

The Urban Outreach Program began with a dream of providing an after-school program for the Hispanic/Latino Community. “I remember sharing at an education division meeting the vision of establishing various centers that would provide a safe environment, perhaps at local Mexican restaurants, where Hispanic/Latino students could be tutored and receive help with their homework. There was an immediate response at that initial February meeting, and four weeks later the first satellites began, in four restaurants and one parish hall,” said Monsignor Lewis F. Gaetano, D. Min., Diocesan Liaison for Walsh University’s Urban Outreach Program.

The beginnings of the Urban Outreach Program followed Msgr. Gaetano's 2007 visit to El Salvador as well as Walsh University’s collaborative relationship with the migrants in Hartville during that summer. According to Gaetano, those two experiences served to clarify the solidarity that we all need to have with our brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor, marginalized, or disenfranchised. The call to welcome the stranger among us and to recognize the image of God in the face of the immigrant is non-negotiable. This includes the challenge to reach beyond the customary and imaginary borders of country, nationality, and culture, and to make real in the life of our universities, colleges, schools and churches the words of Mexican theologian Raul Vidales, “that the encounter with Christ in history passes by way of the oppressed [and the poor], and there is no detour.”

A primary and constant concern is that the intended program at St. Paul’s be seen as intentionally Catholic. In the words of Dr. Mary McDonald, Superintendent of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Memphis, Tennessee, “We are not here because our students are Catholic or non-Catholic; we are here because we are Catholic.” The Urban Outreach of St. Paul’s is a faith-based and community-based program striving to ground itself in the social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and the shared human experience of our students, their families, and the neighborhood. Every effort is made to assure that the principles that uphold and support the Dignity of the Human Person, Solidarity among people, and the Common Good manifest themselves as the rationale for the program in its intellectual, human, social and spiritual components.

Under the direction of Msgr. Gaetano and Walsh University Education Chair Jean DeFazio, Ph.D., Walsh University's Urban Outreach Program initially began as a collaboration between the Theology and Education Divisions. The program has continued to gain momentum and broaden itself beyond its original vision. The Urban Outreach collaborative effort of Walsh and St. Paul’s Catholic Church includes the cultural, racial and ethnic diversity that embraces the dense population of the northeastern quadrant of Canton. This is where the Urban Outreach now finds its home.

Msgr. Gaetano and Dr. Defazio, along with Program Coordinator Constance Smith, continue to create and provide a unique program of educational and formational enrichment in Language Arts, Social Sciences, Math and Sciences. Assessing the tutoring and mentoring needs of the students allows facilitators to respond to students individually, while providing specific assistance in strengthening those learning practices and habits that enable student success. Additionally, efforts are made to help students

with homework and language skills, and to provide enrichment in the Fine Arts and Physical Education.

To assure that the program outcomes are aligned with the learning objectives of the program, Dr. Defazio explains that “we have been using ongoing informal portfolio assessment, where notes and examples of each child's progress are documented in a folder. The first ten week period certainly brought challenges for the staff, but the engagement of the students has been amazing, given that they come directly from a full day of school.” Most students are ready to work when they arrive, and some are not ready to leave when their parents come to pick them up at the end of the day. Parents have shared both their own and their children's teachers' recognition of improvement and achievement that our students are having in the classroom.

The experience has also enriched Walsh University student facilitators, preparing them for the future, whether that be in education, ecclesial ministry, or other relevant disciplines. Students teaching in fulfillment of their field education and service learning requirements have maintained reflective journals for their supervising professors. The mission of Walsh, “educating students in service to others,” is realized not only through the students' fulfillment of their field education and service learning requirements, but also in their recognition of the mutuality of learning. The relationships that develop between students and mentors can become truly transformative and allow for a growing awareness that all are learning together. The program increases the capacity for understanding diversity, cultural richness, and tolerance, and transcends the barriers that separate people by race, nationality, religion and socio-economic background. “The Urban Outreach Program is responding to a need,” said Msgr. Lew Gaetano. “In a short time we have gained an awareness and understanding that each person participating and supporting the program is a stakeholder, enabling, ennobling and empowering one another in creating their place and their dream for a shared future.”

Together the combined parish, university, and civic communities as well as the partnership with the social service, social action, and migration programs of Catholic Charities, contribute to the totality and success of the Urban Outreach Program. The presence and safe environment of the center has allowed parents and children of the neighborhood as well as community school students and staff of *Project Rebuild*, parishioners of St. Paul's and members of neighboring congregations, to come together with agency and university personnel to share a variety of learning and social venues. Most importantly, through this common human experience, each person is beginning to recognize that he or she is a vital contributor to the the ***Rebirth of a Dream*** in northeast Canton.

When we return in January we are going to continue to build on the established objectives, but we will be adding a set of more comprehensive assessments that will continue throughout the year, enabling us to demonstrate learning outcomes. We also plan to work more closely with the teachers of the schools that our students attend, and to collaborate more fully with the schools in determining individual student needs. An additional goal is to strengthen and support the relationship with parents and to provide a

support system that will encourage the engagement of parents in the program and the networking of agencies within our community.

Our hope is that together the many stakeholders of the Urban Outreach Project, as they work to enable each person's voice to be counted, will be empowered to encourage families to live in peace and security in their homes and neighborhoods, and to offer educational endeavors that will build the capacity for the success and ennoblement of all.

For further information on the Urban Outreach Program please feel free to contact:

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