

PARENT CENTER PARTNERSHIP REVITALIZES LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD

by Carmen Guerrero

Logan Street Elementary School is located in an inner city area of Los Angeles, about three blocks from the Diocesan Cathedral Center. It is in the center of an area claimed by the Echo Park Gang which consists of over 300 members. For years the administration at the school has been trying to get the parents involved in an effort to help the children succeed in school and ultimately to provide an alternative to their joining the local Gang. However, it has basically been unsuccessful.

About five years ago, Mrs. Gloria Rodriguez, a mother of two children at this school as well as a member of St. Athanasius, the Cathedral Congregation, with the support and endorsement of the Vestry was hired by the school on a part-time basis to serve as a community organizer in hopes of getting the parents involved.

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... a partnership between "church and state."
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The school had very limited funds as did the congregation. However, working in partnership, Mrs. Rodriguez applied for a grant from the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, and the school principal applied for funding from the city thus forming a partnership between "church and state." As a result, the church has become a model for ministry among high risk families and their children.

Recently, a school administrator at Logan Street Elementary School stated that "children need to feel connected with others in their community. This is why they join clubs and organizations, participate in team sports and group activities, and unfortunately, join gangs."

Mrs. Rodriguez got involved in the work of organizing local parents when she began to see the high amount of gang involvement by young children and the low attendance at school events by the parents. As a community/parent coordinator and organizer, she lives and works in the community and therefore remains in touch with its pulse.

The partnership between the church and the school is making a powerful difference in this high crime inner city area of Los Angeles. A Parent Center has been established on the school campus which provides parenting classes, support groups, and other courses such as child abuse prevention, gang awareness and prevention, domestic violence, alcoholism, and even a prayer group. What started as a support group for about a dozen mothers has become a group where mothers bring their cares and concerns, asking each other's prayers.

Parents' meetings have swelled in attendance to over two hundred. Parents have gotten involved in programs that are improving their own lives, the lives of their children, and the life of the local community as well.

This year, the Parents Center sponsored a "Peace Against Gang Violence" march in the area which included the Mayor and two City Council members. Hundreds of children and their parents marched to the local park by candle light and concluded with prayers for peace in the community.

Parents gather on a weekly basis to serve as teacher's aides. Once a month these parents provide a meal for the teachers to show their appreciation for the education their children are receiving. This increased involvement between parents, school, church, and children is contributing to the success of these inner city children.

The outstanding characteristic at this Parent Center at Logan Street Elementary School is the vision of one lay Episcopal woman who lives out her baptismal vows of service to others and by respecting the dignity of every human being - regardless of their level of education, country of origin, language, or religious affiliation.

Contributions to this article were made by the community of the Parent Center at Logan Street Elementary School. It was compiled and edited by the Venerable Carmen Guerrero, Archdeacon, Multi-Cultural and Hispanic Ministries, in the Diocese of Los Angeles.

The theme of this issue of *Vestry Papers* is "Partnering with Your Community." Though it speaks to the broader theme of outreach, the articles showcased here are examples of how some congregations, their laity and clergy, have been able to develop true partnerships within their local communities and beyond. They are offered here as a reminder that we are called to minister to all of God's children.

Who takes the child by hand,
takes the parent by heart.

German proverb

THE “WELL” IN NORTH LOUISIANA

by Ginger Paul

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus said to his disciples. This familiar passage from St. John’s Gospel perhaps best describes the ministry of the “Well” in North Louisiana. Begun in two rented rooms in a hotel on the edge of downtown Shreveport, Louisiana, the project has grown and flourished and now has a hotel of its own.

The Rt. Rev. Robert J. Hargrove, Jr., Bishop of the Diocese of Western Louisiana, invited Carlos Russo to come to the diocese to further the work for the poor, especially the homeless. Capt. Russo set up his base of operations in Lafayette during the worst of the oil bust. Not a timid soul, he refused to listen to “tenners” (not singers, but those who will give you ten reasons why a worthwhile project won’t work) and has built a multi-faceted ministry there. Next, he set his sights on the Shreveport-Bossier City area.

For the poor and the oppressed, for the unemployed and the destitute, for prisoners and captives, and for all who remember and care for them, let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy.

*Prayers of the People
Form I*

Having gained the support of the clergy of the convocation and their vestries, under the direction of Russo, a group of committed lay people from most of the area churches began to help congregations understand the work to be done in the light of the Baptismal Covenant to seek and serve Christ in all persons. With the additional guidance of two lay

leaders, they focused on their responsibilities as members of the Body of Christ to be involved in this ministry to the homeless through prayer, donations of money, and sweat equity.

Grants from the diocese, the city, and area churches, including \$50,000 from the Church of the Holy Cross, enabled the purchase of the Crewell Hotel in the downtown area. Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist youth groups and adults also support the Well with supplies, money, and “work days.” Companies have adopted it as a service project.

