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Community Pharmacist Changing Lives of Underserved Neighbors

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- The first time Dr. Danielle Polley learned she would be working at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Cincinnati, Ohio, she was hesitant. She had been assigned two month long rotations there during her last year in school, but she knew little about the organization and had concerns about the daily hour-plus commute.

Polley, a 2017 Cedarville University [Doctor of Pharmacy](#) graduate, is now back and working full time for St. Vincent de Paul Charitable Pharmacy, an organization that she loves and that serves Cincinnati's underserved.

Polley, originally from Cherryfield, Maine, came to Cedarville because of its [pharmacy program](#) and strong commitment to the Christian faith. It was during her last year of pharmacy school, when students have rotations every month at various pharmacies for their Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experiences (APPEs), that she was first assigned to the Charitable Pharmacy.

Polley expressed her concerns about the commute to [Dr. Thad Franz](#), vice chair of experiential programs and associate professor of pharmacy practice, but Franz encouraged her to continue on because he believed it would align well with her career goals.

He was right. Polley developed a passion for direct patient care and the work of St. Vincent de Paul during her rotations. After graduation, she completed a yearlong residency at the Charitable Pharmacy through the University of Cincinnati's PGY1 Underserved Care program and wanted to stay longer. But charitable pharmacies, as nonprofits, have few paid staff and low turnover. Those who work there usually stay because they love it. A job would be hard to find, and Polley assumed that she wouldn't be able to return to volunteer until she retired.

That changed in August 2021, when Polley received a call about a job opening at St. Vincent de Paul, where she currently serves as a clinical pharmacist and one of the primary APPE preceptors.

The latter role is important because the Charitable Pharmacy doesn't charge patients, whom it calls neighbors, for medication. Volunteers, including students, who are willing to devote their time to the pharmacy are crucial to the pharmacy's operations. The program precepts students from eight different colleges of pharmacy and hosts 80 rotations a year. Already this school year, two fourth-year Cedarville pharmacy students have worked on rotations at St. Vincent de Paul: **Erin Ballentine of Walkersville, Maryland**, and **Jessica Istifan of Cedarville, Ohio**.

"I tell students when I do their evaluations that I truly appreciate their work because we would not be able to see and impact the amount of folks we do without their help," Polley said.

"Danielle is a great pharmacist who cares about her community," said Istifan. "She does a phenomenal job at taking care of her patients and educating them about the importance of adherence and compliance."

The pharmacy's neighbors include people who lack health insurance or who have health insurance that doesn't cover all of their medical needs. While some neighbors, for instance, must choose every month between critical medications or food for their families, the Charitable Pharmacy's patients receive both prescription medicine and food from its attached Choice Food Pantry, all at no cost. Neighbors are also connected with social services to help with clothing, bedding, furniture, rent and more.

Polley and others at St. Vincent de Paul have filled over 600,000 prescriptions valued at over \$80 million free of charge since opening in 2006. But they don't only dispense medications – they also focus on the results, ensuring that interventions are improving neighbors' health and talking with doctors if they believe a different treatment is needed. The pharmacy estimates that it saved the health care system \$5 million in hospitalizations and other costs this past fiscal year.

"We are really looking at how much healthier we can show that our patients are becoming by supporting them, by doing extensive counseling and by checking in on them with hourlong appointments every six months," Polley said.

"We view ourselves as the hands and feet of Jesus," Polley added. "I feel incredibly blessed to work in an organization where I can speak so freely, pray with my patients and see the Lord work in their lives."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [Doctor of Pharmacy program](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Bryson Durst.