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Lutheran High Students Live Out their Faith

by Jill Zempel

*“Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.”*

PSALM 85:10

God is brilliant. In His infinite wisdom, He sends the Holy Spirit to work through and among us in ways we didn't even know were possible. And often, when we least expect it, He offers His grace and mercy in remarkable and humble places.

In 2000, Lonnie Pries, currently head football coach at Concordia University Chicago, was teaching and coaching at [Milwaukee Lutheran High School \(MLHS\)](#), and encouraged kids to volunteer in the community. Religion teacher and then JV Girl's basketball coach, Jay Koebert, decided to follow Lonnie's lead and took his team to a service event. Jay was hooked. For the past 10 years, every Monday from October through March, Milwaukee Lutheran students have volunteered at the [Milwaukee Rescue Mission \(MRM\)](#). Like clockwork, from 3:15-6:15 pm, about 15 students go with Jay to prepare and serve dinner to the men, women, and children who are desperately trying to transition from hopelessness to hope.

The students work at MRM cutting vegetables, preparing food, and serving dinner at three different seatings. Every week, at the same time, they report to the kitchen to serve others. Interestingly, that consistency has been one of the reasons the program at MLHS has flourished over the years. “It's the kind of thing you have to be willing to do whether the students show up or not,” says Jay. “When we first started, we had maybe six students on a regular basis. The kids had to know an adult was making that trip rain or shine. You have to be passionate and committed for a long-term volunteering program to be successful.”



Barbara Vanderburgh, Director of Development and Administration at Milwaukee Rescue Mission, couldn't agree more. “Milwaukee Lutheran is one of the most faithful when it comes to volunteering. The regular and consistent manpower they provide is essential in supporting our program. The faithfulness of those kids and Jay has been amazing.”

Amazing and successful. The MRM volunteer program has become so popular among students that the high school now uses a sign-up sheet for kids on a first-come, first-serve basis. That's because one week last year, 44 students showed up to volunteer – a few more students than MRM was prepared to handle. Every year more than 100 kids from MLHS volunteer

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Review, Reflect, Resolve

What opportunities do your high school and leadership have for significant, ongoing community service?
Who needs to pursue such opportunities?
When will you start?

Links & Resources

Learn more about the [Milwaukee Rescue Mission](#).

Find out more about [Milwaukee Lutheran High School's](#) commitment to the Milwaukee Rescue Mission.



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **Shaping theFuture:**

[Crossing Over from Bondage to Freedom](#) by [Rev. Dean Nadasdy](#) (Feature)

[An Act of Hope](#) by [Reinhild Niebuhr](#) (GLEnet)

[We Wish to See Jesus](#) by [Thomas A. Nummela](#) (PEN)

at MRM – almost 20 percent of Milwaukee Lutheran’s student body. This year’s senior class alone will have volunteered more than 600 hours at the Mission.

The Milwaukee Rescue Mission was founded in 1893 by a group of Christian businessmen and community leaders to care for Milwaukee’s poor and homeless. The mission currently provides food and shelter for up to 400 men, women, and children each week. The Mission includes Safe Harbor, a refuge for homeless and hurting men; Joy House which provides safety and support for homeless mothers with children; and Cross Trainers Academy, a Kindergarten-Fifth-grade Christian school for at-risk children. MRM offers short- and long-term assistance, counseling, and job training to “help restore hope and rebuild lives in Christ’s name.”

“God commanded us to care for the poor and needy.

Volunteering at the Mission is a simple way for us to follow God’s lead,” says Jay.

“Teenagers in particular find a lot of worth in helping those in need.” Danielle Russell, a senior at MLHS, is a regular student volunteer at the Mission. “I look forward to going every week. This is just how I help make a little difference in the world.” Emerald Summers, also a senior, believes the ministry to others is through actions. “The residents at the Mission see us doing good things, and I think it gives them hope.”



Serving at the Mission has become a “cool” thing for students and there is a large cross section of volunteers. Sports teams, Madrigals, teachers, coaches, and parents all volunteer, so one of the hidden benefits is that kids who don’t normally interact with each other at school are working next to each other.

One of the many things Jay enjoys about the program is that he gets to see the kids outside of the school environment, and they get to see him in a different way. “We talk about why we believe what we believe,” says Jay. “When I volunteer with my students we get to live out our faith and share our faith. Of course, we think we’re going to help needy people, but we’re the ones who get blessed.”



“Jay is an unassuming, humble teacher,” says Barbara. “He would never admit this, but he has championed the Mission’s program and efforts in an extraordinary way. He has a passion for encouraging kids to serve others. That’s made all of the difference.”

“The people we serve come from all walks of life,” says Jay. “They have come to rebuild their lives and it’s not always easy. Last year, a man living at the Mission overdosed on drugs and the kids witnessed where destruction leads. But when you share a common faith, some of the preconceived stereotypes fade away. In the end, we’re brothers and sisters in Christ.”

“The Milwaukee Rescue Mission

“This goes beyond serving food – for these kids it’s about learning how to participate in life-long ministry and living out their faith.”

loves the high school kids,” says Barbara. “The students know the routine, they come to work, and they are kind. And our residents are encouraged by their energy, enthusiasm and spirit. The students from Milwaukee Lutheran get the eternity factor. It’s important for them to find ways to show their love. And it’s all about ministry. This goes beyond serving food – for these kids it’s about learning how to participate in life-long ministry and living out their faith.”

If you’re interested in starting an ongoing volunteer outreach at your high school, Jay has a few tips:

- Start slow. Volunteer at the location a few times before you commit to a program.
- It can be a challenge to try and find a place in the community that can keep 10-15 high school students busy on a consistent basis. Make sure there is an ongoing need for volunteers.
- Be open to the work the Holy Spirit can do through you and your students and enjoy the experience!
- Have a faculty/staff member who is absolutely committed to the program.

*Jill Zempel is Editor of **ShapingtheFuture**. She lives in Milwaukee with her husband, and their three daughters attend Lutheran schools.*



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