

Principals, Teachers, and new PLACers,

Never in my life did I think I would be hearing these things on a daily basis: “Miss Kinnier, my eyelash hurts.” “He smiled at me.” “Why did you cheat on the test? It must have been the blueberries in my muffin this morning.”

And never did I think these words would ever come out of my mouth: “Pencils in your cups.” “Reading fingers ready.” “1-2-3 eyes on me.” “Water travels in a cycle, yes it does.” I never realized how difficult yet rewarding teaching, managing, comforting, and supporting 41 first graders would be.

From this point, it won't be long until you are setting up your classroom for the first day of school, then grading your first test (and then realizing that you are definitely going to have to re-teach), and filling out your first set of report cards – oh the joys.

As a first-year teacher, you have a lot to learn, and a little time to do it. For me, I was blessed to be placed at St. Raymond where I teach with 8 other current or alumni PLACers to turn to for help and advice. Although you may not have this many PLACers at your school, don't be afraid to ask your principal and staff for support. They will be there to get you through the year: Through incomplete homework for the 25th time, a dreaded parent conference, rainy day recess five days in a row, and throw-up in the classroom mid-observation.

Many of you maybe never needed to ask for help from anyone before. This is a time in your life when you will be thrown into something entirely new, and you just need to swallow your pride sometimes and ask for help. You can't do it alone. You aren't meant to do it alone. That is why you joined the program, that is why you live in a community, that is why you work in a community. Your school is a community that is there to help you. As I tell my students, “**UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES,**” talk to your colleagues, ask questions- they are there for the same reason you are – to serve the students. We all have a common purpose, and just remember that others are willing to help, but you have to be willing to ask for it.

Since coming into the PLACE Corps, my faith has grown tremendously. In college I'd attend weekly Masses and considered myself a faithful Catholic – I was comfortable in my spirituality and really didn't know how I could grow in my faith...that is, until **COMMUNITY SPIRITUALITY NIGHTS!** I never realized how powerful sharing my faith experience, for even just twenty minutes a week, could be.

Every Thursday, my community has our weekly community dinner. Afterwards, we clean, socialize, and then have prayer. Prayer is a pretty cool thing in our house; every week, another community member leads it and brings a different flavor to the night. One week we might talk about “the rose and the thorn” of our week, and talk about how GOD is in both. Or we might listen to a scripture reading and then reflect on how that relates to our life and our relationship with God. No matter what the theme, every week, this is where our community grows together as we all grow deeper in our faith and understanding of God and each other.

And finally, the strongest and most important pillar to me is Community. Never in a million years did I think I would be living in a convent - in Compton - with nine people. And never in a million years would I have thought that I would actually like it! And now, looking back, I realize that I never would have made it through my first year of teaching, even my second year of teaching, without having these nine friends to come home to.

Whether it's been my best day or my worst day, there is always someone to lean on or vent with. There have been so many days where I walk through the door and just want to make a "b-line" to my room and shut the door until morning light. But then there's Dang, watching a chick flick with Taryn; JP – making a random frozen delight; Maggie- "feng shuiing" her room; Ted- walking around in his boxers singing, "Lean Back, Lean Back" to Christian. Renae- making her scrumptidliumptious banana bread because she has a 12-page paper to write that is due in 5 minutes, and Mary is just back from a Dr. Pepper run because she has the SAME 12-page paper due also.

And then that reminds me that even though we might feel like we've aged 30 years in the past 3 months, and yes, I have sprouted quite a few gray hairs over the past few years, we're just a bunch of kids trying to make a difference and have a little fun while we do it. Community has kept me grounded throughout these past two years: we procrastinate together, veg out together on a Friday night in our sweats and watch movie marathons- as we realize every other 23-year old with a normal job is probably at some bar somewhere- we laugh and sing in the kitchen together. We support each other in our lives and jobs. The relationships I have formed and experiences I have had will be with me for years to come. Being a part of the PLACE Corps has truly enriched all aspects of my life- my professional life, my relationships with others, and my relationship with GOD.

THANK YOU.