

Word & Hope

Angels at the Center!

“My angels!” That’s how Teresa Trenado refers to her friends at the Dominican Literacy Center. The Dominican sisters and tutors there provided Teresa and her family with tutoring in the English language and much more.

Born in a small village in the Guanajuato region of Mexico, Teresa began working in the family fields at the age of seven. After working all day, she attended a village school three hours a night. Teresa was able to attend for four years. At the age of fifteen, she married Miguel Trenado. In order to better provide for their family, Miguel moved to the United States. In 1996, after eight years of separation, Teresa and their children joined Miguel in Aurora. The family moved into a one bedroom trailer. The three children slept on the floor until someone provided them with a fold-out sofa.

Teresa felt very alone. Her lack of English meant that many doors were closed to her. She said, “I felt ‘blind’ when I first came to this country.” Fortunately, some friends introduced her to the Dominican Literacy Center where she began studying English. Teresa completed the three-year program at the Center, working with two different tutors, Barbara and Judy. Her confidence increased as her knowledge of English grew.



Teresa pointing to her home town in Mexico.

Life in Aurora still presented the Trenados with problems. Tragedy followed soon after the family moved from the overcrowded trailer to a home of their own. A fire destroyed their home and its contents, and the family was back to having nothing. Again, the “angels” at the Center came through for the family. Teresa’s tutor, Judy, helped to raise money for the Trenados. The Center collected clothing and household supplies to help get them back on their feet. Despite having a vanload of items stolen while the family was in church, Teresa never gave up hope. “God gave me strength,” she said. She had her family. That was



Teresa and her tutor, Judy Koch, in 1999.

far more important than any of the material goods that she had lost.

Learning English made a world of difference in Teresa’s life. She got a driver’s license. “I wrote the letters ‘L’ and ‘R’ for left and right on my fingers when I went to take the driving test, because I still had some trouble with directions,” she said. She could speak with her children’s teachers at conference time and understood what was going on during doctor’s visits.

Teresa wanted to be more than just a resident of the United States; she wanted to become a citizen. Again, the Center provided an avenue for advancement. She attended citizenship classes offered by the Center. In 2005, she was ready to take the citizenship test. She passed on the first try, giving thanks to God for her success.

Teresa is not the only family member to benefit from the Center’s programs. Three of her sisters, Betty, Griselda, and Elena have also been through the program. Currently, her daughter-in-law, Adriana, is attending classes. Griselda’s tutor, Jonelle Du Bois even started a special class just for the extended Trenado family. Alternating homes, they meet each Friday night to practice speaking English.

Thanks to the blessings she has received, Teresa is now in a position to give back to others. She and her husband, Miguel, visit Mexico each Christmas, bringing small toys, cakes and soda to the people in their village. She is saddened when she sees the poverty, tearing up when she remembers a small boy joyfully accepting a little toy truck, even though it had no wheels.

Her goal now is to volunteer at a local hospital. She wants to help people who don’t speak English deal with medical emergencies. When asked what advice she would give to newcomers to the United States, her reply is simple, “Learn English.”

*We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor.
We need to include the excluded and preach peace. ~ Pope Francis*

In Their Words

Students at the Dominican Literacy Center share their traditions for el Día Los Tres Reyes Magos

Before I came from Mexico, we would start celebrating the night of January 5th. The children would put out a shoe with a letter asking for gifts. That same night, families would get together to celebrate. We would buy a cake in the shape of a ring. In the cake, there would be three baby figurines, sometimes more, depending on the size of the ring cake. We would all drink chocolate and eat cake. Whoever got the figurines would have to make a dinner for everyone on February 2nd. They would all get together on that day and eat tamales. Here, in the United States, we just buy the cake on January 5th, and we get together and eat the cake and drink chocolate.

~Andrea Galli

In my family, in Mexico, we did not give gifts on the Feast of Epiphany. But, we did celebrate Rosca de Reyes, the bread of kings. I wanted to know more about this special bread, so I researched on the computer. I found out the bread is circular to symbolize the love of the lord that has no beginning and not end. I also found out the baby Jesus hidden in the bread was a reminder of Mary and Joseph hiding baby Jesus from Herod. The dried fruit symbolizes the jewels worn by the three kings who brought gifts to baby Jesus. The bread is always served with chocolate which symbolizes the melting together of Spanish and native cultures. I am happy to learn the tradition of Rosca de Reyes, and I can explain it to my children.

~ Alma Raygosa

Meet Alison Brzezinski

Tutors and students at the Dominican Literacy Center were introduced to a new face this fall. The Center welcomed Alison Brzezinski on August 1, 2014. As the new Tutor Coordinator, she is involved in program planning, tutor training and is responsible for pairing over 150 students with tutors each year. Alison takes over for Sister Ann Clennon, who left last spring to assume a position at the Dominican Motherhouse in Springfield, IL.

Alison, highly qualified for her new post, has a BA in Applied Behavioral Sciences and a Masters in Human Services, School and Community Counseling. She has been married for thirty-three years. She has three grown children and welcomed her first grandchild in September.

She has worn many hats throughout her life. She worked in securities at the Board of Trade and formed a consulting firm for securities training. She was employed in real estate. After being a full-time mom for a few years, she received her bachelor's and master's degrees, qualifying her as a licensed counselor.

When employed at Oswego East High School, Alison was an ACT Intervention Specialist. She designed and delivered curriculum for building test taking skills. She cultivated academic success and confidence in at-risk students and ESL students.

Through the years Alison volunteered for many organizations: the PTA, Homeowner's Association, Choir, Band Boosters, Confirmation Education and Religious Education. Her volunteer spirit led her to become a tutor at the Dominican Literacy Center last year. When Sister Ann resigned, Alison was one of many applicants for her position and was hired last spring.

