

*Change a Heart*

**Volunteer  
Handbook**

## *Mission Statement of Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale, PA*

We Millvale Franciscans express our love for God and neighbor by living and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through our vowed life together, through our prayer and through our ministry.

As did Francis of Assisi, we embrace a life of continuous conversion, poverty, servanthood and peacemaking as expressed in the Third Order Regular Rule.

Through Mother Mary Francis Bachmann and St. John Neumann, we trace our simplicity, joy and hospitality.

With trust in God's providential care we reverently share our gifts wherever they are needed, especially with the poor.

We will continually seek ways to respond to their needs, to nurture their spiritual and human growth and to establish justice.

Led by the Spirit and supported by our sisters in community, we pledge to live these ideals.

## *Community Identity Statement of Millvale Franciscans*

We affirm our identity as reflected in our Mission Statement:

As women of the Gospel  
and of the Church  
our focus for mission,  
wherever we are,  
is peacemaking  
and empowerment of others  
through our presence and relationships.

## *Goal of Change a Heart: Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program*

As they serve with the poor, rooted in the spirit of St. Francis and the mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale, PA, volunteers are invited to accept the challenge of experiencing the power of God through relationships which empower the powerless, promote peace, and transform the world around them. Volunteers seek their own spiritual growth in the milieu of a community that shares a simple Franciscan lifestyle.

## **Expectations and Commitment of Volunteers**

### *Community*

Millvale Franciscan volunteers live in a faith-based community on a small stipend and in a low-income neighborhood. They do this in the Franciscan spirit of mutuality and simplicity. This commitment to live the value of community will be difficult at times, but the volunteers are called to challenge themselves to form honest and open relationships. Even though volunteers may have similar reasons for becoming a Millvale Franciscan volunteer, their different cultural, spiritual and socioeconomic background require constant open communication with one another and the program Director. In sharing the joys and sorrows of their daily life experiences as volunteers, as well as the necessary “house” chores such as shopping, cooking and cleaning for one another, they will energize and support one another in their call to live the Gospel.

Community living demands commitment, flexibility, compromise and mutual giving. It is the volunteers themselves who design and create their community ultimately gaining increased respect for others who may think or act differently from themselves.

One evening a week is reserved as a Community Night. Volunteers take turns planning this night using this time for spiritual, social, and educational programs, or simply time to be spent with each other. Community Night is a priority to community living. Another evening is set aside for a community house meeting. During a house meeting, practical implications of community living are discussed. The program

Director or a support person will be present for house meetings. This person is available to help the community or individual to work through community issues, personal problems, or situations of a non-work nature.

### *Simple Lifestyle*

The Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program requires the volunteers to live on a small stipend and in low-income neighborhoods to become aware of the daily realities of those with whom they work. Such exposure to the differences between the “haves and have-nots” is a necessary first step in living always conscious of the poor. Living simply is meant to help volunteers define a Christian lifestyle and can shape their decisions about how to spend their resources of time, talent and money. In community, the volunteers live out their common lifestyle by making consensus decisions about food purchases, recycling, appliance usage, etc.

The commitment is more than attempting to live within a monthly budget; it is more a shift in focus. Spending a year centered on less money and the consumption promoted by our American culture can also free the volunteers to appreciate the value to be found in simple pleasures, conversations and their own creativity. As one removes material clutter, one has the freedom to be gentle, peaceful, and joyful; witnessing to God’s love for the world and the sufficiency of God for all.

Volunteers are not permitted to seek employment to supplement their income.

### *Social Justice*

MFVP provides the volunteers an opportunity to live out a “preferential option for the poor” through full-time ministry for justice and peace at a variety of non-profit social service agencies.

They work for agencies and with people of need, learning first-hand about the injustices of our world. The work of the volunteers ranges from direct service with the poor to working for structural change, and with a commitment to the Church's social teachings of promoting justice for all. Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, the volunteers are encouraged at all times to see Christ in the faces of the poor.

