



Marianist International Volunteers

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Volunteering in the United States
Former program: MVSC
(Marianist Voluntary Service Communities)
New program: MVP
(Marianist Voluntary Program)

Correspondence

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Dear friends
of the Marianist Family,

This is the third edition of the MIV (Marianist International Volunteers) on-line Newsletter, which, as you already know, is one of the means used by the MIV to publicize information about Marianist Volunteers from all over the world.

In the first two issues we chose two very different parts of the world where it is possible to volunteer with the Marianists: Peru in Latin America, and Bangladesh in Asia. In this edition, we have changed continents again, and we move to North America, to the United States in particular.

In this country, from 1979 to 1999, for exactly 20 years, there was a Marianist volunteer program called MVSC (Marianist Voluntary Service Communities) which operated in

the cities of Dayton, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Covington, Cincinnati and New York.

A couple of years later, after the new Marianist Province of the United States had been restructured, a new Marianist Volunteer Program was created, called MVP. This new program is now recruiting volunteers for 2005/2006. For the time being, only American citizens are accepted in this program, and it also offers the volunteer opportunity to serve in Mexico.

It is important to clarify that both the MVSC and the MVP are different programs. However, we wanted to recover part of the great richness left by the experience of some former MVSC volunteer. We have therefore chosen two very different former volunteer stories: one lived by a foreign volunteer from England, who worked in the field of education for runaway

kids, and another one lived by an American computer geek, as he likes to define himself, who found a way to do an evangelizing service to the poor using his computer skills.

Finally, one more word that joins both programs in spirit is the Marianist Charism that they embrace, since both emphasize living in community in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized as important features that characterize the two programs.

We hope you enjoy the stories told in these pages, and remember that this Newsletter is also available in French and Spanish if you need it. We ask you once again to help the MIV publicize all this information by sharing and distributing this material with the people you know who are interested in volunteerism.

Thank you very much for your cooperation in the MIV mission, and may Mary help us strengthen our bonds as members of the Marianist Family among the four branches all around the world.

José Luis Pérez MLC

MIV Coordinator

Making a difference with the use of computers

My senior year in college started like everyone else's - excited about being "free" to get on with our lives, yet a little uncertain about what exactly the getting on might be. I worked through most of my college life at a pretty good company (NCR) and learned a lot about my trade (computer science). In fact, I probably learned more there than I did in college, when it comes to practical, useful job skills. However, NCR was having some tough financial times and even though I had been there as a co-op

student for a few years, my job future there was uncertain. Besides that, I took a couple trips in my last few months of college: one to El Salvador to visit a friend who was volunteering there for a year, and another to El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico (they're across the border from each other). The first one was just for "fun" and to experience some third-world life that I really didn't know much about. Once I got to understand that there was a lot of poverty and unfairness in the world, I decided to take the second trip to Juarez, which was organized by UD (the University of Dayton). UD organizes several of these types of trips each year, to help students get an awareness of what other parts of our country and the world are like, and to learn that there are a lot of people not nearly so lucky and privileged as us. Both of these excursions into the real world got me rather alarmed at the quality of life that so many people in the world experienced.

My problem was, how could I help these people with my computer science degree? I had little desire to live far away from home (Ohio) so that kind of ruled out going to another country. I did figure there were plenty of underprivileged people right here in our own country, and even in our own inner cities, so I looked for a way to help some of them. With my job future at NCR being uncertain, and a friend suggesting I look into the MVSC, it seemed like a really excellent opportunity for me. Little did I know! I relocated from Dayton to Cincinnati, and started work at a small non-profit that helped provide housing for people with AIDS. They had a really groovy project going on to use a computer database to share information about affordable but decent rental housing that some social workers could use to help their clients find housing. Not long after I began working at Caracole, plans were made to expand the database to include not just



housing, but information about many other social service agencies in the city - sort of a phone book, but with really comprehensive information, that would be easily searchable and help folks get the resources they need. This system, dubbed SOPHIA, would be shared by dozens of non-profit agencies all around the city, all contributing to the information and using it to help their clients find resources. So happily, I was able to apply my limited skills as a computer programmer towards the SOPHIA project. In the design of this software, I met some amazing people in the social work field - people who were really committed





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“...in the design of this software, I met some amazing people in the social work field...”

to helping whoever they could improve their lives. It's really something to see people genuinely caring about each other, especially since I had been working in Corporate America up until this point. It was very groovy and opened my eyes to world I didn't really know much about.

Besides working on the SOPHIA project three days a week, I worked the other two at Caracole House, an apartment building that Caracole owns and subsidizes for people with AIDS to live comfortably until their either die, or regain their health and strength and move out on their own again. My work there was not real



exciting - housekeeping, running errands, buying groceries, was the extent of it. I met some really interesting people who were residents of the House, but I had a really hard time connecting with them and understanding them. Generally, they came from pretty different walks of life than I, and it was hard for me to find common ground with them and get to know them. The most important thing I learned working there is that I much preferred dealing with computers than people. It might sound strange, but I figured that some people are just not good at dealing with people all day long, and I seem to be one of them. Still, I was able to help in some small way, even if it meant just a cheerful smile and a running vacuum cleaner.

