

Volunteers sought for after-school program

As Frank Kasper watched young people in the Transfiguration Catholic Community, Baltimore, after-school program play a lively game of catch, he knew getting them to concentrate on homework would be challenging.

The Transfiguration parishioner, a retired computer programmer from Charles Village, was one of two volunteers who helped the five elementary school-aged children who showed up that day with their studies.

“We really need more volunteers, if we want to be effective in this program,” said Jason Ramos, the outreach coordinator for the three churches in the Transfiguration Catholic Community. “These kids need one-on-one attention.”

Right now the parish has three other volunteers who help him run the three-day-a-week program, which currently provides an after-school haven for three boys and five girls who attend George Washington Elementary School, just around the corner from its St. Jerome base.

Those volunteers also don’t come every day, sometimes leaving the program with only two adults to guide the children through play time, snacks and eventually their homework.

“These kids need a lot of attention, especially when it comes to doing their homework,” said Mr. Ramos, 23, a Capuchin volunteer assigned to the parish this year. “So, we’re putting out a plea for volunteers from the Transfiguration churches and beyond.”

The goal of the after-school program – which runs Monday through Wednesdays from 2:30 to 5 p.m. – is to provide the children with positive adult role models, a stable environment, constructive activities and strong study habits for academic success.

Shaquantay “Missy” Norman – a 10-year-old fifth grader who lives within walking

distance of St. Jerome - has been coming to the program for the past three years. Mr. Ramos directs Missy to collect the snacks out of the church refrigerator, a duty the girl sporting a pink shirt and blue jeans is eager to perform. With all adults in her home working until 5 p.m., she would be without supervision on the days she stays at St. Jerome's after school, and Missy said she looks forward to her time playing with the children in the program and interacting with the volunteers.

Though none of the children are parishioners of Transfiguration, the program serves as part of the parish's mission to improve the lives of the people in the surrounding communities.

Volunteers for the program should possess a deep affection for children, a commitment to the program and the patience in dealing with inner-city boys and girls who sometimes need guidance developing their social skills, Mr. Ramos said.

"I figured that since I had the time, I should go ahead and do this," said Mr. Kasper, who began volunteering before Christmas. "I used to live in this neighborhood and still attend church around here, so I wanted to give something back and make a difference in the lives of these kids."

Sometimes the rewards are far and few between, but ultimately worth the sacrifice, said Mr. Ramos, who was raised in an affluent suburb of Dallas, and took this assignment to gain experience with underprivileged children in an inner-city environment.

"We have a great opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these kids," Mr. Ramos said. "Our presence gives them stability."

Potential volunteers should contact Mr. Ramos at (410) 684-5044, or by email at transfiguration_outreach@yahoo.com.