



Omar Gonzalez tutors a Spanish-speaking immigrant who is preparing for his citizenship test at the Presentation Lantern Center in Dubuque

A PRACTICAL PURPOSE

Students gain hands-on experience while serving the community

The lessons taught within the walls of the classrooms at DWC are carefully planned, delivered and evaluated. They're crafted to fit a particular curriculum and meet the outcomes of the academic programs.

Still, nothing compares to the opportunity to put these lessons into action through practical experiences. A ministry practicum affords participating students the opportunity to serve the surrounding community and work directly with people in need while also sharpening the skills they'll need for a lifetime of service.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most off-site ministry work was halted for more than a year. This academic year, most efforts came back online.

"The practical experience of ministry outside the college is an essential part of the education and formation of our

students," said ministry coordinator Fr. Raymond Akumbilim, SVD.

In pastoral care class, students learn about the virtues they'll need for ministry. They explore the importance of patience, compassion, prudence, wisdom and respect for boundaries.

"It is only in the practice of ministry that these virtues are developed and tested," Fr. Raymond said. "You can know all about compassion, but if one is not exposed to a situation that demands one's compassionate response, then one may never actually develop this virtue. We therefore, believe our ministry practicum provides our students this unique opportunity to grow in their vocation and ministry." The college offers students a variety of service opportunities. They connect with residents at local nursing homes, volunteer their skills to area religious communities,

offer language support to immigrants and serve food to people in need. For some, this is their first real experience of practical ministerial engagement. For others, it builds on the experiences they already have from previous ministry assignments.

For the past year, Sr. Nhiem Thi Nguyen, LHC, offered her time on Fridays at the Epworth Community Meal. Each week, she and four other DWC students work alongside local volunteers to prepare and serve more than 150 meals. The food is distributed on site, delivered to the homebound and also available for carry-out.

“Doing this ministry for a year, I have learned how to value food and share time with others. Moreover, I admire other volunteers who give time and energy joyfully to continue this ministry,” she said.

Peterson Forestal is part of group of students that visits a nearby nursing home regularly to help facilitate activities like bowling and bingo with the residents. Each week, the DWC students play games, interact and pray with the men and women who live at Accura Health Care in Cascade, Iowa.

“It is not only my presence that brings joy and support to the residents but seeing them brings a lot of joy to me, too. When I interact with them, it almost appears like they

do not have any suffering or handicaps,” he said. “Doing this ministry in Cascade has taught me to be patient, and to be humble when it comes to serving the marginalized, the poor, and the sick.” Each week, students reflect on their experiences and at the end of the semester, the group gathers to share what they’ve learned. For some students, the ministry practicum helps them discern and clarify their religious vocation.



Peterson Forestal assists a resident at Accura HealthCare in Cascade as she lines up her shot for bowling while Sr. Isabel Mula, CPS cheers

“The off-campus ministry is also the College’s way to reach out to our neighbors in loving service, recognizing that we owe our education and formation to the generosity of many people,” said Fr. Raymond.

“The overall goal is that through this ministry, students can develop the practical skills and virtues necessary for ministry within and outside the church that takes into account the socio-cultural and religious context of those they are called and sent to serve.”



DWC student Sr. Nhiem Thi Nguyen, LHC, serves a bowl of soup at the Epworth Community Meal