What service did we provide to the community?

The most obvious service we provided was help around the farm. There were ten of us total, so they split us in half and sent five people to prune grape vines and the other five to help with construction on a new intern house. Koinonia Farm is a small community with only six actual members, so they rely pretty heavily upon their interns and volunteers to keep the farm running. But I think another more subtle and maybe more real service we provided was friendship and, through that, encouragement to those at Koinonia. Many members of our group formed friendships with the members and interns at Koinonia, so much so that it was really hard to say goodbye at the end of the week. The people at Koinonia often commented on how much they enjoyed working with us and how much they were going to miss us when we left. I think our enthusiasm for our work and our honest desire to learn more about the people at Koinonia gave them a renewed love of their work and community. I personally did not want to leave. I was so encouraged by the peace of the place and the hospitality of those who lived there, and also by our group and our comradery and true interest in learning about the place we were serving. In the end I think Koinonia provided more of a service to us. I learned more about what good community looks like at Koinonia and about the importance of taking time to step back and rest, and now I seek to incorporate that rest and community in my own life. I hope to return to Koinonia in the future and continue to learn and grow from that community.

-Hannah Vandervorst

What did we learn from the experience?

Having grown up in Los Angeles, farm work is not something I’m very accustomed to. Yet every day at Koinonia I looked forward to hours of working in the fields. I learned practical steps for mulching in the blueberry orchards, weeding the garden, and pruning acres of grapevines; but more than that, I gained great appreciation for them. There is something about working closely with the earth, about tending to a vine for hours or digging in the dirt on your knees, that is both tranquil and exhilarating. As a student who is used to sitting and thinking really hard all day, it was refreshing to do manual labor and let my mind engage in personal reflection or deep conversation with others. The farm work also became a spiritual discipline, a space into which I could invite God and be present with Him. Christ’s imagery of Himself as the vine, us as the branches, and God as the gardener became particularly clear as I walked through the vineyard with a pair of shears, lopping messy branches that sprawled in all directions so the plant could grow and bear fruit, even if the cutting was painful and left the plant bare and vulnerable. Through conversations with community members, I also understood the commitment and tedium required to maintain the farm and their livelihood. It is tempting to idealize their lives when we join them for only a week, but in living alongside them I learned to practice patience, persistence and love, both on tranquil or exhilarating days and on days that are monotonous and ordinary.

-Linnea McLaughlin
How did the experience shape my understanding of my vocational journey?

This year I returned to Koinonia Farm for my second year with Calvin’s S-LC trip. After my experience last year, I couldn’t imagine not returning. The week at Koinonia was transformative on many different levels, but vocation certainly played a huge role.

At Koinonia Farm, we got our hands dirty. I realized that, for the first time, there was so much more to our relationship to food than simply consuming. The concept and practice of growing one’s own food and eating it together in community was very compelling to me. I got to see it, to partake in it, to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor—literally. For me, this was an incredibly raw and gritty spiritual experience; by working with the land, I was engaging in a very physical form of justice—partnering with God to give our bodies what they were meant to have: wholesome, fresh produce.

Once I returned to Grand Rapids, I applied for an internship at the urban farm in my neighborhood. My experience there has only heightened my passion for participating in the entire experience of food: planting, growing, harvesting, selling, sharing, and eating. This summer, I’m continuing to intern at the farm in my neighborhood. I am also interning with Baxter Community Center as a gardening mentor. It’s pretty amazing to think that the trajectory of my vocation was so strongly impacted by just one week on a farm in Georgia.

Honestly, I generally find the concept of vocation rather confusing. I’m not always sure whether God is calling me to a particular thing or not. But when I was pruning grapevines at Koinonia Farm, and while I was building a hoop house earlier today to foster better growing conditions for the farm’s tomatoes, I couldn’t help but think: God is profoundly present in this place, and for some reason, I can’t stay away.

-Jess Montague

How did the experience shape my faith?

My spring break trip didn’t as make me just grow in faith but made me see faithfulness, and how faithfulness spawns faith. Now I must admit, Americus still isn’t a big, impressive, town. Koinania isn’t a big, impressive, or even in any sense a profitable, successful organization. Koinania’s history is not even renowned for its stance against racism, not even mentioned in history books, and barely anyone even knows that it helped inspire Habitat for Humanity. In many ways Koinania is still what it was 60 years ago, a small farm, in a small community, that seeks to live life together and to carry out that life faithfully. I learned faithfulness when I went out walking with farmer who would go out every day at dusk to collect eggs from Chicken. I learned faithfulness that from the elderly lady who would set the table, brew coffee, and get the snacks ready for the community twice every day. I learned it from the director of the farm, who still doesn’t even know how to keep the farm afloat financially for the next month, but says that the farm will continue to live faithfully to God. I learned that faith doesn’t have to manifest itself in big ways, it doesn’t have to prove itself in magnanimous achievements, faith is about being faithful "in scorn of the consequences". So, what would I say if anyone asked me about how my faith has grown over spring break? I would tell them that there is a little farm called Koinonia, in a little town called Americus, in the deep south state of Georgia, where an act of faithfulness gave this farm its very begins and to this day acts in faithfulness "in scorn of the consequences.

-Joshua Choi