The basement of the hotel will be the site of the day shelter when renovations are completed. Other floors will continue to provide short-term emergency shelter and low-cost housing for permanent residents as they have since the project’s inception. In cooperation with the Church of the Holy Cross, a building on the church’s property several blocks from the Well is being readied to house primarily women and children during the winter months.

The Faith Promise Banquet has asked participants to make a pledge to the Well, not based on what they know their income will be, but based on faith that dollars will come to them. Over the past three years, thousands of dollars have been provided for the Well as a result of the Banquet. Through faith, many of God’s sheep are being fed.

Ginger Paul is a communicant of Church of the Holy Cross in Shreveport, Louisiana in the Diocese of Western Louisiana. She is also a member of the National Church’s Executive Council.

“that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

I Corinthians 12:25-26

THE NEHEMIAH HOUSING PROJECT:

A lesson in the civic community

“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer disgrace.’ And I told them of the hand of my God which had been upon me for good, and also of the words which the king had spoken to me. And they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ So they strengthened their hands for the good work.”

Nehemiah 2:17-18

Named for the biblical prophet who rebuilt Jerusalem, the Nehemiah Housing Project is a two-phase initiative to provide lower income families in the South Bronx with opportunities for home ownership while at the same time stabilizing the surrounding community. The venture has the backing of the alliance of South Bronx Churches, religious organizations, and the vestries of individual churches like St. James’ in New York City.

When South Bronx Churches started in 1985, they held about 1,000 meetings with people in different congregations to discuss the significant needs and projects or issues on which South Bronx Churches would work. Their first actions included clearing out corrupt management at Lincoln Hospital, closing down the “crack dens,” getting rid of a motorcycle gang near one of the member churches, demolition of dangerous buildings, getting lights in the subway station, and improving supermarkets. A major issue discussed in most meetings was providing affordable housing so people with median incomes of \$20,000 living in public housing could afford their own homes.

St. James’ involvement with South Bronx Churches started with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), instrumental in organizing South Bronx Churches. In the mid-80s, representatives from South Bronx Churches came to St. James’

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When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.
Eleanor Roosevelt

OUT OF SNOWS COME LIGHT AND NEW LIFE

The winter of 1996-97 was a horrific one in Sioux County, North Dakota. It snowed from October until May, and snowdrifts reached 30 feet or more in many places. Food and water became scarce, water lines froze, and furnaces went out. The situation seemed bleak at best.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church and its parishioners in Fort Yates, under the direction of its vicar, Father John Floberg, had been operating a food pantry for four years which provided food not only to Fort Yates but to the neighboring Native-American community of Cannonball as well. However that year the needs of the communities far outstripped the pantry's capacity to meet the demand created by the unending snows. The 25,000 lbs. normally consumed over a 3-month period all of a sudden was needed to fill empty stomachs each month. The cost of propane needed to keep the furnaces operational went from \$.75 a gallon to \$1.35 a gallon - a hard hit for the poorest county in North Dakota where average incomes had already shrunk from \$30,000 annually to \$3,000.

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Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.

Luke 12:48

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The community pitched in, and the once bleak picture began to change. A grant from the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief provided funding to the Food Pantry, thus enabling it to buy food at \$.14 a pound to feed those in need - a huge savings on the increased prices in grocery stores. The monies saved on groceries could then go to offset the increased propane prices.

In addition, the Christian radio station in Fargo held a concert, and the funds generated from that event were used to provide clothing, blankets, and additional food. That winter, the Red Cross and the Salvation Army also assisted in the relief efforts. Youth groups in the communities affected by the snowstorms did their share by shoveling snow from the driveways and walkways of the elderly and disabled. A food pantry was also opened in Selfridge, a

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needing seed money to organize and train community leaders. Grant funds were made available over a three year period, and improved housing was immediately identified as a dominant need.

By 1991, a \$1,000,000 interest-free loan matched by Trinity Church, was put in place, and Nehemiah Housing Project officially began. Phase I is now completed and fully occupied. At a cost of \$42,500,000, 512 housing units were built, and the initial loan has been repaid along with a share of the proceeds. St. James' plans to reinvest those funds in the South Bronx through Phase II, a similar 240 unit development.

community 17 miles away.

Some of the residents of Selfridge were Episcopalian, yet there was no Episcopal presence in the community. Father Floberg began conducting services there, and the congregation has now swelled to fifty. They are in the process of converting an old Supervalue grocery store into a church and a youth activities building.

