

Volunteer Initiative Fills Need All Around

“The classroom is like an emergency room—there’s not a minute to waste.”

— Sister Marion Etzel, SDS

Project Light in Bradenton, Fla. provided the perfect opportunity for a new volunteer initiative of the Sisters of the Divine Savior.

Below: Sister Marion Etzel, SDS, second from left, and Ethel Martinez, far right, bonded with students who sought literacy assistance through Project Light.

Below, right: Sister Marion Etzel, SDS, broom in hand, cherished the “aha” moments of students she came to know through her volunteer service with Project Light.

Humility and hambone theatrics helped to drive home the lesson when Sister Marion Etzel, SDS, saw her students struggle with correct usage of the words “witch” and “which.” Running to a nearby closet, Sister Marion grabbed a large broom, straddled it, and glided across her classroom floor. Seeing her students’ eyes light up was one of those “aha” moments that warms the heart and feeds the soul.

“Each and every day held a special joy,” recalls Sister Marion of the four weeks she served in an adult literacy program through a new volunteer initiative of the Sisters of the Divine Savior. Sister Marion explains that the SDS Volunteer Program stemmed from a province initiative approved in February 2009. Later, a core committee designed a framework for the program. The committee was led by Salvatorian Sisters Ellen Sinclair, Jean Schafer, and Marion along with Father Don Loskot, SDS.

The adult literacy program known as Project Light of Manatee in Bradenton, Fla. was co-founded by Lay Salvatorians Ann and Ed Griffin back in 1995. Sister Marion shared the four-week Project Light experience with Lynda Eyrich, SDS Affiliate of Pompano Beach, Fla.; Ethel Martinez of St. Charles, Ill.; and JoAnn Kunde of Oshkosh, who is studying to become a Lay Salvatorian. Their month of service spanned October and November and consisted of teaching reading, speaking and writing English as a second language. Students ranged in age from young adult to senior citizen, and their reasons for coming to Project Light were just as varied. One student, Katalina, felt that improving dialog with her children’s teachers was important to their academic success. Another student sought assistance



in completing a job application. Then there was Isaac, who juggled a job at a gas station with his own fledgling computer business. He spoke four languages, but struggled with English comprehension. One of the adults had never had the opportunity to attend school as a child.

For the volunteers, their weeks spent together provided an opportunity for prayer, reflection, recreation, and as Sister Marion put it, “doing something that really makes a difference.” The volunteers also discovered a knack for teaching they never knew they had.

“Those two-and-a-half hours went by very quickly each day,” says Sister Marion. “The classroom was like an emergency room—not a minute to waste.”

During their time in Bradenton, Sister Marion, Ethel, Lynda and JoAnn resided with the Griffins, who delighted in sharing their favorite Florida cultural attractions with their guests. Ann and Ed also appreciated the opportunity for communal prayer, along with the support for Project Light, which has been a collaborative Salvatorian ministry for many years.

Sister Marion says adults of all ages are hungry for opportunities to serve others. She hopes this inaugural service experience with Project Light can be the spark that ignites widespread enthusiasm for the Salvatorian Sisters’ volunteer initiative. To learn more about the Sisters of the Divine Savior Volunteer Program, contact Sister Ellen Sinclair at sinclair@salsvatoriansisters.org.