Not to be outdone during this year of new experiences, I had an interesting group of MVSC housemates. We met each other for the first time at a retreat for the beginning of our volunteer year. Of

course, my housemates were not quite what I expected. I thought volunteers would all be long-haired granola-eating hippy type people who were very relaxed and groovy, and I was looking forward to getting myself into that crowd. As it turns out, people who volunteer come from all walks of life and all sorts of backgrounds. In our house, we had a lawyer, a computer geek, a carpenter, and a jack of all trades. We were all white and generally Christian, but had a whole lot less in common than I had hoped for. Once again, I had a hard time connecting with people with such different lives than I had. Still, we were all in the MVSC together, and we did share meals and prayer together, and all those things brought us closer together throughout the year. I was grateful for the support structure and friendship, especially on the rougher days. We even had Thanksgiving dinner at our house (a week before the regular holiday) and invited everyone we knew - it

was an amazing day. I'd like to say that by the end of the year we all shed some tears to part ways, but it wasn't meant to be. We had some good prayer and community together, but it wasn't the amazing bonding lifetime-friendship sort of home I was expecting when I entered the program. Even so, I would still do it all over again if I had to (though I would paint my bedroom a different color!). I learned that you just have to meet people where they are in their lives rather than expect them to do things your way.

All my experiences that year added up to some amazing learning and growing I never saw coming. Between the community life, excellent retreats, and social work kind of job, there was *never* a dull moment for anyone. Even though there isn't much of an MVSC program in the US anymore, it lives on in each of the former volunteers. It helped make us the people we are today, and for my part, I grew at least as much that year as I did

through several years in college. I still work at Caracole today, through thick and thin, and watched Sophia become a whole department of people committed to helping other non-profits use their technology effectively through all sorts of software, support, and planning. So even a geek can make a difference!

David Durkalski

www.sophiatech.org
MVSC Cincinnati 1995-1996

On the peculiar 13th Street in Cincinnati

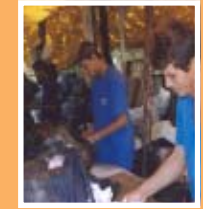
I came to be an MVSC volunteer by mistake. I was going to be an

Appalachian volunteer, but the Marianists got me first! I was given a phone interview on Independence Day, I think the day is important! I was offered the position of being a volunteer in Cincinnati. It was going to be a big move for me because I am English, and had always lived in England. Nevertheless I took the opportunity and within a couple of months I was flying to Cincinnati. At the airport, after the interrogation by the immigration officers, I was met by an ex-volunteer (I later found out that ex-volunteers hang around a lot) and an ex-volunteer who had become a team leader. When we arrived at my home on East Thirteenth St, I was surprised by a lot of things. One, the street seemed so wide, (we only have narrow residential streets in England). Two, there were so many people outside for 1 AM at night, and three the house I was to be living in was enormous. My job was to be a volunteer at a

runaway shelter. I had three major roles, one was driving students to the education center (yes, learning to drive on the wrong side of the road was fun), assisting in the center and helping the adolescents in the shelter with their day-to-day needs.

My experience of working with this group of young people was enlightening. I saw children of ten who had run away from home because they had parents who were drug addicts, to girls of fourteen or fifteen who had left because they were pregnant. In this year I think that I was of help to the shelter in providing consistent, free assistance. In all honesty I doubt whether I personally had very much effect on the individual teenagers that I came into contact with. As many MVSC volunteers will testify a big part of the program and of their individual, personal development was living in "community". Actually living in community meant sharing a house, and food, and prayers, and free

time and life with three other strangers! It was an amazing and powerful experience! That year together saw every idea from what worship is, to whether or not to buy generic brands challenged. Negotiation, diplomacy and lots of laughter came into their own. That experience was very emotional, and saw lots of tears when the year came to an end. Maybe I knew deep inside that while these people had been a year temporary family we wouldn't be able to remain on that level after the year was over. It is with deep regret that I am only in touch with one of the volunteers I lived with. I know that the year as a volunteer





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“...a big part of the program and of their individual, personal development was living in community...”

was rewarding and challenging and many things that I learned then are still just being understood today, eight years later!

Ruth Dicker

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Marianist volunteer in Cincinnati, OH - United States of America between 1996 and 1997.

Marianist Volunteer Program / MVP

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| <u>Mission Statement</u> | The Marianist Volunteer Program provides opportunities for men and women of faith to share in the marianist charism by building a community in mission for peace, justice, and solidarity with the poor and marginalized. | |
| <u>Description</u> | The Marianist Volunteer Program is a faith-based volunteer program that provides individuals with the opportunity to serve those in need, live in community, and reflect on that experience with the larger Marianist Family. Stateside commitment is 1 year, International commitment is 2 years. | |
| <u>Opportunities</u> | <u>in USA</u> | Cincinnati, Ohio Rockaway, New York Saint Louis, Missouri San Antonio, Texas |
| | <u>in Mexico</u> | Coatzacoalcos |
| <u>Fechas</u> | Monday august 1, 2005 to monday july 31, 2006 | |
| <u>Address</u> | 4425 West Pine Blvd. - Saint Louis, MO 63108 - Estados Unidos de América | |
| <u>Phone</u> | +1 (314) 533-1207 | |
| <u>Fax</u> | +1 (314) 533-0778 | |
| <u>Coordinator</u> | Daniel Richter (drichter@sm-usa.org) | |

For further information about volunteerism around the world, we recommend the following websites:
[World Volunteers English](http://newsletter.worldvolunteerweb.org) <http://newsletter.worldvolunteerweb.org>
[Catholic Network of Volunteer Service](http://cnvs.org) <http://cnvs.org>