Another byproduct of these joint community efforts is the development of St. Gabriel's Camp, the only church camp in Sioux County and a major venture in outreach to the area's youth. The camp currently serves over 300 youth with programs throughout the year. It has been supported by the local congregations, United Thank Offering, and the National Church's Council on Indian Ministries. The local tribal district has also provided funding for scholarships and assisted with the purchase of a van for youth activities.

Father Floberg is assisted in his efforts, and those of his congregations, in these communities by a volunteer for mission, a native of Alabama who has been working with him for over a year. This volunteer is supported through a joint venture between the Diocese of North Dakota, Church of the Ascension in Montgomery, Alabama where he is a parishioner, and the National Church Missions Department. His work in North Dakota is also endorsed by the Bishop of Alabama.

Each of these communities is a part of the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation. The work being done there is truly an example of successful partnerships among many entities, both local and national. Through these efforts, light and new life have been generated in an otherwise bleak situation.

Father John Floberg has resided on the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation for the last seven years. He is Vicar at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Fort Yates, North Dakota and St. James' Episcopal Church in Cannonball, North Dakota.

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According to George Fowlkes, former Sr. Warden at St. James', it was a sound investment, although risky at first. But it made a statement by St. James' of the need to channel a portion of the church's assets into entrepreneurial ventures where the risks taken have a social impact. They are working with the poor in the community; they are providing affordable housing for their human needs; and they were giving a head start to viable families to get them out of poverty - out of the projects and the subsidized housing where they sometimes have lived for three or four generations.

This article is an excerpt from Visible Light, a newsletter of St. James' Episcopal Church in New York City.

Should not the giver be thankful that the receiver received? Is not giving a need? Is not receiving, mercy?

Friedrich Nietzsche

Wise men appreciate all men, for they see the good in each and know how hard it is to make anything good.

Baltasar Gracián

RACHEL'S WOMEN'S NIGHT SHELTER

A partnership providing shelter for the San Diego homeless

For several years, the Outreach Committee of St. David's Episcopal Church in the heart of San Diego provided meals for the homeless through a program sponsored by the YMCA. When that program ended, the committee determined that it wanted to continue providing this kind of ministry.

Catholic Charities offered several programs for homeless women under the umbrella of its Rachel Ministries. The Charity was in the process of opening a women's night shelter and was seeking the assistance from a broad base within the community. St. David's was more than willing to join forces with the organization.

Catholic Charities approached the United States Postal Service about acquiring space from them. An upper floor facility in one of the community's post offices was offered, and the ministry began.

Rachel's Women's Night Shelter provides shelter for 30-50 of San Diego's homeless women each evening. The women who come there for shelter must agree to abide by the Center's rules. They must be sober, and they must stay in the shelter overnight in order to partake of the dinners. Most of the women who stay there are working to rebuild their lives. The shelter does not provide housing for children.

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The only gift is a portion of thyself.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
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The women of St. David's provide hot meals six nights each month. They are one organization

among many that offer this service. Several Episcopal Churches in the community are working with Rachel's in addition to other women's civic groups and outreach groups from other denominations. A different team provides the meals each evening. The volunteers eat with women housed in the shelter, and together, they clean up and wash the dishes.

Under the coordination of Debby Park, Director of Outreach Ministries, and with the support and endorsement of the Vestry, the twenty women from St. David's who volunteer their time and energies, are, for the most part, employed in full-time jobs. Many of them must travel twenty miles or more to reach the shelter. They cook the meals themselves and pay for them out of their own pockets.

According to Ms. Park, though the church has funds budgeted for this outreach program, in very few instances has it been asked for reimbursement by its volunteers. "Our volunteers enjoy eating with the women and getting to know them. They are a very diverse group of women, in age, in race, and from all walks of life. It has been a gratifying experience for us, from the standpoint of working with the women housed there and from the partnerships we have made in the community as a result of this ministry," she concluded.

Debby Park, a communicant and Outreach Chairman at St. David's Episcopal in San Diego, California, contributed to this article.

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Questions

**Editor's Note: It has been suggested through the evaluation forms enclosed with each issue of Vestry Papers that key questions about the topic should be included as a way of stimulating vestry response. The following are questions your vestry might want to consider in looking at partnership opportunities within your community or beyond.*

- Are there existing opportunities for partnerships with other organizations within your community and beyond that you might want to explore?
- How is your congregation currently linked with other congregations and organizations in ministering to God's children? Are your combined resources being used in the best ways possible?
- What seems impossible to do today may

become a reality tomorrow. Are you planning and partnering in creative ways to address the issues and problems within your community?

- As vestry leaders in your congregation, stop and listen – try to discern what God is calling your congregation to be. Are you answering that call in your ministry to the community around you?
- As a vestry, have you seriously addressed the power of congregational vocation – God's call to you as Christians?
- Are you using all the resources available to you through the national church or through your diocese?
- Are you providing adequate training opportunities for your volunteers?