

PROJECT B.L.I.S.S. AND ST. EDWARD CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CORONA: A GREAT PARTNERSHIP

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When Lanita Tademay and Claudia Pasillas of CAP Riverside first approached me about Project, B.L.I.S.S., (Building Links to Impact Self-Sufficiency), I was surprised to hear that there is a life style that perpetuates a “Cycle of Poverty” and that there was an educational course, of 9 classes, designed to break this “Cycle of Poverty” mentality. I guess the bottom line for me was that here is a government funded program that



wanted to partner with local churches, using federal grant money to develop and train people to teach these classes. We provided them a place to meet and provided them with some hospitality. This also provided the parish with an evangelistic outreach to Parishioners in need and the poor in our community to help them make a Faith connection to St. Edward Catholic Church.

I arranged for the Parish Staff do an in service, along with the St. Vincent de Paul leadership, on the process so that they could help promote and generate interest with people with whom they were in contact. There are income and other parameters for people to qualify to being eligible to enter this process.

We were able to find 12 Hispanic families that were able to overcome their fears and sign-up for the classes. They graduated last month and they were so grateful to us for providing this opportunity. When I attended their graduation, their comments about what impacted them the most was being able to learn how to properly make a plan for their finances and to become more goal orientated in their day to day lives, and having a place to share their experiences and support one another.

Now that they have graduated, they have moved into the next phase of the process which lasts for 12 – 18 months. They learn budgeting, credit card usage and dangers, plus adding an ally component, which means matching them with middle income persons to become a mentor/ friend. Allies encourage and support the families in this growth process by meeting with them once a month. I knew from the beginning that this would be a challenge for the program, to help them to find allies to walk the journey. We are enlisting the priests and leaders of the Hispanic community to challenge others to apply and be trained as mentors for the process of being an ally, much like finding someone to become a sponsor for Baptism, Confirmation or Initiation Rites of the Church.

After this phase is completed they will enter the Individual Development Accounts (IDA) program, a matched savings program that will allow them to save money to use for school, starting a business, or buying a home.

The long range goals are many, but for me, I would like for them to be assimilated into the faith life of the Parish in a number of ways: a small faith community, a ministry group to support others in the program, or to connect them to other ministries groups, that would continue to nourish their lives with Faith and Hope.