Through their own experiences, and those with whom they live, volunteers are exposed to the complexities of the injustices faced by the poor in our society. They have the opportunity to examine the causes of injustice in the United States, and to search for creative, long-term solutions and faith-filled responses, and to "preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." (St. Francis of Assisi).

### ***Spirituality***

The Millvale Franciscan volunteer year is an opportunity for the volunteer to integrate their Christian faith through their ministry with and living among the poor, and their communal, simple lifestyle. Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, the volunteers are encouraged to live the Gospel, making the attitudes and values of Jesus their own.

Throughout the year, the MFVP provides retreats, opportunity for spiritual direction, resources, and staff visits to support and encourage the volunteers' faith life. The volunteers also commit to weekly communal prayer as a way to deepen their faith life, and to support each other's ministry.

### **Volunteer Formation**

The MFVP provides a five-day orientation program in August, three retreats throughout the year and an integration gathering at the close of the year.

#### ***Orientation***

This five-day program in August is an introduction to the volunteer year, to the values of community, spirituality, simple lifestyle, working for justice, and to the spirit of the MFVP. It is an opportunity for the volunteer to meet each other during a planned week of structured and free times. Each day includes presentations, large and small group discussions, and times for prayer, quiet and socializing.

#### ***October Retreat***

This weekend is a chance for the volunteers to address the challenges of community. The weekend comes seven or eight weeks into the year, when questions about community living begin to surface. There is a presentation on communication and conflict resolution skills. There will be time for volunteers to address issues that have arisen and to set future goals.

#### ***January Retreat***

Once again, this time focuses on the challenges of living the values of the MFVP: community, social justice, spirituality and simple lifestyle. Through presentations and discussions, these values are re-examined and developed within the volunteer's experience. It is an opportunity to reflect on the past five months experience, to share the questions, joys, struggles that have come, and recommit themselves to the remaining months of the program.

#### ***May Retreat***

This retreat will be a time for the volunteers to gather for a silent prayerful experience in the form of a short directed retreat. With the end of the year approaching and decisions to be made, it is an opportunity for the volunteers to stop and reflect. Each volunteer

will meet with a spiritual director for clarity, support, and direction in their spiritual journey.

### ***Integration***

An end-of-the-year gathering takes place the beginning of August. The time will include evaluation, reflection, and celebration to bring closure to the year's experience as a volunteer.

### ***Individual Formation***

Each volunteer is matched with a spiritual director, and is expected to meet with their spiritual director on a regular basis, at a time mutually agreeable to the volunteer and his/her spiritual director.

Growth in personal prayer is encouraged through participation in community, reflection on ministry, and exploring forms of spirituality. Keeping a personal journal can provide a means of reflecting on experiences and prayer. Keeping a journal is strongly encouraged.

It is expected that each volunteer will meet with the director on a regular basis, at least every other month, to address concerns and questions that the volunteer may have, and to supply support and encouragement.

### **Volunteer Benefits**

The Millvale Franciscan volunteer is placed by the Director, in consultation with the various Site Supervisors, in a ministry that supports the MFVP goals, and matches the gifts and interest of the volunteer. This discernment takes into consideration the volunteer's application papers, recommendations, personal interview and need of the agency. The volunteer is considered a full-time employee

with all of the accompanying rights and responsibilities. They work as peers with other salaried staff.

Volunteers receive the same amount of vacation, sick, and personal days, and paid holidays. All MFVP retreat days are not to be considered days off. Arrangements for taking time off must be made by the volunteer with the Director and the Site Supervisor.

Millvale Franciscan volunteers work a minimum of 40 hours per week; some evening and weekends may be required. Schedules vary from placement to placement. All volunteers must be employed in an approved placement in order to remain in the Millvale Franciscan volunteer community and program. Changes in a volunteer's placement should be considered a solution only as a last resort. The MFVP Director will determine whether another placement can be offered. All positions are considered "hands-on" experiences. Teamwork and flexibility are stressed. MFVP does not guarantee the return of a volunteer in subsequent years.

