

The Mission Village Offering More Than Just A School

It is difficult if not impossible for a child to maximize their education potential if their home environment is unstable, recognizing this, Solidarity School while focused upon providing a grade school education is also an integral component of the overall "community support program" offered by Solidarity Mission Village. In close co-operation with the School, Holy Spirit Mission provides the community with a range of services through a staff of 4 supported by a large cadre of volunteers of multiple faiths and from every socio-economic level. Adult literacy and computer training classes assist parents of Solidarity School students and other immigrants to effectively interface with governmental systems, increase their potential for finding employment and open the door to a high school diploma and higher educational opportunities. Emergency intervention and counseling services direct support to families in immediate need, heading off severe hardship, educating families as to opportunities available to them and reducing the incidences of family fragmentation and domestic violence. To date the Mission has served approximately 3,000 families and is receiving an annual subsidy of almost \$300,000 from the Holy Spirit parish offerings. In addition to offering social and educational services, Holy Spirit Church has constructed a "Mission Church" within the Village complete with a sanctuary, classrooms and offices offering Hispanic families the opportunity to worship and study in their native language. This 7,000 sq. ft./\$750,000 facility was entirely funded by Holy Spirit parish but is regularly served by a number of Spanish speaking priests from neighboring parishes, all of the students enrolled at Solidarity School worship at the Mission Church. Using space released by the exclusion of inappropriate users, the Village has supplemented the businesses originally present in the Village with new minority owned businesses (including a Mexican restaurant, a Hispanic bakery, a hair salon and a "Dollar Store"), and by the upgrading and expansion of a pre-existing general store to offering a range of fresh foods including a meat counter. Other legitimate businesses have been encouraged to remain in the Village, and have been offered advice as to how they can improve their businesses and better serve the community. The Village has recently reached agreement for the Georgia Hispanic American Chamber of Commerce to establish a business incubator within the Village offering services, advice and office space to fledgling entrepreneurs. This partnership will establish the Village as the "the center of opportunity" for Hispanic immigrants in Atlanta.

Expanding Our Service To The Community

The Village has at the core of its philosophy the belief that the families that it serves should be aided and encouraged in their entrepreneurial pursuit of personal success in this country. For many immigrants adult literacy and computer classes are first critical steps in their pursuit of success, while the partnership between the Village and the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce will offer the opportunity for a macro-leap. To support these endeavors the Village aims to establish a Community Credit Union that will provide families and small businesses with banking services (as an alternative to expensive, tertiary "check cashing" services), offer financial counseling and provide micro-loans/broker SBA and other small business finance facilities. The creation of community-run thrift and book stores will create employment for community members while offering much needed services to the community. These stores can additionally serve as a training ground to provide immigrants with their first "American work experience" and qualify them for employment in the wider business community. Compliance with the laws of our country is a key requirement for any immigrant hoping to successfully assimilate into our society. Local police officers regularly visit the Village, not in response to a reported infraction, but rather as invited guests at the Solidarity School or to participate in a community event. The provision of pro-bono legal services within the Village will allow immigrants to obtain assistance with immigration, naturalization and taxation processes as well as providing the community with a broad range of advice and assistance in connection with day-to-day legal issues.

Much Needed Support

Although Solidarity School and Solidarity Mission Village were each initially conceptualized, funded and executed as a consequence of a donor's personal philanthropic vision and are without question "Faith-Based" the projects have now taken on a wider "ownership" and received support, whether financial, logistical or in kind from many sources both Church related and secular. An example of the "community based" nature of this project is the snack/lunch program...snacks have been donated to the school by the PTA of the closest public school, by a women's interfaith prayer group and by a local supermarket and, as a result of an introduction by Fr. John Hopkins LC. (a priest from the Legionaries of Christ who serves as the schools' Chaplain), raw materials for the preparation of student and faculty lunches are donated by a catering company and then cooked and delivered to the school by a local restaurant. While lunches are currently served at the student's desk, Holy Spirit Church has recently (at its own expense) constructed a staircase linking the school to its own newly constructed facilities allowing the students to utilize the meeting hall in the Churches complex as a lunchroom. Solidarity School and Solidarity Mission Village are highly efficient models for the provision of a wide range of Educational, Faith-Based and other non-profit services to an immigrant community. The School and Village each deliver services more economically and effectively than public sector initiatives and facilitate true community based "self-help".

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