



from the Northside

Urban Immersion Experience 2015

by Dave Nimmer, Visitation Companion

The nine seniors from Visitation High School who gathered at the Fremont house the morning after Memorial Day knew they were in for a different, demanding and defining experience. They'd already ditched their smart phones and figured out they would spend the next two weeks with no texts, tweets or TV.

They were volunteers in the true Salesian spirit of the Minneapolis Northside nuns: tending kids, baking cookies, helping seniors, weeding gardens, keeping journals and saying prayers. Bergin Brown coveted this opportunity, the "Senior Immersion Experience," before she goes off to Boston College in the fall. Her mother was taught by two of the sisters, Mary Frances Reis and Katherine Mullin, back when she was in high school.

"I've grown up in a family with many advantages," Bergin said. "I am open to meeting other people, to understand the life they're dealing with and the problems they face. Poverty and violence are not part of my life. I want to expand my world – and my mind."

She got a chance to do that at the Northside Child Development Center, a Catholic Charities effort to provide daycare and early childhood and pre-school education to toddlers and youngsters. At the center the Vis seniors read to the kids, played with the kids, pulled them around in wagons and, yes, cleaned up after them.

Those who volunteered at Heritage Park Senior Services Center listened to stories, played Bingo, provided music and offered company. The center is part of a first-of-a-kind seniors' community that offers news and nurture for the body, mind and spirit.

On their first day up North, the seniors donned hair nets and toured the Cookie Cart on West Broadway, where several of them returned to volunteer. The cart got its start in 1988, a brainchild of Sister Jean Thuerauf, offering



teenagers a safe, secure and satisfying place to earn a little money, gain some experience, build a resume and, of course, bake some cookies.

For two weeks, the Vis seniors put into action the words from Sister Mary Virginia Schmidt upon their "commissioning." "Our purpose," she said, "is to be fully present in this community. We bring people here who would not ordinarily come. It didn't take long for the children to find us. And they led us to their families."

Sister Suzanne Homeyer elaborated. "Bridging is our main ministry. We are all human beings. We simply try to help people along on their life's journey."

Fifth Ward City Council Member Blong Yang's journey took him from a refugee camp in Thailand to America and a bachelor's degree from UCLA, a law degree from the University of Minnesota and a post as the first Hmong-American on the Minneapolis City Council.

"This (the Northside) is a really great place to live," he said, "but we must engage as many people as we can in the life



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We are an urban monastic community. Please contact us for more information about our way of life.

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This newsletter is available on our website. If you prefer the online format, please contact the Sisters at vmonastery@aol.com.

Welcome!

To the founding of our Visitation Lay Community

By S. Mary Margaret McKenzie

If the following characteristics gathered during Phase II discussions inspire and call you, think about, pray about commitment:

Relational, by being residential and in the midst of the neighborhood;

Mutual, in living as well as in decision-making;

Dedicated, to Gospel living through the lens of love inspired by Salesian spirituality;

Stable, through the stability of a life lived by “being where you are and being there well”;

Prayerful, in personal prayer and solitude to “know who you are and be that well”;

Prayerful, in communal prayer with faith sharing for support in laying down life in the dailiness and ordinariness;

Diverse, by living into and learning that diversity is our most valuable resource for moving us into the oneness into which we are baptized;

Inclusive, in respecting all others by affirming their dignity and creating a place for their belonging in the oneness with which God gifts us.



Possible ways the Sisters might support the common good could include providing a facilitator for communication; installing a security system; forming a 501c3; exploring medical insurance; funding community educational opportunities. Community members would be responsible for funding their own lifestyle, housing, utilities, transportation, and insurance. The lay community’s presence in the neighborhood would require ongoing study of resources and learning from the neighbors in order to facilitate connectedness in north Minneapolis. In living near to us, they would join us for prayer when possible, enjoy an occasional dinner, participate in Salesian studies and other related topics along with reviewing the Sisters’ call to affirm the place of the laity.

The call gleaned by the Sisters from the Phase I listening sessions added depth to the vision of a residential Visitation Lay Community and is very specific:

1. To strengthen their legacy from Francis de Sales that “all are called to holiness;”
2. To support the laity in a way of evangelization for our time;
3. To affirm the moral authority of the laity;
4. To be with the laity in their leavening-living of the Kingdom in the church and in the world;
5. To be and to model conversion from separation to communion;
6. To pass on to others their faith in the future of the church.

