

From St. Leo's To Ethiopia

What began as a project working with St. Leo's children's liturgy of the word program when she was a senior at Seton has led Anna Combs to Ethiopia this summer where she is teaching English to fourth graders.



shared with me that she was on her way to New Jersey to join a convent. We had a really good talk about faith and vocation. She wanted to know about my vocation and I told her about St. Leo's, how I wanted to work

Now a senior at the University of Dayton and a member of our covenant parish Our Lady of Visitation, Anna

with people of other cultures, and somehow get to Africa. I explained that I was having a difficult time finding a program. She told me about her experience serving in Central America, and that she was able to go there through the Catholic Volunteer Network. She gave me a web address to look into, and eventually we parted ways."

After searching through the Catholic Volunteer Network's website she found a program through the Vincentian Lay Missionaries to travel to Ethiopia. "I was very excited about this possibility because it would require me to teach students English and also incorporated my faith," she said. "However, the program had never accepted anyone who wasn't a veteran teacher before. I contacted the director who encouraged me to still turn in an application while she considered the possibility of accepting an applicant who was still in school. After spending many hours working on my application and nervously turning it in, I found out that they had accepted me!"

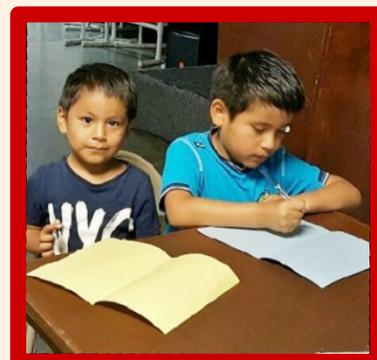


describes her experience at St. Leo's as "very special" and key to her formation. Connecting her students in Ethiopia to those at St. Leo's seems a "no brainer" to Anna who plans to have them become pen pals. She met with children at St. Leo's the Sunday before she left for Africa and had them write letters about themselves that she plans to share with her new students.

"St. Leo's has played a huge role in helping me to find my passion and my vocation. I thought it would be really neat to have the kids who inspired me to go to Africa write to the kids I would meet while I was there," she said. "I plan to give the notes to my students, explain a little bit about St. Leo's and who the kids are, then have my students do the same in return and write back to the kids at St. Leo's. I thought it would be a great way to connect two sets of children, both of whom are playing a large role in my life."



Anna is spending a month in Jimma, Ethiopia, staying at the Daughters of Charity's compound and teaching English to fourth graders in their school. In addition to class work she will be playing games with them, and getting to know the community as a whole.



Anna had always had an interest in African culture, "but working at St. Leo's helped me to get a better understanding of it. I learned so much through conversations and relationships I formed with some of the parishioners. It was the first time I had ever really felt that I was a part of a community. When I had to move on from St. Leo's to go to college I knew two things: 1) that I wanted to keep working with people of other cultures for the rest of my life 2) that I had a strong desire to see Africa for myself."

These insights led to her decision to become a teacher with an emphasis on teaching English to speakers of other languages. Finding a way to get to Africa proved to be much more difficult, but God opened a door in a most unexpected way. "Last summer I was flying home to Cincinnati alone. I was seated next to a very friendly woman named April. After chatting for a while she

Her faith has always been a guiding force in her life. "It is because of my faith that I believe that God has a plan for my life, as he does with everyone's life. My faith has also given me the strength to fight for my path. Even though I have desired to have an experience like this one for years, it is still a little nerve wrecking now that it is finally here. However I have taken great comfort in prayer and believing that I was meant to have this experience,"

What she will do after graduation next year is uncertain. She's considering many possibilities teaching English abroad, teaching in a middle school, teaching English in a non-traditional setting such as a refugee resettlement agency, or eventually going back to school to get a Master's degree in TESOL What is certain, however, is that her experience in Ethiopia and her relationships at St. Leo's will play a large part in that decision.

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate

Above: Anna with children; Fr. Jim with a send-off blessing
Photos provided by Angela Anno