As part of the learning experience, all volunteers will be evaluated regularly. Formal evaluations will take place at mid-year and at the end of the year's experience. Problems and concerns that arise within the job placements should first be addressed with the Site Supervisor. If the Site Supervisor and volunteer are unable to resolve the placement issue, the MFVP Director will provide assistance. Problems with placements should be addressed as early as possible before difficulties progress. Site Supervisors who have serious concerns about a Millvale Franciscan volunteer and her/his job performance should consult with the MFVP Director. If disciplinary action or termination is necessary, the Director should be notified in advance and all applicable personnel.

### ***Housing***

Millvale Franciscan volunteers live in a simply furnished house provided by the MFVP. Volunteers are required to keep the house in a safe, clean, and reasonably neat condition.

Volunteers are expected to follow the terms of the lease; maintain the house, and to replace any items that are broken or damaged during the course of their residence. The replacement of items valued over \$50 should be done in consultation with the Director.

Personal belongings are not insured by the MFVP and cannot be responsible for lost or stolen property. It is up to the individual volunteer to decide if she/he wants to bring anything of value (i.e. bicycle, computer, stereo, camera, etc.) and to ensure their safe storage.

Volunteers are asked to keep the thermostat at 68 degrees or lower during the winter months. It is expected that the volunteers will be energy conscious and help keep the cost of utilities low in keeping with the spirit of a simple lifestyle.

Volunteers are not permitted to have friends or family move into the volunteer house. The volunteer house is specifically for the Millvale Franciscan volunteers to live in as a community. In the Franciscan spirit of hospitality, guests are always welcome; however, the host volunteer must check with the rest of the community as a courtesy. All guests must be respectful of the privacy of the volunteers. Pets of any kind are not permitted.

### ***Transportation***

All work-related transportation costs, including daily travel to and from work, is included in the stipend paid by the sponsoring agency. If the volunteer has a car she/he is responsible for maintenance, repairs and insurance.

Orientation and retreat costs are the responsibility of the MFVP. Transportation home at the end of the program is the responsibility of the sponsoring agency. Shipping belongings home will be covered up to \$40.00. MFVP expects that the mode of travel home be the cheapest. If a volunteer leaves the program before the final

retreat, MFVP or the sponsoring agency is not responsible for any relocation costs.

### ***Finances***

Each month, each of the Millvale Franciscan Volunteers will be paid \$1000 by their sponsoring agency. All checks will be payable to "Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program" and will be deposited into the local Volunteer House common bank account. One volunteer chosen by the volunteer community and the Director will be co-signers on the account.

Each volunteer will receive \$85 as a personal stipend. MFVP suggests to the volunteer that \$15 of that stipend be set aside each month for unexpected expenses, such as prescriptions or other medical expenses. All other monies (\$915) are considered part the common community fund to cover the expenses of living in common: rent, utilities, food, basic phone expenses, local transportation, health insurance, and general maintenance costs from the Volunteer community common bank account. The volunteer is expected to pay for all personal phone calls (including long-distance), personal transportation, and any personal items.

### ***Health Insurance***

For the duration of their volunteer service, Millvale Franciscan Volunteers are covered under a basic health insurance plan. A portion of the agency fee paid to the volunteer each month is intended to pay for health coverage. For more information about specific details of MFVP health coverage, see the health plan's handbook.

Prescriptions incurred during the volunteer year and not covered under the health insurance plan will be the responsibility of the volunteer up to \$15 per month (suggested emergency fund).

Prescription costs over \$15 per month will be covered by the Volunteer House account. In the case of a volunteer with a known pre-existing medical condition requiring prescriptive medicine, the volunteer will be responsible for the costs of the prescriptions.

In the event of termination from the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program, health coverage associated with the program will also be terminated, effective the date of termination from the volunteer program. (See “Termination” section below for more details).

### *Taxes*

Millvale Franciscan volunteers are employees of the sponsoring agencies. The personal stipend of \$85 is taxable. Any monies withheld should not decrease the basic living allowance; the volunteer should be paid the full monthly allowance after additional expenses (liability, workmen compensation) are taken out.