Phase II closed with a bonded community, all its own, creating a clear pathway to founding a residential Visitation Lay Community while holding the vision with heart and hope.

Encountering Christ in the Hood Reflections on a Year of Service

By Cody Maynus

“This is the place of my delight and rest!” These words of our holy foundress, St. Jane Frances de Chantal, have become my daily prayer of gratitude over the past ten months. The Visitation Internship Program is this monastery’s response to the growing trend of young adults giving a year (or two!) of service after graduating from colleges and universities.



Cody (left) with Monastic Immersion Experience participant Brenda Lisenby

In September, I moved to the neighborhood, fully aware of its reputation for gang violence and drug activity, and began the best year of my life. Building on the service of previous VIPs, I continued to extend the Sisters’ ministry of nonviolent presence and contemplative prayer throughout the neighborhood. I spent the majority of my service time serving Christ in the K-6th grade scholars at the Patchwork Quilt after school program and Ascension Catholic School. My Tuesdays were spent behind the coffee bar at Venture North Bike + Coffee, serving Christ a cup of hot coffee and the occasional bicycle spoke or two. I served Christ around the board room table, taking the minutes for the Alafia Foundation Board of Trustees. Alongside the Sisters, I served Christ whenever I answered the doorbell. The Visitation Internship Program is a valuable asset, not only to the northside and monastic community, but also to the young women and men who, listening to the whispers of the Holy Spirit, offer a year of service, learning, and prayer among the most loving, most faithful, most creative people in all of creation.

Urban Immersion continued from page 1

and politics of this community. A few years ago the Hmong residents were practically invisible.”

Will Wallace is anything but invisible in his role as a counselor/advocate for Change Inc., working in Minneapolis Public Schools to encourage “our young brothers” to stay in, hang on and keep up. When he talked to the seniors, he took off his coat, looked ’em in the eye and bared his soul.

“It’s scary in the streets,” he said. “Life is scary but don’t give up. We’ve got so many doctors, lawyers, scientists (street survivors) – what would you want to give up for?” “It’s painful,” he added, “but without the pain, there’s no success.”

None of the Vis seniors was close to giving up after her experience. It was just the opposite for each and every one: Julie Barth, Bergin Brown, Kaitlyn Ewine, Sophie Minter, Helen Ruble, Julia Sullivan, Katherine Weir, Elizabeth Wollan and Sarah Newcome.

“I learned about homelessness and poverty, never having enough,” said Sarah, who worked with youngsters at the Northside Child Development Center and will attend Notre Dame this fall.

“The kids came full of joy,” she added. “(I learned) they are like all kids; they want your attention. I also learned I’m a lot more capable than I thought. I can make a difference.” She and the other Vis seniors made a difference in the life of the Sisters.

“I can see what I’m doing means something to them,” said Sister Karen Mohan.

“They’re interested in the religious life – not to become sisters – but in what we do. They affirm us. They see us as we are, in a most personal way. What a gift.”

What a two weeks. The planners called it an “immersion experience.” Those who lived it were, most assuredly, baptized – one task at a time, one person at a time, one day at a time.

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“Live in joy, brimful of God”

—St. Francis de Sales



Catholic Youth Camp (CYC)

**At CYC we made great friends
with God and each other!**



Thanks to your generosity we sent **75** children
and youth leaders to CYC this summer.

Thank you for sharing the gift of camp!

Join us in our *online* community of prayer and presence!

Thank you for being a faithful, faith-filled reader of our quarterly newsletter. Once every season you open your mailbox and, unfolding these pages and reviewing the latest happenings in our urban monastery, you join us in Spirit.

Today, we invite you to join us in our online community of prayer and presence. Tune in to our updates via our social media channels. Follow us on **Facebook!** Subscribe to our **blog!** Check out our **tweets!** View our **Flickr** Photo albums! Sign up to receive our **e-newsletter!** (The e-newsletter is a “constant contact” email newsletter and has different content than the printed newsletter.) Tune into our **YouTube** Channel.

Be enlivened by the mystery of the Visitation as it is born out in our mutually honoring social media spaces.

You can find all of these social media links at our website:
www.visitationmonasteryminneapolis.org
LIVE + JESUS!

Melissa Borgmann-Kiemde
Social Media Specialist & Visitation Companion