

**Father David Blanchfield is the pastor of St. Jerome Church in Norwalk, CT. Father David and St. Jerome parish have been enthusiastically supporting Education and Hope from the very beginning. Their deep faith in our mission has been instrumental in facilitating the growth of our program.**

**RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM GUATEMALA (Father David's notes in the St. Jerome bulletin for the weekend of August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009)**

I am writing this column from the computer lab at Education and Hope in Xela, Guatemala. Both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures tell us that mountain tops are places of divine revelation. YHWH speaks to Moses, Elijah and Jesus on mountain tops from which they descend into the everyday world to spread the Good News that God has a plan for his children and all of creation. The plan always involves building a community of justice and holiness, integrity and peace.

To quote Martin Luther King, I can now say " I have been to the mountain top." On Tuesday morning, after a journey the previous day that lasted from two thirty in the morning to the equivalent of seven thirty at night, I found myself at the top of Xela, 8000 feet above sea level, about to enter Education and Hope for the first time.

For those of you who may be new to the parish, Education and Hope is the dream come true of Julie Coyne, a long time parishioner. I had heard about her work and seen pictures for the last 12 years, and her program is an official parish ministry sanctioned by our Pastoral Council. There is a link to it at our parish website. I was about to enter a place long imagined and my expectaions were very, very high. Usually when high expectaions kick in, the results are often disappointing. We are a people, after all, who live in earthen vessles and not the mansions of the kingdom.

What I discovered within the walls of the two buildings that hold the community of adults and children who make up Education and Hope was a reality that proves to me the existence of God's Grace as well as the truth that despite human sinfulness and systemic injustice, pockets of compassion and light, mercy and hope can shine forth just like the light of a city set on a hill.

Education and Hope is clearly a miracle. It took the hard work and vision of Julie Coyne as well as the large community that supports her, but it is every bit as much the hand of the Lord working in the midst of poverty and hopelessness. The buildings are bright, clean, and in fact the class room building reminded me of All Saints School, it is so nice. But the deepest reality is the 92 children here that first day for a huge, delicious

meal after a morning of private school education, paid for by the supporters of Julie. These children feel loved unconditionally by those who lead, teach, serve, and sponsor Education and Hope. For most of the children this huge meal and the substantial snack they get in the middle of the afternoon is 95% of the food they will have this day. Julie is indeed doing the corporal work of feeding the hungry. As the children walked in Julie called each by name and hugged each one - she was mirroring and making real God's love for each of these little ones. As the children met Julie's mother and father it brought tears to my eyes for you could see the children loving Gene and Kathy who had given them Julie.

Education and Hope is a place of laughter and learning, community and nurturing. It is the miracle of the mustard seed come true before my very eyes and I am in awe. By the time you read this I will be back at St. Jerome. Either this weekend or next you will get to hear the impression made on Megan Laney, the granddaughter of John and Lee Kuczo. If you think I am exaggerating wait until you hear about this graced experience from the eyes of someone who is young.