when I felt that my opinions were not valued, that my voice wasn't being heard. However, Sewanee gave me the skills to have these hard conversations, and I was able to make myself heard when I felt this way. The seminar-style classes that I have had in my time at Sewanee taught me how to hold my own, but also taught me that conversations don't have to be competitions. They taught me that the value of someone else's opinion does not have to diminish the value of my own (and that sometimes, they can even add to one another). Having difficult conversations on a daily basis in the classroom helped to prepare me for these conversations in my internship.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

My teamwork skills were strengthened both by living in community and by working every day with the same people. A specific instance of this would be cooking in a very small kitchen with the other intern. We cooked a Radical Hospitality dinner every week, and hosted about 5 people per dinner. This meant that we spent the majority of that day cooking together, which was incredibly difficult and frustrating at first. We had to figure out how to work together and communicate effectively in order to cook without having tension between the two of us. Through a process of trial and error, and more than one burnt hand, by the final Radical Hospitality dinner, we had figured out how to share that tiny kitchen!

How did your internship affect your career plans?

This internship did not necessarily change my career plans, but the emphasis that Benedictine Rule has on balance helped me to realize that whatever career path I end up taking, balance is something I need to be intentional about.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

The biggest encounter of someone from a different background that I had was the other intern working at St. Mary's. Her upbringing and young adulthood was radically different from my own. I disagreed with her about nearly everything, it seemed, and struggled very much to interact with her using kindness and compassion. In order to interact effectively with her, I had to communicate with the prioress about what I was struggling with. This helped me to deal with my negative feelings towards her without taking them out on her. It was also important to me to draw boundaries-- while conversations with someone from a different perspective are important, knowing when and where to have these conversations is also essential. I learned that we could only communicate effectively when we were both ready and willing to do so, which was harder to accomplish than I thought it would be. I learned a lot from her perspective, though it did not necessarily change any of my own views. However, having to explain and unpack my own perspective in these conversations allowed me the space to understand why I think and feel the way I do.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

A car is pretty essential. Interns need to provide their own groceries, toilet paper, etc... and the distance to the grocery store isn't really bikeable/walkable.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

This experience would not have been possible for me without financial support. I am beyond grateful that I received funding and could fully embrace this internship without worrying about how I would feed myself. This internship helped me to deepen my faith, to learn a love for food gardens, and to find the balance that has been missing from my student life. It would not have been possible without this financial support, and I will always be thankful for this funding allowing me this life-changing experience.