

Congratulations RYS, Religious Youth Service on 40 Years of Service

Congratulatory Remarks by Carol Pobanz
September 2, 2026



As John Gehring, the International Director of RYS, for many years, has often pointed out, RYS has been built upon two essential components.

The first is the vertical dimension - developing God's Heart (or by whatever name you may refer to the Divine): the heart of unselfish love that inspires, motivates, and gives purpose to our actions.

The second is the horizontal dimension - expressing that love through acts of service to others.

In its simplest form, RYS is about Heart and Service.

That has been the foundation of Religious Youth Service for the past 40 years.

When I first became involved with RYS, much of our service centered on physical projects. We built schools and medical clinics, created parks, cleaned neighborhoods, painted buildings, restored areas after storms, planted trees, and worked side by side with local communities. These projects changed lives, but over time I came to an important realization.

Service is far broader than construction, restoration, or cleanup.

Service is anything we do for the genuine benefit of others.

As I reflected on this, I realized that each of us has unique gifts, talents, and passions. Those very passions can become our way of serving the world. Since my own passion has always been art, I naturally gravitated toward communal or participatory art projects. Rather than simply creating art to hang on a wall, I became interested in art that brings people together - creating murals, mosaics, sculptures, and creative projects that beautify neighborhoods, foster community pride, spark conversations, and communicate hope. In that way, art became my form of service - and we did many projects in Europe and central America as well as here in the United States.

This broadened my understanding of what RYS truly represents.

A doctor serves by healing. A teacher by educating. A carpenter by building. A musician serves by lifting hearts through music. A cook or baker serves by nourishing others. An athlete or coach serves by encouraging teamwork, discipline, and friendship. A scientist serves by discovering new knowledge. A businessperson serves by creating opportunities. A parent by nurturing a family.

When the motivation is love and the goal is to benefit others, every honest vocation and every genuine talent can become an act of service.

Perhaps that is one of the greatest lessons RYS has taught me over these past four decades: our passions, interests, and abilities are not merely for our own fulfillment and benefit. They become the vehicles through which we express God's love to the world.

So, whatever our gifts may be, when they are offered with a loving heart for the sake of others, they become true service.

During my years with RYS, I had the privilege of watching many young participants discover a deeper purpose for their lives. Some went on to careers in youth ministry. Others dedicated themselves to non-governmental organizations, the Peace Corps, education, social work, community development, and countless other fields devoted to serving humanity. Seeing the seeds planted through RYS blossom into lifelong commitments to service has been one of the greatest joys of my life. I am deeply proud of every one of those individuals.

Yet, the point I want to make today goes even further.

My hope is not simply that RYS participants will choose careers in service organizations. Rather, my hope is that every person who has experienced RYS will come to see that their entire life can become an extension of RYS.

RYS is not merely a program. It is not simply a service project, a summer experience, or a memorable event from our youth. RYS is a way of looking at the world. It is a way of seeing every person as a brother or sister and every circumstance as an opportunity to express love through service.

Whether we become doctors, teachers, artists, engineers, business owners, parents, politicians, scientists, carpenters, or retirees, we can carry the spirit of RYS into whatever we do. Every workplace can become a place of service. Every neighborhood can become a community to care for. Every relationship can become an opportunity to practice compassion, understanding, and generosity.

The physical projects we completed during RYS eventually came to an end. The buildings were finished. The parks were restored. The schools were painted. But the spirit that inspired those projects was never meant to end. It was meant to become part of who we are.

That's why I believe RYS is fundamentally an attitude of heart. It is the habit of asking, "How can I make life better for someone else?" It's the willingness to use our unique gifts, talents, and passions to uplift others. It's choosing to live for the sake of others not only during a service project but through every day of our lives.

If every participant leaves RYS carrying that attitude into their family, their profession, their community, and their nation, then the impact of RYS continues to grow long after the project itself has ended.

So, today, as this project is a celebration of 40 years of service, my hope is that the spirit of RYS will accompany each of you throughout your lives - from this day forward and, ultimately, into eternity. For a heart that has learned to love and to serve never retires, never grows old, and never comes to an end.

Congratulations RYS on 40 years of Service!

Thank you and God bless you all!