These Advent weeks are heralded as the season of giving, but at Hope the Christmas spirit lasts year-round. It's exemplified by a commitment to serving others that finds expression even in students' first days on campus and continues throughout the school year and beyond. It's built into the Hope experience, shepherded with deep devotion by faculty and staff who themselves seek to live the ideals expressed in the college's missional emphasis on educating students for lives of leadership and service, but more than that it reflects that Hope students have giving hearts and appreciate that there is more to the world than themselves.

"Hope students see their education or experience at Hope as not merely a passport to privilege, but as a passport to serving others," said the Rev. Trygve Johnson, who is the Hinga-Boersma Dean of the Chapel at Hope.

"They want an education that enables them to become more," he said. "If all college is is a head trip, then it isn’t wisdom. Knowledge needs to be applied."

Freshmen find the opportunities within about 24 hours of when they arrive on campus, when during New Student Orientation they are given the opportunity to sign on for "Time to Serve" the following Saturday. Led by the student-run Volunteer Services office, "Time to Serve" presents about three dozen day-long service projects throughout the community. The work can range from spreading wood chips, to painting, to sorting clothes at a re-sale store, to washing goats.

"...and it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge."

— Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol
The day is designed to give the students a chance to get to know their new Holland community and especially to start developing a sense of how they can serve as a part of it. It’s pretty effective.

“When we were going around that day, people were asking, ‘Can we come back to this and serve longer?’” said senior Bryanna Warmer of Eaton Rapids, Mich, who co-directs Volunteer Services with senior Erica Smith of Muskegon, Mich.

That single day can make a profound difference. One group this year helped with a variety of projects at the home of a recently widowed 80-year-old whose nephew was comptable to show walk away from their visit’s impact. “If they only know how happy this woman now feels about her house, the dining room, and porch, ceilings, and cabinets all painted and the yard mowed,” he wrote. “We will forever remember this day. We will never be able to thank you enough.”

The school year can nearly be defined by painted and the yard mowed,” he wrote. “We... room, and porch, ceilings, and cabinets all were a great presence during a race held to raise money for Rotary exchange programs, the Environmental Learning Group cleaned up trash along the shoreline in Laketownship; Hope athletes advocated for cancer awareness during conference meetings in October; Mortar Board continued its award-winning student’s book drive; students in the accounting program teamed up for the Holland Rescue Mission’s benefit race; and some 100 students signed up as volunteer tutors with the campus-based Children’s After School Achievement (CASA) program.

For several years, the Campus Ministries program has offered students the chance to get to know their new Holland community, and especially to start developing a sense of how they can serve as a part of it. It’s pretty effective.

“This was all relational, and I loved it,” he said. “We all went down thinking of what we could take to them, but it’s what you bring back from the kids. It really changes your life.”

Both students are still connected with the children. “It’s about teamwork, being servant-hearted and work with students to serve and discern how they might share their talents and training with others. Pre-medical and nursing students traveling to Nicaragua this past year made visits to isolated villages and public schools to help meet a variety of hygiene and medical needs.

“These are all the skills they are learning,” she said. “They are learning how to be effective in a variety of disciplines working to help meet a variety of hygiene and medical needs.

“Of one of the things that really appealed to me about Hope was the opportunity to be more involved in my community,” she said. “I really enjoy being able to be on the community board and work with other students who like to volunteer.”

Junior Aaron Lawrence of Grand Rapids, Mich., finished high school ready to make a difference. “So when I went off to college I was looking for something to do,”

Early in his freshman year, he connected with “Hearts of Hope,” a program that serves at-risk youth from kindergarten through 12th grade who live in the apartment neighborhood of Holland Highlands. He’s been volunteering there the same student since his freshman year (it’s been really cool to watch him grow,” Lawrence noted); and this summer worked with the program’s summer-service activity. In August, Lawrence received the “Student’s Award for Men in Mentoring” from State Senator Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland). A psychology and religion major, after graduation he is hoping to work with refugees and child soldiers in Africa or Southeast Asia.

Both sophomore Caleb Nykamp of Holland, Mich., and junior Caroline Serra of Grand Rapids, Mich., had been active in volunteer service before coming to Hope. What they experienced through their participation in last spring’s mission trip to Miguel Aleman, Mexico, however, affected them deeply.

“They worked at Eagle College, a Christian elementary school that is set in a community that struggles with poverty and serves 140 children primarily from families in need. They did one-on-one tutoring, played with the children and generally helped out in any way that they could.

And, they observed and learned.

With service presenting so much potential for students as they determine their life’s path, multiple programs at the college emphasize service-learning specifically.

The college’s Crossroads Project develops programs in a variety of areas in keeping with its mission of helping students to think theologically about cancer, calling and faith. Its initiatives have included a variety of internship programs in the U.S. and abroad, including “The Hope Blooms in Puerto Escondido” program developed by Dr. Robin Klay, professor of economics. Growing out of a spring break Habitat for Humanity mission trip, the May- and June-Term program now includes internships in a variety of disciplines working with civil and mission organizations that seek to better the lives of the local people.

The Center for Faithful Leadership, working in conjunction with the college’s leadership minor, focuses on servant-leadership specifically through project-based learning experiences with a service emphasis. Among other activities, students have helped develop an integrated communication plan for a county-wide network of food pantries; marketing plans for a Christian camping program and a children’s museum in a low-income community; and an expansion plan for a rural health clinic.

Dr. Steven Hoogerwerf ’77, associate professor of religious studies and director of service-learning specifically. “I feel that about ‘managing’ or ‘being the boss’ of others. It’s about teamwork, being servant-hearted and outreach. I think that the concepts that the Center for Faithful Leadership brings students to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to live and work with the Ogala Lakota tribe. They not only engage in projects—repairing homes, building outhouses and bunk-holds—but also practice skills of listening and attention to others in order to help them learn from and better understand the people they are serving. Even before heading west, the class meets to read about and discuss Lakota history and culture in order to help students relate to those they’ll be helping in a spirit of partnership. It’s service in the context of our emphasis on education,” Dr. Hoogerwerf said. “It’s people serving in a way that helps them to understand the ‘other’ and to see themselves differently. We also learn that while serving others, they can also serve us.”

Senior Tara Toole of Wilmette, Ill., went into the May Term intending to pursue a career in nursing with a service focus, and was powerfully touched by her encounter with the people. “My Pine Ridge experience fed my passion for learning about other cultures. I want to do a service year experiencing new cultures after I graduate and I do not know if I would have the same post-college goals without this class,” she said.

Bekahi Bush, a sophomore from Muskegon, Mich., who also participated this past year and will be returning as a teaching assistant this coming spring, was similarly affected.

“I want to engage in what’s going on around me,” she said. “I know that after I graduate I would like to do a couple years of missionary work.”

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