



(Circle 2.0 Orientation: Chaplain Craig, Me, Ollin, and Director Amelia.)

My name is Melissa and I was a member of CoTB 2.0 AND 3.0, from 2017-2019. I am from northwest Ohio and I chose to come to Circle to learn more about intersectionality and because I loved Circle's motto of "Building Kinship Across Lines of Difference."

I served two years at City of Lakes AmeriCorps working as an academic coach at Hmong International Academy, a k-8 Minneapolis Public School. I worked to support middle school English language learners; predominantly Hmong and Somali students. I supported them in class, as well as provided one on one goal setting and mentorship. In addition to my personal and professional growth, I was also able to be part of my schools family engagement committee and coached the girls basketball team. It was because of my service years that I was inspired to go back to school to pursue my teaching license.



(My coworkers and I during spirit week 2019; AmeriCorps week 2018: My site supervisor Cheri, CoTB alum Micah, Me, my AmeriCorps Supervisor Jessica.)

Circle benefitted me in so many ways. Probably the thing I am most grateful for is learning how to be comfortable expressing my thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and learning how to be an effective communicator. Having the opportunity to learn about the Enneagram and train in non-violent communication made me more aware of myself. It helped me develop and strengthen both my personal and professional communication skills. Circle introduced me to new spiritual practices and ideas and after leaving Circle, my faith is stronger than it has ever been. I also loved the opportunity to meet with and connect with different people. Getting the chance to form strong bonds individually with a chaplain, mentor, and spiritual director, as well as building community with my housemates helped me discover myself, deepen my faith, and become the person I am today.



(Ollin and I enjoying some cookies we decorated; Me with Father Mitchell from St. Andrews; Circle 3.0 with our Chaplain Craig and Director Amelia.)

One of the best parts about Circle was having the opportunity to live and work in North Minneapolis. The northside is a vibrant community and we were blessed with wonderful neighbors, as well as the amazing faith community of St. Andrews episcopal Church. North MPLS has been known to have a bad reputation and being able to live and serve in that community helped me see that there are so many beautiful and wonderful things that happen there. Did you know that there are a group of Nuns who hand out bus tokens and pray with people? What about a high school with a superstar music and performing arts program? Or how about a cookie shop that employs high school students and teaches them job skills? I think being able to bring young adults to north MPLS to live and serve helps us to truly live into our call to be brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as build bridges across racial, social, and cultural lines.



(Circle 3.0-Jacob, Me, Fiona, and Bianca enjoy a fall outing at the Minneapolis sculpture garden; Us with our new director Denise.)

There is no denying that my time in Circle changed my life. I had the opportunity to meet and work with people across diverse racial, social, spiritual, and cultural backgrounds. I was able to challenge my views on my faith and grow in both my personal and spiritual life. Circle taught me about who I am: How I communicate, my interests and strengths, and how to live and work with others. I know that I am a better, stronger, healthier, and more complete person because of my time in Circle. I am grateful for my two years as a member of CoTB and for everyone who helped me and our program build kinship across lines of difference.



(Me with the ESC directors during their fall 2018 conference in Minneapolis; Ollin, Amelia, and I on our XTREME Community retreat in Aspen. We spent time in community with our ESC friends from Ohio, Colorado, and St. Louis; Circle 3.0 with our ESC friends from Deaconess Anne House for our fall retreat in 2019.)