### *Student Loans*

Deferment of student loans during the year of service is provided under the Higher Education Act of 1992. It is the responsibility of the individual volunteer to complete the appropriate forms from the lending institution with the name and address of the lender, and to provide a copy to the MFVP Director. These forms will be provided by the Director of the MFVP at the orientation in August.

### *AmeriCorps Education Award*

This initiative provides education awards to national, state and local community service programs that can support most or all of the costs associated with managing the work of AmeriCorp members from sources other than the Corporation for National Service.

The education awards are paid as vouchers by the National Service Trust, and may be redeemed, within seven years, to pay education costs at colleges, universities, other post secondary institutions and approved school-to-work programs, or to pay back qualified student loans already incurred.

Millvale Franciscan volunteers are eligible to receive an education award of \$4,725 if the volunteer complies with the following criteria:

- signed contract
- completed AmeriCorp orientation, assessments, weekly time sheets, quarterly reports
- successfully completed 1,700 service hours

## **Accountability**

Mindful that Millvale Franciscan Volunteers are representatives of the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale, reasonable and appropriate behavior is expected at all times. If the volunteer has not upheld her/his commitment to the MFVP, the Director may ask the volunteer to leave the program. In such a case, two weeks notice will be given to all parties. Volunteers asked to leave the program by the Director will not be eligible for student loan deferments or AmeriCorp award.

The following is a list of behaviors that constitute a basis for immediate intervention by the Director, and which could lead to dismissal from the MFVP:

- Unauthorized possession or use of drugs.
- Excessive use of alcohol.
- Engaging in sexual intercourse in the volunteer house.
- Absence from community functions (i.e., community night, community spirituality night) without advance consultation with community members.
- Failure to attend weekend retreats.
- Uncooperative attitude, which inhibits an individual's and/or community's ability to live out the values of the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program.

- Any other action that is deemed unlawful or inappropriate, and discredits the MFVP.

## Termination

Volunteers are encouraged to actively discuss their experiences with their site supervisor and the MFVP Director. In the event a situation arises whereby a volunteer feels there is reason to request a change in ministry placement site, the following steps should be taken:

1. The volunteer should discuss the concern with his/her site supervisor and the MFVP Director
2. The site supervisor and the MFVP Director will assess the situation and guide the volunteer accordingly. If a ministry site placement change is indicated, it is expected that the following actions will be taken prior to reaching a conclusion:
  - a. prior to determining that no realistic alternatives are available, the volunteer will contact the site supervisor and MFVP Director to discuss the situation and to explore options for resolving the issue(s). A joint meeting with the volunteer, the site supervisor and MFVP Director will be held to discuss the situation.
  - b. If it is determined that a change in ministry placement is indicated, the volunteer will terminate assigned tasks in the placement in a professional manner as determined by the site supervisor and MFVP Director.
3. Once a volunteer leaves a ministry placement, the MFVP Director will work with the volunteer to arrange another placement
4. No volunteer, or site supervisor should terminate any ministry site arrangement without the knowledge and involvement of the MFVP Director.
5. In the case in which the placement site terminates the volunteer, the site is responsible for one's month's prorated

share of the volunteer's community expenses and transportation costs for relocation of the volunteer.

### *Procedures for Volunteers Requesting to Leave the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program*

Volunteers are expected to complete the full year of service with the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program. However, situations may arise which can cause the volunteer to terminate the program before the full year of service is completed. This is considered an extreme circumstance, and should only be undertaken in consultation with the Director.

If the early departure is the volunteer's decision, the volunteer will pay the costs for transportation home, and forfeits eligibility for student loan deferments and AmeriCorp award. Two weeks notice must be given to all parties involved if a volunteer's service ends early.

### *Location and contact information*

The director of the Millvale Franciscan Volunteer Program is Sister Donna Stephenson, OSF. MFVP offices are located at Mt. Alvernia, the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale. Contact information for the MFVP is:

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