Alison has settled into her bright second floor office. "I enjoy meeting the many tutors and students and I love the open, loving spirit of the Center," she exclaims.



el Día de Los Tres Reyes Magos

Three Kings Day, the Feast of the Epiphany, is celebrated twelve days after Christmas on January 6th. On this day, tradition celebrates the arrival of the three wise men (Magi) bearing gifts for the infant Jesus. In many Latin American countries, it is the visit of the three kings that is celebrated with gift giving during the Christmas season.



Thank You!

A heartfelt thank you to all who donated to our Sponsor a Student Campaign via the online portal Razoo. Using Razoo is a safe and secure way to connect with our Center and to support our mission. Anyone wishing to make an online donation to our program can find the Razoo site on our webpage at www.dominicanliteracycenter.org.

New Tutor Training

Training for new tutors will take place Saturday, January 17, 2015 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Dominican Literacy Center. Lunch will be served. After completing the training, tutors will set up a time to observe a class at the Center. To register for the training, contact Alison Brzezinski at 630-898-4636 or via email at alison@dominicanliteracycenter.org.

Replicating a “Vibrant Idea”

Making challenging decisions is part of managing a successful program. Such a decision confronted Sr. Kathleen, Sr. Ann, and Sr. Jane Ann in 2009. The program at the Center had grown from one tutor, two students and a card table to fifteen full sessions, morning, noon and night, Monday through Friday on three floors of a former convent. The needs were clear: find a larger home for Center or assist those seeking to replicate the program in other locations. Knowing the financial responsibility and energy required for the first choice, the DLC staff choose to actively support replication.

Today the Dominican Literacy Center is replicated in five locations, all of them offering individualized, one-to-one tutoring. Although most of the programs have been started with former tutors from the DLC, each program serves a particular population. The small program at Stonebridge Country Club is for the employees. In Galena, the program serves a sizable Hispanic community employed by the restaurants and golf courses. At St. Rita and St. Joseph, the tutors saw the need for an ELL program for fellow parishioners. Some of the programs are only for women, some serve men and women. In all the programs the DLC helped in the organizational phase and facilitated the initial tutor training.

Leadership is crucial in the programs. The primary contributing factor to the success of the replicated program is the presence of a full time coordinator. The basic structure of one-to-one tutoring has proven easily adaptable to different kinds of groups.

This year another DLC replication is taking place in Columbia, Missouri. A group in Fort Worth, Texas is interested in bringing the concept to their community as well. As Sr. Kathleen says, “The basic idea of one person helping one person is a simple and vibrant idea which can change the lives of many.”

St. Rita’s Program

Paula Romanow first heard about the Dominican Literacy Center when she teaching elementary school. When Paula retired, she volunteered as a tutor and found herself in a wonderful program. “The women were motivated,” Paula recalls. “They truly wanted to learn.” She told friends at church about the program, and was surprised when a fellow parishioner suggested that Paula begin a similar series of classes at St. Rita of Cascia parish in Aurora.

Even though Paula realized the need for such a program at her parish, she also understood the commitment required to implement one. She turned to Sisters Ann, Kathleen, and Jane for support. “They understood that there is always room for differences [between programs],” Paula said. The Sisters provided insight, ideas, and confidence for Paula to develop a new program. Paula based St. Rita’s program on the DLC model, but knew that changes might be necessary to meet the needs of the students.

In fall 2013, Paula opened St. Rita’s ESL Program for Women. The first class began with eight students, six tutors and a waiting list. For the first year, this “sister-program” mirrored the original. But as the second year began, some adjustments were needed. The program had nearly doubled in size and class times were extended from ninety minutes to two hours. All tutors and students began taking their breaks together to allow for extra English conversation.

Some changes extended beyond the classroom. “It is genuine friendship,” said Paula, speaking of the relationships between the tutors and students. “There’s a bond that develops.” That bond permeates everyday life. The women, regardless of native tongue, support each other through ordeals and celebrate successes. They share recipes and visit each other’s homes.

“The rewards that the program has brought are far greater than we anticipated,” Paula says, with pride in her voice. “Giving women a sense of their importance, the empowerment to give them a sense of themselves, is one way that our program has succeeded beyond our expectation.”



Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance and support for the many initiatives of the Dominican Literacy Center:

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“Word & Hope” is a twice-yearly newsletter of the Dominican Literacy Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

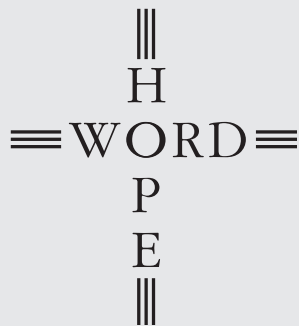


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The Dominican Literacy Center provides ...



The mission of the Dominican Literacy Center is to provide opportunities for women to receive individual tutoring in reading, writing and speaking English. We provide these opportunities through individual tutoring by trained volunteers within the neighborhood setting. The Dominican Literacy Center believes in empowerment through education, and in the dignity of each individual person.



- **free 90-minute weekly individual tutoring sessions for women in reading, writing and speaking English as a second language.**
- **customized curriculum of English-only instruction appropriate to each student's level.**
- **sessions that run from September through May, with day and evening formats.**
- **the opportunity for a student to remain in the program for three years, usually working with the same tutor during the entire time.**
- **conversation classes open to current students and "graduates".**
- **citizenship classes for both men and women.**

**For more information, call 630-898-4636, M-F 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
or see our website at www.dominicanliteracycenter.org**