Let your light shine

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” ~ Matthew 5:14-16

Ahh, summer! There are so many things to love about the summer months – green grass underfoot, birds singing, piles of flip-flops at the door, family bike rides and crackling campfires under starry nights. Family road trips, vacations and camps provide new and fun opportunities to experience the excitement of summer and often create memories that last a lifetime.

Summer is also a great time to add volunteering to your family to-do list and make special memories and connections you only get when you share your light with others.

Do what you love

When you find ways to connect your talents and interests with organizations doing good work in your community you stay engaged and excited to lend a hand. Do you like to cook? Donate your skills to prepare meals at a soup kitchen. Enjoy running or exercising? Volunteer for the Special Olympics. Explore the websites of respected organizations such as Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services and The United Way to find opportunities in your community for you (and your family) to give back.

All creatures, great & small

If you have an animal lover in the house (or maybe that’s you!) contact your local animal shelter to find out what opportunities they have available to help out. Shelters often need dog walkers and groomers. They may also need volunteers

who have website or social media skills, or are comfortable giving tours to new visitors.

Make new friends

Researchers have proven that loneliness can have a detrimental effect on a person's health. Relationships and social connections make a person stronger and more resilient. Contact a living facility for seniors or a local senior center to ask about volunteer opportunities that might be available. Sometimes all it takes is a cup of coffee and a conversation to make a difference in someone's life.

Feed the hungry

For some children, the one full meal they get during the day is at school. When school lets out for the summer, their families struggle to get enough food. How can you help? Contact your local school district or local community center and find out if they offer a free summer meal program and whether they have a need for volunteers to prepare food, greet guests or otherwise assist with the program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a comprehensive listing of summer meal programs. Find out what is in your area at www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks and lend a hand.

There are many personal benefits when you and your family take time to give back to your community. Volunteering helps you feel more connected to your community and part of something bigger than yourself. Most importantly, sharing your light with others is one of the most meaningful ways you can give glory to God. Let your light shine this summer!