

Holy Family/Viator House Collaboration

August 7, 2024

Two volunteers for Holy Family Catholic Community's "Welcome the Stranger" ministry are making a significant impact on the lives of young male asylum seekers through their work with Viator House of Hospitality.

Viator House was founded in 2017 to provide a humane, fiscally responsible and supportive living environment for young men as they await their asylum proceedings. Participants can attend school, improve their language skills, grow spiritually and emotionally, receive medical attentions and prepare for jobs with the help of Viator House's staff and volunteers.

The organization grew out of an idea from Brother Michael Gosch, C.S.V., who is now its director of programs and housing, to continue the tradition of the Clerics of St. Viator. The order was founded in the 1830s to work with young people in rural France. Father Corey Brost, C.S.V, (who typically uses his first name) is executive director of Viator House. Since its founding, Viator House has provided a home for 199 young men from 28 nations.

Almost all of these young men entered the country as "unaccompanied minors" and were detained and placed in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services. When these children turn 18 years old, they are no longer able to remain in HHS facilities. Viator House provides a home for the young men so that they don't end up in temporary shelters, detention centers or unsafe situations.

Bernie Rupe and Rich DeWaal, members of the Holy Family ministry, both began volunteering at Viator House about two years ago.

"I began working with Viator House in the summer of 2023," says DeWaal. "This began as a conversation with Fr Corey after mass regarding immigrants, including asylum seekers needing education to prepare themselves to be self-sufficient. The objective was to help them become good citizens."

Rupe also connected through Fr. Corey when he reached out to him so an asylum seeker he was sponsoring could have connections with other immigrants. Through their work with Viator House, Rupe and DeWaal have helped in different ways to enable several young men make significant progress in their adjustment to their new country.

DeWaal's previous experience included training young adults in the Dominican Republic on installing large scale computer systems. Viator House presented an opportunity to use his experience.

He developed a training program around the Microsoft suite of products. The program starts with teaching the Viator House participants computer software skills to write a resume and create a personal budget. They then learn how a business operates, including developing and operating an online store. In the end, participants learn sales,

inventory, shipping and simple accounting to help them understand the fundamentals of how a business works. Each student was able to achieve multiple certifications from Microsoft within a year of study and work.

“Fr. Corey and I believed that my expertise would help Viator House participants. Since then, several other volunteers have joined with me to provide education and training to these young men in preparation for life ahead,” explains DeWaal.

The goal now is to extend this program to others who have immigrated and need similar help.

Rupe has taken a different path in his work with Viator house, offering more individual direction and mentorship. After Rupe’s connection with the first asylum seeker at Viator House, a friend asked to take another young asylum seeker out to lunch to talk about careers.

“We had a nice lunch and conversation. He later reached out to me and we started going out to dinner at various new places to try new foods,” says Rupe. “As our friendship grew, I signed up to be his mentor and our contact became weekly, including bike rides, swim lessons, help with his driver’s license and so forth. I was also his confirmation sponsor when he joined Holy Family.

In addition to his mentoring work, Rupe is a liaison between Holy Family and Viator House. As a licensed professional, he has also presented a workshop on trauma to the Viator House staff.

The work of these volunteers at Viator House is just one of several ways Holy Family’s “Welcome the Stranger” ministry assists with the challenges of migration. The Inverness parish’s ministry has conducted information programs and collected household goods to provide “Welcome Packs” in conjunction with Exodus World Relief Services, for refugee families being resettled into new homes. In addition, four members of the parish are serving as “new neighbors” to help a recently resettled family of eight from Nigeria adapt to their new surroundings in the northwest suburbs.

To learn more about Viator House of Hospitality, visit:
www.viatorhouseofhospitality.com/who-we-are/