

The Canticle

The newsletter of Santa Maria Urban Ministry, San Jose, CA June 2009

Canon Reyes Visits SMUM, Meets with Board of Directors

The Rev. Canon Jesus Reyes, who is responsible for congregational growth and development in the diocese of El Camino Real, made a first visit to Santa Maria Urban Ministry (SMUM) on May 20 and packed a lot into a three-and-a-half hour visit.

Canon Reyes met with seven members of SMUM's Board of Directors and the Rev. Lawrence Robles, Executive Director of SMUM, and a wide-ranging and productive sharing of ideas followed. Having experience as a social worker with a service agency providing food, housing, and crisis intervention services to clients, Canon Reyes was able to offer helpful observations as well as learn about the history, mission, and experiences of SMUM.



Lawrence and Carmen Robles with Canon Reyes

Canon Reyes got the deluxe tour—everything at the facility, including the ABC Playtime classroom where the children greeted their visitor with interest, a tour of the food warehouse and an introduction to the volunteers working there, and a look at the children's playground with its new cushioned tiles. He responded with enthusiasm, calling SMUM “a very creative use of space,” and “an amazing operation” that is “responding to the challenge” of helping people.

The visit concluded with lunch, shared with the Board members and volunteers on hand, and, as is true for all SMUM meals, Carmen Robles and her

helpers provided a bountiful spread of delicious dishes.

VITA Team Helps SMUM Clients File Income Tax Returns

Albert Einstein once said that the “hardest thing in the world to understand is the income tax.” If so, completing the forms to file the tax return have a high difficulty rating.

This tax season (February-April) SMUM once again offered the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program to those who needed assistance and who qualified as low income, elderly, disabled, or limited English speaking. Using the computer lab at SMUM, the VITA team was able to relieve the anxiety level of many tax payers.

The VITA team (Lewis, Melissa, Carolina, Angela, Pablo, Maria, Rosie, Chris, Linh, and Sandra) spent 318 hours helping 194 people file 2008 tax returns. They also assisted 56 people in getting ITINs (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number) in order to be to file returns. The team, which is qualified to help English, Spanish, and Vietnamese speaking people, also assisted a number of people who had to file returns for previous years.



Team leader Lewis with six members of the VITA team

VITA volunteers receive free classroom training and IRS certification after successfully completing an examination.

Seven-Year-Old Shares Her Birthday with SMUM

In early May, Joyce Damozonio made a donation to SMUM in honor of Grace Shelchuk's 7th birthday. Grace, a member of St. Andrew's, Saratoga, had encouraged her family friend to make a donation rather than buy her a gift and suggested SMUM as the recipient of this donation. Grace is familiar with our community at SMUM and has helped her mother drop off toys and food at SMUM. She was very grateful and excited that this donation enabled her to share her blessings with the children in the SMUM community. Thank you, Joyce and Grace!

ABC Playtime Children Complete a Good School Year

SMUM's ABC Playtime is designed to help three- and four-year-old children prepare for kindergarten, and its curriculum emphasizes **Academics, Behavior, Creativity, and Play**.

The kids have had a good year, thanks to the teachers and assistants who gave their time so generously. Among their recent activities was a trip to Martin Luther King, Jr. library, which is in walking distance of SMUM.



ABC children, teacher and assistants enroute to library.

While they were at the library, the children listened to stories and had time to explore the children's area of this facility.



ABC children listen to a story at the SJ-SJSU library

The ABC Playtime children had an end-of-year party and graduation on Wednesday, May 26, with proud parents in attendance. The program will take a break until the fall. It is currently offered only two mornings a week, due to a lack of teachers and assistants, but we would love to offer ABC three or more days a week in the fall. Training can be provided during the summer. If you would like to be a teacher or assistant and can help one morning a week or more, please call Lawrence Robles. You can have fun and provide an important service to preschool children and their parents at the same time.



The cute kids and their moms, teachers, and assistants associated with ABC Playtime—you could be in this picture too!

