Can Empathy be Taught?

By Tom Turner, Director

Last summer, we managed an internship program for 25 Catholic college students who worked at several nonprofit agencies in Kansas City. At the end of the summer, we conducted a survey of the students. One question asked, “What was one thing you learned this summer?” A student wrote, “I grew in empathy for others.”

It’s easy to feel empathy for immediate members of our family, relatives, and close friends, but our empathy “radar” starts to weaken once we move outside of that group. It is more difficult to empathize with those who look or act different, are total strangers, or who live far away.

Our student interns’ empathy radar extended way beyond their family and friend circle. The students worked with groups of people often described as marginalized: those who are experiencing homelessness, living on a low-income, are refugees or immigrants, were previously incarcerated, or are children who are at-risk.

I think a challenge of faith is to see how far out we can push our empathy. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus challenges his followers not to invite their friends and family members over for dinner, but rather the poor and disabled people (14:13). In other words, reach out to those who are different than you.

We are offering two programs for young people where we hope, like the student in our summer intern program, they can “grow in empathy.” One program is called Defend Against Hunger and the other is Serve. Learn. Earn.

Defend Against Hunger

Defend Against Hunger, a partnership with Matt Besler, captain of Sporting KC, works to lessen food insecurity in our city.

This season, we invite families to learn more about hunger, to engage in conversations together, and grow closer through service to others. Over the month of November, we will send you weekly activities, conversation starters, service opportunities, and challenges for you to complete with your family.

Afterward, we invite all participating families to join us at the brand new One City Café with Matt Besler to celebrate the ways you and your family worked together to Defend Against Hunger. To sign up, go to bishopsullivan.org/defend-against-hunger.
New Program for College Students

Serve. Learn. Earn. is a unique program for college students to learn about poverty-related issues.

Serve. Learn. Earn. is an eight-week program. One night a week for eight consecutive weeks, students will help serve a meal at One City Café, our community kitchen at 39th and Troost. Students will assist with the preparation and serving of the meal from 4:00 to 6:30. That is the “Serve” part of the program.

After clean-up, the students will partake in a discussion, for approximately 50 minutes, about their experience serving in the community kitchen. That is the “Learn” part of the program.

Knowing that students are always in need of some extra money, each student will receive up to $500 depending on their participation. That is the “Earn” part of the program.

Each Serve. Learn. Earn. eight-week program will be limited to no more than 10 students. The first Serve. Learn. Earn. course will run for eight consecutive Tuesdays from January 15th to March 5th. A second course will be offered on consecutive Tuesdays from March 19th to April 30th.

To apply to participate in this unique program, go to bishopsullivan.org/serve-learn-earn.

Tax Credits Available for Donations

Did you know? The State of Missouri offers a tax credit – better than a tax deduction – for donations to Missouri food pantries. Most donations to Bishop Sullivan Center qualify for this credit.

For a donation of up to $5,000 per individual or corporation, you receive up to 50% back. You do not need to itemize deductions in order to receive this credit.

For those of you considering a year-end donation, this can be a tremendous benefit, both for our food pantry and you. For details, go to bishopsullivan.org/missouri-tax-credit or consult your tax advisor.

Save the Date: Annual Auction and Trivia Night on March 2nd, 2019!

This little girl is happy about the food she and her mother received from our food pantry.

Follow us on social media to keep up with the Center, learn about whom we serve and see the difference your support makes.