MANY RAYS
ONE RISING

CATHOLIC VOLUNTEER NETWORK'S 42nd ANNUAL
NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAITH-BASED SERVICE

Arantxa Martinez

Sr. Aprilia Untarto, SSpS
with Arantxa Martinez

From November 5 - 8, 2019, Sr. Aprilia Untarto, SSpS and I had the opportunity to attend Catholic Volunteer Network's (CVN) 42nd Annual National Conference on Faith-Based Service, held in Cleveland, Ohio. Our attendance at this Conference was possible thanks to a generous grant from CVN through its "From Service to Sisterhood Initiative". Through this initiative, in partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters, CVN provided funding to congregations of women religious who want to initiate or expand volunteer programs. The idea is to give more opportunities to young adults to work alongside sisters, share in their way of life, and discern their own calling to vocation. In the SSpS US Province, for example, this past summer the Vocation Promotion Ministry and the Sisters working in the Holy Spirit Life Learning Center (Rogers Park and Wheeling) invited several lay women as volunteers to help in the Summer Peace Camp. Four young women had the opportunity to live, work, and pray with the Sisters in the Rogers Park community. Some of the funds from the "From Service to Sisterhood" grant were used to support the summer project.

During the Conference, we encountered lay and religious staff from various faith-based volunteer programs, vocation promotion ministries, youth ministries, college campus personnel, and non-profit organizations involved in social justice work. The Conference featured a series of workshops, keynotes and other sessions, which provided valuable information that, can help us strengthen the effectiveness of our work; in my case, within my role as development coordinator. Some of the topics that stood out to me the most were: the question WHY, visibility and marketing, and the importance of data. From the first evening of the conference, we were invited to reflect on the WHY: why are we here, why are we involved in the work that we do. Not part of that reflection, but throughout the conference, I thought that when it comes to raising funds for a project, it is also a good idea to always start with the WHY.

Do we have a strong WHY behind our project? If the answer is yes, then we need to be able to articulate, with facts, to potential donors why we are creating the project, or why we need to continue developing a particular project. Organizations have rich histories and stories to share, and being more visible, better known, can help improve fundraising, volunteer recruitment, vocation promotion, and relationships with partners. Speakers talked about employing better strategies for reaching out to those unaware of our organization, especially Millennials (persons born between 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born 1996 – current). We were given some ideas for improving social media strategy, expanding advertisement efforts, and website development. In one of the workshops I attended, a representative from the Salesians of Don Bosco shared about their experience of developing a framework for collecting and analyzing data as a strategy for long-term growth. Although it was specifically about their volunteer program, I could definitely see its relevance in other areas. When it comes to fundraising, especially grant writing, it's very important to include qualitative data and quantitative data in applications and reports. Funders like to know how people's lives are impacted by attending our program, how we track and measure success, how exactly are their funds being used for helping people, etc. Although it may be time consuming, collecting and analyzing data provides many benefits to our own organization.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to have attended this Conference. I hope to be able to support the sisters in their ministry using some of my learnings from the Conference.

Sr. Aprilia Untarto, SSpS, & Arantxa Martinez with Kerry Alys Robinson, member of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities