



HOLY CROSS HIGH SCHOOL

† THE DIOCESE OF SCRANTON †

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Joseph Stella

Bishop O'Hara Class of 2007



Joseph Stella is a 2007 graduate of Bishop O'Hara High School. Upon graduating from the University of Scranton in 2011, he moved to Quito, Ecuador, in order to join a group of young teachers from the United States and Germany. He taught at The Working Boys' Center (WBC), a Catholic

and Jesuit institution which is dedicated to serving the needs of working boys and their families.

The Working Boys' Center operates primarily as a learning center for families who commit to joining the program. The Center provides a day care, primary school, middle school, and an adult education program. When a family that has children working on the streets commits to joining the Center, they agree to enroll the entire family. That means that all family members participate in education- even the parents. While the primary school students enjoy a curriculum that is similar to that of a Catholic primary school in the U.S., the middle school students focus on earning a certificate in a particular trade. The boys can study auto mechanics, metal mechanics, carpentry, or baking, and the girls may choose to study cosmetology, sewing, marketing and sales, or baking.

The WBC also provides families with three nutritious meals a day, access to medical and dental care, and the opportunity to participate in leisure activities using the facilities on campus. In return, the families commit to volunteering each week at the WBC and to focus their time and attention on school. The boys and their sisters also continue to work on a very limited basis. All family members are required to save their money each week and to deposit it into their accounts on campus. Upon graduation, a member may withdraw his or her savings and use

that money to repair their home, to cover the cost of a loan, or even to buy a car. The hope is that by inculcating values such as hard work, education, and personal responsibility, the families will become more reliant upon themselves and less dependent on the charity of others.

When did you decide you wanted to devote a year of your life to service?

I knew early on as an undergraduate that I wanted to spend at least one year of my life in direct service to others. This desire stemmed from my service trip to Appalachia, Kentucky as a freshman. A group of Scranton students and I drove a van down to the Appalachian region and helped to repair homes that belonged to very poor individuals. I loved everything about the trip- meeting new people, living in community, manual labor, and reflection at the end of the day. Each year for the following three years, I participated in a domestic service trip. By the start of senior year, I began to seriously research programs that matched my twin goals of serving the poor and becoming more proficient in Spanish.

What made you choose the Working Boys' Center for your service?

I chose the Working Boys' Center for a number of reasons. I have two close friends that volunteered at the Center before I even applied. Both individuals confirmed that everything I read online was true. The WBC was helping thousands of people leave poverty behind and I wanted to be part of that mission. Additionally, I knew that the volunteers lived together in community in a place that was comfortable, secure, and on the same campus as the school. But apart from all of that, the reason I felt most comfortable committing a year of my life to the families of the

Working Boys' Center was because my values aligned with their values. Those values include, but are not limited to, family, community, education, faith, and financial responsibility.

What was the most challenging part of your service experience?

The most challenging part of my service experience was the length of our work days. We worked Monday through Friday for at least 12 hours a day. Most days, however, we worked 15 hours or more. We had little free time during a regular work week to really sit back and focus on ourselves. This was a challenge, but also a blessing. We were fully committed to these families- so much so that we neglected some of our personal wants and needs.

What was most rewarding about your time in Ecuador?

The most rewarding part of my time in Ecuador was the time I was able to spend with my students and their families outside of the classroom. We were all a big family. I particularly enjoyed eating lunch and dinner with my students and their families. Fortunately, I am still in touch with most of them via e-mail or Facebook.

How do you feel your Catholic high school education prepared you for your experience?

My Catholic high school education helped me to realize at an early age that we are all connected. No matter our religion, ethnicity, or personal views, we are all God's children and our mission in life is to love one another and to help each other find joy.

How do you feel a Catholic education can be valuable in today's society?

A Catholic education is valuable in today's society because it brings us back down to ground level. As Pope Francis said during one of his recent interviews, "I am a sinner." Being Catholic means being aware that we are all loved sinners. It doesn't matter if you are the leader of the entire Catholic Church or a high school student from Dunmore, Pennsylvania. No one is perfect. We are, however, all united in that we are God's children. We must try to love ourselves and others as God loves us and forgive ourselves and others as God forgives us.

What advice would you give to our students today?

Be humble and grateful for everything that you have in life. Recognize your God given talents and strive to find new and exciting ways to share them with others. Never forget that we are all connected in this world. And lastly- learn a second language. Learn a third language and a fourth if possible! The world is changing rapidly and we in the United States are behind the curve.

To learn more about The Working Boys' Center, visit <http://www.c4wf.org/> or email Joseph Stella at joseph.e.stella@gmail.com.

Do you have someone that you would like to nominate for an alumni spotlight feature? Email alumni@hchspa.org with their current contact information and we would be happy to get in touch with them for one of our features!