Coming Up at Santa Maria

- July 13** The start of **Back-to-School**, our project to provide backpacks and school supplies for our clients' children
- Sept. 21** A visit to SMUM by representatives of El Camino Real's partner dioceses in Tanzania and Gloucester

Luncheon Honors Santa Maria Volunteers

Volunteerism is someone doing more than they have to, because they want to, in a cause they consider good. Santa Maria is blessed with lots of people during just that—90 individuals. In fact, SMUM has only one full-time employee (the Executive Director) and two part-time employees (the volunteer supervisor and the grant writer), so without these volunteers, we would have to shut our doors and discontinue the assistance that so many families depend on.

In recognition of the volunteers who make SMUM successful, the Board of Directors held its annual Recognition Luncheon in the Trinity Cathedral parish hall. About 50 people attended. As usual, the food was delicious and in great abundance, thanks to the efforts of the cooks: Maribel, Dulce, Lucina, Rosa, Daniel, and Jose.



Left to right: volunteers George and Marge



Left to right: volunteers Humberto, Maribel, Dulce, Lucina, Rosa, Adriana, and Jorge

The meal was topped off with the traditional dessert: Tres Leches cake created by Romero's Cakes of East San Jose.

Following the luncheon, volunteers received certificates of appreciation presented by Executive Director Lawrence and Supervisor Carmen Robles. Everyone also received a Kelly-green T-shirt with the SMUM logo.



Volunteer Carmen Alicia with certificate from Lawrence Robles

This event gives meaning to the statement, "The human contribution is the essential ingredient. It is only in the giving of oneself to others that we truly live."

Fun Summer Ahead for Studio 17

With no homework to do over the summer, the students in Studio 17, SMUM's after-school program, can relax and have fun. This summer, as in previous years, several special activities are planned, including trips to the Tech Museum, Monterey Bay Aquarium, and the San Francisco Zoo. Program enrollment is at 22 young people from upper elementary grades through high school. During the school year, they meet from 4-6 PM in SMUM's computer lab for homework assistance.

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Special Thank You's This Month

All of our volunteers deserve hearty thanks for their important contributions of time and talent, but the following individuals earn special recognition this month for their faithful service at Santa Maria Urban Ministry:

- Lewis Pollard, volunteer extraordinaire and team leader of the VITA team, and his dedicated assistants
- Joanna Shreve, finance whiz who is taking over the Treasurer's job and ensuring that all our financial records are accurate and current
- Anne Briggs, Mary Beth Gay, John Gurley, Stephanie Palmer, Ruth McLaughlin, Lois Tarr, Cindy DeSantis, Linda Imura, Anne Hootman, and Nancy Nelson, the teachers and assistants in the ABC Playtime program, who gave their time so generously this past school year
- Humberto Martinez, who comes to SMUM *every day* from Palo Alto to work in the warehouse, sorting incoming food, helping store it, and putting together the food boxes for clients—a dependable and faithful volunteer

We also want to thank—again—these businesses that contribute food to SMUM each month:

- Le Boulanger
- Martha's Kitchen
- PW Markets
- Safeway
- Trader Joe's

In May, these businesses contributed an estimated **8,015 pounds** of food to SMUM.

Many other volunteers and organizations could be listed for thanks as well, and we will try to recognize them in future issues of The Canticle.

Food Items Needed at SMUM

As widely published media stories indicate, more and more people in our country need assistance in obtaining sufficient food. With the cuts in state programs that are in store, local needs will increase significantly. How can you help?

- **Send a check** to Santa Maria so that we can buy in bulk, making food items cheaper than what you have to pay in the grocery store.



Humberto in SMUM's food warehouse, where boxes of food are prepared for distribution to clients.

- **Bring food items** to Santa Maria or to your church. Especially needed are canned meats and peanut butter.
- **Sponsor a food drive** in your church or other community organization. St. Francis Willow Glen, for instance, held a "Pasta Sunday" on June 7. Parishioners brought all kinds of dried pasta to church, and it was then delivered to SMUM. People seem to respond particularly well when asked to bring specific items, such as canned fruit or tuna..
- **Volunteer to help out** at Santa Maria. At present we particularly need individuals to work at the welcome desk. Training is available; assistance is always close at hand.