

## “How My Acts of Service Help Me Understand What My Community Means to Me”

To me, community means more than just the place where you live—it is a place to connect, grow, and uplift one another. For years, I have dedicated my time to serving my community through volunteer work, mentorship, and personal development. One of my favorite ways to contribute has been through theater. Theater is an art of expression that allows individuals to step into new characters while developing their own creativity. It promotes confidence and individuality. Growing up, I performed skits at my church, rehearsing lines for Easter programs and helping inform the congregation about upcoming events. Through theater, I learned how powerful storytelling can be in bringing people together.

My acts of service have deeply shaped my understanding of what community truly means. Volunteering at my church’s afterschool program has given me the opportunity to support younger students by helping create safe, encouraging spaces where they can learn, grow, and build confidence. Assisting with activities for elementary school students has shown me how impactful positive role models can be. Even small actions—organizing materials, guiding group activities, or offering words of encouragement—can leave lasting impressions. These experiences taught me that community begins with investing in the next generation.

Serving at my church’s concession stand has also strengthened my appreciation for togetherness. While it may seem like a simple responsibility, it plays an important role in bringing people together during events that foster joy and connection. I have learned that every role, no matter how small, contributes to something greater. Community is built not only through large initiatives but also through consistent, dependable service.

One of my most meaningful experiences was partnering with another church to prepare

sack lunches for a local homeless shelter and writing notes of encouragement to include with each meal. This experience opened my eyes to the realities many people in my community face daily. Providing a meal is not just about addressing hunger—it is about offering dignity, compassion, and human connection. Conversations with individuals from different walks of life reminded me that everyone has a story worth hearing. These moments strengthened my empathy and reinforced my belief that a strong community cares for its most vulnerable members.

Using my voice has also been an important part of serving my community. I had the honor of speaking at a Community Prayer Breakfast, where I became the first youth to deliver a “This I Believe” testimonial. Through that opportunity, I shared my faith and spoke about my aspirations to pursue a degree in finance, specifically forensic accounting. As I begin college this fall, I plan to work toward earning my master’s degree in this field. My goal is to bring financial literacy education back to the children in my community, helping them understand the importance of managing assets and building stability from a young age.

Advocating for equal access to resources has further shaped my understanding of community, particularly from an economic perspective. As an intern at Battle Creek Unlimited, an economic development agency, I have helped assess housing accessibility for individuals across different income levels and advocated for equitable resource distribution. This experience has reinforced my belief that thriving communities require intentional investment in opportunity for all.

Additionally, participating in a park redevelopment project where I helped plant trees gave me a new perspective on service. Planting trees does not produce immediate results, but it represents hope and long-term investment. Knowing that those trees will provide shade, beauty, and cleaner air for years to come reminded me that serving my community means thinking

about its future. It means leaving spaces better than I found them and contributing to something that will benefit others long after I am gone.

Through these experiences, I have come to understand that community is more than a physical location—it is a network of relationships, shared responsibility, and collective growth. Service has taught me accountability, compassion, and leadership. It has shown me that being part of a community means actively participating in its well-being. Whether working with children, supporting families at church, feeding those in need, advocating for economic access, or planting trees, each act of service has strengthened my connection to the people around me. Ultimately, I have learned that community is built through consistent care, meaningful action, and a genuine commitment to uplifting others.