



cathy's cup

A COVENANTER'S LIFE OF QUIET COMPASSION INSPIRES NORTH PARK STUDENTS.

MATT ENQUIST

I'm sitting with Emily Nothnagel, who earlier today was laughing with children from halfway around the globe. Later this week she will cook dinner, play games, read books, and change diapers while teaching the kids how to read and how to use the twisted multicolored branches of the Chicago transit system. It's all in a day's work for Nothnagel, a North Park University student and one of the first recipients of the newly established Cathy's Cup award.

The award was inspired by Cathy Meyer, a North Park staff member who died in 2002 after a long battle with breast cancer. Cathy was assistant human resources director at North Park. The award is overseen by the school's Office of University Ministries.

The program provides funds to students who want to organize a compassion-driven project but lack the financial resources to do so. Students receive \$250 in seed money for their idea.

Cathy's husband, Don Meyer, the Covenant's executive minister of communication, says she was a person of "quiet compassion" whose acts of service were out of the limelight. She understood the power of small acts of kindness done in the name of Christ.

In that way, he says, Cathy lived out the words of Jesus: "whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42). Don hopes the initiative will inspire others to follow her example.

The first Cathy's Cup award recipient was Nothnagel, who is pursuing an education degree and a certificate in nonprofit management. Nothnagel's project seeks to pair North Park students with refugee families in nearby neighborhoods. She hopes the students and families will form lasting friendships. Over the past two years, some 400 Somali Bantu refugees have been settled in the Chicago area, along with other refugees from all over the world.

Students can use the fund as they see fit; from taking children to museums, educating parents on how to use buses or libraries, to simply being a faithful friend in some way. "Each student can offer their compassion, personality, and skills in order to make this family feel more at home," said Nothnagel in her project application.

Nothnagel says that refugee families often need someone who can "stick around and be a consistent part" of their lives. "When parents are busy work-

ing to support the family, who's going to take them to the swimming pool? Who's going to be there for them in the small things?" she asks. "This project gives students an opportunity to educate themselves and meet needs—and refugee families have a lot of needs."

Refugee families face a gamut of issues, from finding affordable housing to adjusting to school. "Some of these families have had terribly hard lives in their countries and they come here, get placed into schools for the first time, and don't have their educational needs met. It's hard to see," Nothnagel says.

There's also the burden of finding a place to fit in. "We all have a need for community," she says.

Nothnagel's interest in working with refugees began in 2005 when she was a freshman at Northern Illinois University. She worked on a research project on the long-term effects of conflict in Rwanda. Her time in that war-torn country was life-changing.

"Seeing the poverty in Africa makes you feel very compassionate and grateful for what you have. I learned that you should use what you have to bless those who don't have as much. Refugees here have a lot of needs and I've found an outlet for my skills as a future teacher," Nothnagel says. Not long after transferring to North Park, she be-

gan volunteering with the local World Relief office, which serves refugees in the North Park neighborhood.

She currently volunteers with a family down the street from her dorm and also works as a tutor for refugee kids in the Chicago Public School system. "A lot of different opportunities came my way and I just kind of found my niche," she says.

Nothnagel has established a treasured relationship with a family from Sierra Leone. She sees the family two to three times a week, and has become especially close to the family's five children. "Everybody should feel like they have a home and a community. God calls us to reach out to those who have been displaced and make them feel at home," says Nothnagel.

A mother's burden

Margaret Sebastian, the second recipient of a Cathy's Cup award, has spent her time ministering in Chicago's Cabrini Green neighborhood.

Sebastian is a graduate student in the joint master of Christian ministry and master of nonprofit business management program at North Park. Her project involves a family that she met at Kid's Club, a program that helps kids in the Cabrini Green neighborhood with homework while providing a positive influence.

Kid's Club also helps families find insurance and meet other material needs, and creates an atmosphere where kids are encouraged to pursue their dreams. "I'm getting to see the kids that we started with actually graduate and move on to a new stage of their lives, which has been really exciting," Sebastian says. "We want to make sure the kids actually have an opportunity to do what they want to do."

One of families Sebastian works with has fallen on hard times. The father committed suicide, and the mother, who dropped out of high school, has not been able to continue her education because of the demands of caring for her five children.

"She's not in the position she's in because she doesn't like school, she's in

the position she's in because she loves her children and longs to take care of them," Sebastian says.

When Sebastian heard about the Cathy's Cup initiative, she wondered if "maybe God will provide in this way" for the family.

Sebastian plans to use the award funds to help the mother pay for fare to travel to a GED program, and to buy



Emily Nothnagel with a young girl from a refugee family



Cathy Meyer

suitable clothes for job interviews in hopes of finding work that allows her to better care for her family.

An example of quiet compassion

Cathy Meyer grew up in the small town of Thor, Iowa, Don says. Her mother died when Cathy was two, and after a difficult childhood, she "grew into a person of deep compassion—and a very quiet, humble compassion."

Don says that Cathy's pastor, Art Nelson, "attributed her sense of humility and compassion to an inner spirit of Christ that operated at the center of her life."

After Cathy's death, many students and former colleagues told Don about how she had made a difference in their lives. For some, it was a note of encouragement, for others, financial assistance in a time of need. Cathy's family believed that one of the best ways to honor her memory was to encourage young people to follow her example and find joy in humble acts of love.

"As a family we were talking about ways to honor those values of humility and compassion and help influence others to do that kind of thing," Don says. "We hope that this experience will inspire a lifetime of compassion and giving in students."

Cathy's Cup was initially funded with more than \$4,000 in memorials received during two services for Cathy—one at North Park Covenant Church in Chicago, and one at the Meyers' home church, Zion Covenant, in Jamestown, New York.

"Obviously, our desire is to see more projects funded and more student lives influenced," Don says. He hopes to attract donations to help build the endowment fund. He also is working on ways to make Cathy's Cup programs available to local churches, targeting students in grades six through eight.

"The earlier we can engage children in experiencing the joy of giving of themselves, the more likely it will be that they will be generous in later adult years," he says.

Nothnagel and Sebastian are grateful for the support of Cathy's Cup. "The project gives students an opportunity to live out their dreams for seeing change in this community," Nothnagel says.

Sebastian says that the mother she volunteers with reminds her that, even when life falls apart and our plans fail, God is still present.

"She helps me to understand that life is not all that everyone plans for, but if we allow God to help change and bless us, we can get a lot more accomplished," Sebastian says. □

Matt Enquist is a student at North Park University in Chicago, and a member of Libertyville (Illinois) Covenant Church.