Community Outreach of Villanova, or COV for short (pronounced “cove”), is Campus Ministry’s oldest running service program. Its roots go back to the early 1980’s when students and Campus Ministers responded to the growing phenomena of homelessness by organizing the Villanova Committees for the Philadelphia Homeless (VCPH).

Originally the focus was on serving homeless individuals and their support agencies in our area on a weekly basis. Over the years, however, the program grew to incorporate opportunities to serve the broader needs of the local community beyond the issue of homelessness; for example, trips to visit nursing homes, mentor children at community centers, tutor at underprivileged schools, visit prisoners, restore and beautify the environment, as well as alleviate poverty housing through Habitat for Humanity.

Thus, circa 1990, VCPH was renamed Community Outreach of Villanova (COV). Under COV the committee/site leaders were brought together to form a steering committee. The COV Steering Committee met weekly to build community, further educate themselves, process issues and plan logistics, as well as reflect on their service in light of their faith.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

As a Catholic university community we are called to use our unique gifts and talents for the common good as a witness to our heritage. As educators and ministers at an Augustinian university it is our mission to transform hearts and minds, and to do so by following the example of our patron St. Thomas of Villanova, in and through service to the poor.

The COV program offers a range of opportunities for individuals to live out their faith through direct service and action for social justice. In partnering with sites to serve the needs of the local community, students witness and participate in some of the most difficult issues facing our society. It is our goal to build relationships with our local community and work for concrete changes in the present, while simultaneously transforming the hearts and minds of all involved and inspiring them to a life-long commitment to service and justice.

Through COV opportunities we hope to expose individuals to what it means to: make the preferential option for the poor a part of their daily lives, to work for economic justice and stewardship of the environment, to affirm the intrinsic dignity of the human person by assisting the marginalized in securing their most basic rights, and to experience the transformative power of community and solidarity.

Campus Ministry has long held the COV program as a cornerstone of its mission. By offering service programs such as COV within Campus Ministry, it is hoped that individuals come to a deeper understanding of and commitment to their faith.
and the Gospel call. Furthermore, it is hoped that they come to understand that, “the obligation to 'love our neighbor' has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.” Ultimately, it is hoped that programs like COV help individuals come to fully realize one of the most fundamental tenants of Christian faith, that their own wellbeing, fulfillment and even salvation are bound together with their neighbor’s -- all brothers and sisters in one human family as expressed in the Lord’s Prayer.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

The COV weekly service program offers trips to soup kitchens, nursing homes, shelters, community centers, and afterschool programs. Most trips take place late afternoon and early evening Monday through Thursday, with some Friday and Saturday opportunities. Transportation is provided to and from Campus Ministry. The most unique feature of the COV program is that individuals can sign up one trip at a time. Thus, the advantage of COV is that it is open to individuals at any time, and while the program is mostly for students, faculty and staff are welcome to sign up as well. Sign-ups are on the bulletin board in the lower lobby of Campus Ministry. Only the student leaders make the commitment to lead for the semester.

The student leadership structure has evolved from the COV Steering Committee into the Service Council -- Campus Ministry’s faith-justice-service leadership formation program. All COV leaders are automatic members of the Service Council, however, the Service Council is open to anyone who wants to be involved. This open membership not only allows the program to be more inclusive of committed students who are unable to lead or attend weekly service opportunities due to their schedules -- and/or commitments in other on campus service programs, such as Service Learning or Rays of Sunshine -- but it makes the COV program more sustainable by cultivating future leaders and more successful by expanding the reach and capacity of constituents.

OUR GOALS

The goals of the Service Council are to:

- provide for comprehensive development and empowerment of student leaders and volunteers through: community building, improving leadership skills, facilitating faith reflection, educating for justice and advocacy.
- improve collaboration with other service programs within Campus Ministry as well as other departments, and clubs on campus.
- proactively meet the needs of our service sites, as well as develop more service site opportunities if needed.

Some examples of COV service sites are:

*St. Francis Inn Soup Kitchen* -- St. Francis is a little bit different from the typical soup kitchen since the volunteers actually serve the guests like it is a restaurant, which really makes it a very interesting and entertaining service site. It is a great
opportunity and the people at St. Francis are wonderful; really letting you get a personal feel for some of the problems that exist.

*Northern Home for Children* -- Northern Home is a place where we interact with at-risk children. It is located in Roxborough, PA right outside of Manayunk. For the first hour we tutor kids (help them with basic math, science, and reading) and then for about a half an hour we play outside or we do activities such as video games, pool, and foosball inside.

*North Light Community Center* -- Come to the North Light Community Center to help out with the after school program. North Light houses an after school program for children ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. We work with the kids one-on-one, providing homework help, playing games and organizing arts and crafts. Join us to become a role model...and have a lot of fun! The kids are great, and they LOVE Villanova!

*St. Agatha’s Soup Kitchen* -- At St. Agatha's soup kitchen, volunteers are responsible for preparing and serving the food and for cleaning up afterwards. To serve, volunteers can carry trays, serve food or pour juice. Students from other universities are usually also there. We return to campus between 7:30 and 8 p.m.

*St. Barnabas Women’s Shelter* -- St. Barnabas is a shelter for women and children. Volunteers spend an hour playing with the children, acting as positive role models and friends. We play outside on their playground and attempt basic arts and crafts. Everyone is welcome to join us each week in making a small difference in deserving children’s lives.

For more specific information on Campus Ministry service programs please see: [http://www.villanova.edu/campusministry/service/](http://www.villanova.edu/campusministry/service/)

Other ways to get involved:

- Sign up for a COV trip.
- Sign up your students, hall or class up for a COV trip (email Jennifer Maez).
- Advise a Campus Ministry Service Break Trip (contact Nancy A. Lee)
- Support Service Council activities, fundraisers, donation drives, and advocacy events on campus (email Lauren Adderly).
- Sign up for our faculty/staff VU Habitat for Humanity emails (email Christina Radossi).
- Host our student speakers in your class or for organizations you advise (email Jennifer Maez).
- Give a presentation/lecture to our students on issues of: spirituality, social justice, leadership, counseling, diversity, community organizing, etc (email Gregory Schettini).
- Teach a Service Learning course (contact your colleges Service Learning coordinator) or teach a Peace & Justice cross-listed course.