

SPIRITUALITY IN ACTION

What's going on throughout the Areas of the American Association of the Order of Malta

January 2016

INSPIRATION FROM THE AREAS AND THE ORDER OF MALTA WORLDWIDE

The North American Prison Ministry Apostolate held its fall board meeting at San Quentin State Prison outside San Francisco. It was a deeply moving experience.



On the following day, Sunday, Holy Mass was celebrated in the Catholic Chapel. The Mass was inspiring. The men, most of whom were lifers, could not have been more welcoming. They were deeply touched that people

from “the outside” would come in to be with them. Some five years ago, the American Association Prison Ministry Committee contributed a few thousand dollars to upgrade the Catholic Chapel at San Quentin. Among other things, we put in monitors so that the readings at Mass were projected on screens on either side of the altar. This is very important since many of the inmates, unlike us, cannot go to their ophthalmologist to obtain a new prescription when needed. We also put in a first rate audio system.

Father George Williams, SJ, Ch.M., the Catholic chaplain at San Quentin is doing an outstanding job working with our Catholics inmates.

Robert J. Fredericks, Ph.D., GCMOb
Chair
North American Prison Ministry Apostolate



Scranton, PA Area: The Scranton chapter meets monthly, and each month members bring various supplies for the Lahey Clinic at the University of Scranton. The Lahey Clinic provides medical services, a food and clothing pantry, PT and OT services for

the uninsured people in the Scranton area. Dr. Deborah Pellegrino DM, the Dean of the Panuska College Health Sciences at the University of Scranton, initiated the program with the Scranton chapter, and provides opportunities for the Order's members to become involved in the work of the clinic.

NAPLES, FL AREA: Area Chair Peter Bewley sent us the following article from the local Naples, FL newspaper:



Order of Malta members gather to load power packs at Catholic Charities building on the Wednesday before distribution. Joe Landon/Correspondent

It's hard to imagine that a child, living right here in the Naples area, would have no food or not enough food to eat at home. The reality is that there are children, residing in Naples Manor located in East Naples and attending Parkside Elementary School, who come to school exceptionally hungry on Monday morning, not having eaten properly over the weekend.

There are 180 Parkside students identified by school staff, especially classroom teachers, as needing additional food at home. They are described as being "food insecure" or chronically hungry which means they don't have a reliable source of food in their home on Saturdays and Sundays when school meals are not available. All students receive free breakfast at school and 97 percent of Parkside's students are economically needy and qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Thanks to the generosity of Catholic Charities of Collier County, these 180 kids are given food to take home each Friday afternoon. They receive what's called a Power Pack, typically a grocery store bag filled with cans of chili or ravioli, boxes of macaroni and cheese, cans of fruit or applesauce, breakfast items like instant oatmeal, cold cereal or Pop Tarts, powdered milk, and snacks such as crackers or cookies or protein bars. The thinking is that the food can be eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



The students are provided with two of everything according to Tom and Jo O'Reilly, retired owners of the local McDonald's restaurants. They personally pack and deliver the food each week along with a team of loyal volunteers from their Order of Malta group, a lay religious order of the Roman Catholic Church whose members minister to the poor and sick.

The O'Reillys see this very hands on activity as their way of giving back. "The community has been so good to us the least we can do is help feed the neediest of the children living here," said Tom O'Reilly.

Parkside School Counselor Tom Gemmer, who runs the program for the school, called his students "so appreciative. They are grateful to be receiving the food, always saying thank you for it. And most of them tell me they share the food with their brothers and sisters. Some of the older ones even know how to make their own mac and cheese," he said. "Without this, most of these students might eat just rice and bread over the weekend."

The student stories from the ranks of Parkside's pre-kindergarten families demonstrate the need for the Power Pack program. In one instance, a mother lives with 6 children, one of whom is disabled, and there is no father in the home. The seven live in a two-room house with one room for sleeping and the other for cooking, eating and everything else. Somehow the food in the Power Pack sustains the whole family for the entire weekend.

In another case, it's a mother and three small children at home with the father having recently been deported. Mom tries to make ends meet by buying vegetables from a small farm and then selling them at farmer's markets. The food in the Power Pack supplements the vegetables they eat along with whatever else they can afford with the small amount of money mom earns.

The Power Pack Weekend Food Program was launched by Catholic Charities during the 2012-2013 school year and it has been in operation at Parkside since last year.

Research shows that well fed students perform better in school and the same holds true for those served by this program. Starling Hendriks, a Catholic Charities volunteer, has found that Power Packs are having a very positive impact on the children receiving them and doing more than just putting food in their tummies.



"Without exception, the results for the students we have tracked since we started reflect significant achievement in math and reading scores," Hendriks said. "Additionally, students participating in the program have lower numbers of discipline referrals and strong attendance records."

But one student served, Kericy, puts it best with his own evaluation by saying that "Power Packs have yummy food for my brother and I to enjoy. We love it!"

Save the Date: The American Association has a retreat in Lutz, Florida on February 5 – 7. Emails were sent to you with information and a registration form. You can also check the Association website or contact Maria at the New York office to get these materials.



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