



God Works In Wonderfully Mysterious Ways

By **Marisa Celenza**, Editor

St. Mary Catholic Elementary School in the Jamesville area in the north end of Hamilton is benefiting from a unique community partnership. Two years ago Principal Jerry Crapsi, who was new to the school, was exploring the neighbourhood in search of an “espresso” or “latte”. He stopped to chat with Sue-Ann Ward, an Anglican priest who was sitting on a bench reading her newspaper. This chance encounter led to a partnership that has provided for the high needs of both the inner-city school and the church community.

The Reverend Sue-Ann Ward had recently been appointed as assistant curate at the nearby Christ’s Church Cathedral. In conversation, they discovered that they shared common concerns about their respective communities that formed a part of the larger Jamesville community. This area of Hamilton is one of the neediest in the city. Jerry discovered that Sue-Ann had been a teacher and he invited her to volunteer in his school.

Reverend Sue-Ann was welcomed by the school community and things began to move very quickly. Jerry mentioned that the students would benefit from a Breakfast Club and Sue-Ann took action to make his wishful thinking a reality. In less than two

months, the Jamesville Breakfast Club was opened in a meeting room at Christ’s Church Cathedral. Sue-Ann gathered a group of church volunteers, who through the support of corporate and community sponsors provide breakfast consisting of cereal, fruit and friendship for up to 70 children five days a week. Sue-Ann credits Jerry and states “his leadership skills and his willingness to push the limits have been invaluable”. Jerry sings the praises of Sue-Ann and her ability to take action. No one complained about the Anglican parish helping the Roman Catholic school.

The Breakfast Club was only the beginning of their work. They soon involved the local bank manager at Scotiabank, Frank Passaro, who was also a native of the area, and several members of the Anglican Church community. Sue-Ann describes Frank as:

a genius who thinks outside the box, secures resources, and makes things happen. He is highly respected because his motives are pure. Frank is part of many community building social justice projects in the Hamilton area.

They formed the Hamilton Association for Residential and Recreational Redevelopment Projects (HARRRP) as an agency to receive and distribute funds.



HARRRP is run by a community-based board of directors who know the needs of the community. Rather than wait around for programs to be implemented for them, they went in search of opportunities. They looked for existing resources and used them in Jamesville. They opened the Jamesville Community Centre at St. Mary Elementary School to give kids a safe place to gather and to provide programs and opportunities for people of all ages at no cost to the participants.

The Hamilton Spectator ran a story on this project in November 2006. As reported by Bill Dunphy:

They consulted with the neighbourhood, they got a summer recreation program running in a matter of days - the city chose, hired and trained the staff, HARRRP paid for them. As the fall arrived, the Catholic school board found bulletin boards and furniture for the centre, their IT department found used machines and allowed them to share their Net access. The Sisters of Notre Dame sponsored the Virtual Y program provided by the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington.

The board funded a homework club, a teacher created a chess club, Hamilton Artists Inc. offered someone to teach cartooning, United Family Martial Arts volunteered free karate classes. The list is still growing - a sewing circle for a group of refugee women, an Ontario Early Years program for neighbourhood moms and toddlers, a seniors' club. In short, they have a community centre, run by a mix of paid and volunteer staff, a warm, safe and welcoming place.

On April 21, 2007 on a perfect day, the Jamesville Community Centre had their grand opening. Approximately four to five hundred people attended to celebrate this event.

HARRRP has since opened a second community centre at St. Helen Catholic Elementary School in the east end of Hamilton. The Hamilton Catholic DSB kindly provided the space they needed. This new community centre is called the McQueston Community Centre, which is the name of this Hamilton neighbourhood. The programming will closely mirror the Jamesville C.C. programs, along with other programs to meet the specific needs of this community.



All of these events have unfolded in a very short period of time. Jerry Crapsi reports:

In just a short time, we have HARRRP and two community centres with partnerships in this community that have caught many by surprise. Both community centres have many programs running out of them and we are feeling the pressure to expand; a nice problem to have. We haven't finished.

This is a wonderful story of community building; of a community that knows its needs, goes out and meets them through its own resources, without waiting for outside help. It is impressive to witness what these community partners have accomplished for the people who live in the community. Jerry stated, "Frank Passaro has always said that if we had sat down to plan all of this we would still be talking."

This all came about because of a chance meeting and the story is not over. It is still unfolding. Reverend Sue-Ann elaborates:

I pray that others see this as a model for something that they can realize in other neighbourhoods. We have been able to develop community hubs that empower people to realize dreams and we have done it in a manner that is resource rich and sustainable. The large number of partners means that no one partner carries a heavy burden. All of the partners bring gifts, talents, experience, skills, and perspective to the undertaking. It requires that individual egos are set aside for the benefit of everyone. I have been very impressed by how readily people and organizations have rallied to the cause. People are by nature generous and willing to help out if they are provided with a manageable way of doing so that clearly accomplishes a positive goal.

God does work in wonderfully mysterious ways to perform his miracles.

Contact Jerry Crapsi at crapsij@hwcdsb.ca, Reverend Sue-Ann Ward at sueann.ward@niagara.anglican.ca or visit the website: www.jamesvillecc.ca for further information. You can also browse the Hamilton Spectator website at www.thespec.com and search for "Jerry Crapsi". You can read the full text of two stories that the paper ran on the project and take an audio-visual tour of the Jamesville Community Centre.