

Mercy students volunteer at St. Leo's

When Mother of Mercy's Director of Service-Learning, Megan Knapke '06, put out the call for volunteers at St. Leo the Great Parish in Fairmont, students didn't hesitate to give their time. The connection started last spring when Kerry Finley and her son Cole Miller, a student at Elder High School, began volunteering to teach English to adults. St. Leo's offers a spiritual home and pastoral care for African refugees of genocide from Burundi, Tanzania and the Congo. Mrs. Finley quickly realized that many of the children were struggling with school and it was difficult to get support at home as their parents are learning the English language. "We have learned so much from these families," said Mrs. Finley. "Their faith in God is such an inspiration, especially considering all they've been through. They have taught us so much in faith and hope that we wanted to give back to them." Mrs. Finley spoke to the staff at Leo's and they agreed to begin a tutoring program. She reached out to local high schools last spring and Mercy, along with Elder and Oak Hills, followed up right away. Several parents of the student volunteers dedicate their time to tutoring at St. Leo's as well.

At the start of the 2013-2014 school year dozens of students volunteer their time on Tuesday evenings to work with up to 40 children seeking help with homework. Mercy students have been credited with being instrumental in the success of the program thanks to their kindness and dedication to the children. "The students of Mercy have been a blessing this past year," said Mrs. Finley. "It has been a joy to see them every week and witness the relationships they have formed with the kids."

Mercy senior Amy Pellegrino has been volunteering at St. Leo's with several classmates almost every Tuesday this school year. "I look forward to my Tuesday evenings," said Amy. "The parishioners of St. Leo's are very fun to be around and knowing that I am helping someone is one of the most rewarding feelings ever." The children usually need help with daily homework assignments, reviewing and practicing math, and English skills. Because many have only been in America for just two years they still need help with basic reading and math skills. "I'm so glad I have had this opportunity to serve," said Amy. "I have learned so much about the kids I tutor and learning about their history and culture has been a really interesting part of the experience."

To learn more about St. Leo's parish or to volunteer, visit www.saint-leo.org.

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