Service for Learning, Service for Life: DePaul's Vincentian Mission in Action

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SERVICE FOR LEARNING, SERVICE FOR LIFE: DePaul’s Vincentian Mission in Action

By Marilyn Ferdinand

THE STEANS CENTER

DePaul’s approach to community-based service learning has grown steadily through the Irwin W. Steans Center. A thriving part of DePaul since 1998, the Steans Center links about 3,400 students each year with more than 500 community partners, many of which provide individuals in need with access to education, housing, health care and food.

“The center works with all colleges and schools at DePaul to support faculty who integrate service learning and community engagement into the curriculum,” says Howard Rosing, executive director of the Steans Center. “We also offer an array of community-based employment opportunities, most of which engage students in critical analysis of how organizations address social inequality.”

Margaret McHenry (BUS ’12, MS ’13) serves as the chief financial officer of Worldwide Orphanage Relief Coalition (WORC), a nonprofit founded by Matthew Manning (LAS ’13) to foster collaboration between international orphanages and provide them with the resources they need to enhance the lives of their children and overall community. “My highest priority as WORC’s CFO, and also one of my biggest challenges, is finding a way for WORC’s mission to be reflected in our budgeting,” says McHenry. “As a budding organization, it is important that the funding we do receive is spent wisely and always with a resolute focus on our mission.”

McHenry’s service learning at DePaul began during her freshman year, working at Josephinum Academy, an all-girls school for underserved students, through the Steans Center’s Catholic Schools Initiative Program. “Then, through the DePaul Community Service Association, I connected with Vincentians in Action, which was pivotal to my community service experience; in December 2009, I traveled to Kenya to work on its water system,” says McHenry. “So much of our service is spent wisely and always with a resolute focus on our mission.”

Pasquini-Salazar gives credit to the Steans Center for helping to connect with many of the students who are putting their education to work in service to others, DePaul’s Vincentian mission is being realized. In addition, the university is creating research partnerships to help service organizations develop effective strategies to combat such stubborn problems as poverty and homelessness.

Before students enter a single classroom—often before they are even accepted for enrollment—they know what DePaul stands for. The university is very clear in asserting the Catholic, urban and Vincentian character that underlies its commitment to serve others through higher education and its determination to help eradicate human suffering in the world. Through the thousands of alumni and students who are putting their education to work in service to others, DePaul’s Vincentian mission is being realized. In addition, the university is creating research partnerships to help service organizations develop effective strategies to combat such stubborn problems as poverty and homelessness.
“What we view as service may be working at a soup kitchen, but it’s more than having the power in the hands of the person doing the service,” says Pasquini-Salazar. “One of the nice things the Steans Center offers students is the chance to engage with communities and see the impact, to learn about the ethical issues and the structural and endemic aspects of marginalization in real-life settings.”

“The center’s work is to push students not to think of service and community engagement as charity, but as a means to become leaders in transforming society to be more socially and economically just,” says Rosing. For many alumni and students, the service learning and community outreach opportunities woven into the academic rigor of DePaul’s degree programs brought their career goals into focus and helped them become part of the solution for society’s most vulnerable populations.

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