



An Ignatian Partnership

» OUR PURPOSE

Belize 2020 is a non-profit volunteer organization focused on improving the quality of life in Belize by supporting Jesuit ministries in that country. Our initial emphasis is on education which we believe is the most enduring solution to the problems of drug-gang violence, unemployment, forced immigration and family instability.

Summer Robotics Camp Provides Hands-On STEM Learning

History was made this summer as the Clavius Project at St. Louis University High School (SLUH) came to Belize. On a Friday morning in July, teams of students from St. John's College (SJC) High School and St. Martin de Porres Grade School in Belize City built their first robots.

The students were participants in a summer robotics camp sponsored by the Clavius Project and held at SJC. The Clavius Project began in 2014 as a collaboration among SLUH students, faculty and staff to bring education in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) to St. Louis urban middle schools. The effort is named for Christopher Clavius—a German Jesuit mathematician and astronomer. The experience is designed to help students develop essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

SLUH took the program on the road to Belize this summer, hosting a three-week camp for SJC High School and St. Martin's students. More than 50 young people participated in the camp, which was organized and guided by Clavius Project Moderator Jeff Pitts and 18 volunteer educators and mentors.

Working in teams, the campers used LEGO® MINDSTORMS® kits to design and build robotic vehicles. They learned to make their robots move and behave by programming a special LEGO brick that served as a control center and power station. The results were outstanding according to Pitts. "All of the campers did a great job and all of the robots got built and put together without error, and they did a terrific job learning how to program their robots," he said.

With their robots assembled and programmed, campers were challenged to help their robots complete a 20-second obstacle course as quickly as possible. The students had to figure out ways to modify their robots' program (i.e., eliminate



Jeff Pitts presents Anthony Grande with a certificate for completing the Clavius Project summer robotics camp in Belize.

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Literacy Program Gets Boost from O'Shea Foundation

Thanks to a new three-year grant from the John and Charlene O'Shea Family Foundation, the Readers for Tomorrow program has taken another important step in helping students at St. Martin de Porres become healthy, life-long learners. The program's goal is to promote a culture of reading to ensure that at least 70 percent of the school's students can read at their respective grade level by the end of Standard 1 (the U.S. equivalent of second grade).

The new funding has allowed for the creation of a full-time literacy coach position to introduce student assessments, assist with faculty skill development, coordinate a summer student literacy program and support family literacy needs. To

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St. John's College Hosts Disability Awareness Exhibit and Workshops

MORE THAN 150 FACULTY, staff, students and community members at St. John's College (SJC) in Belize City recently became more knowledgeable about disability awareness and inclusion. Members of Saint Louis University's (SLU) School of Education traveled to Belize this spring to present the work of The Ability Institute, a university-sponsored initiative that provides educational opportunities to transform attitudes and develop allies for people with disabilities. Making the trip were Karen Myers, Ph.D., director of The Ability Institute; Mark Pousson, Ph.D., SLU School of Education faculty; and Christine Luebbert, M.H.A, assistant director of The Ability Institute.



SJC President Alice Peralta, right, presents Karen Myers with a hand-carved, personalized plaque in appreciation for bringing the work of The Ability Institute to SJC in Belize City.

Myers, Pousson and Luebbert presented "Allies for Inclusion: The Ability Exhibit," a traveling multimedia display on disability awareness, and facilitated workshops on disability-related issues and the inclusion of people with disabilities through respect for others. They were in Belize at the invitation of SJC President Alice Peralta.

In addition to her leadership responsibilities at SJC, Peralta is pursuing her doctorate through the Higher Education Administration program at SLU. Her colleague, SJC Dean of Students Sol Angel Alvarado is also in the program. Peralta and Alvarado have put their education to practical use in Belize where, as their final graduate projects, they designed the first accessible restroom in Belize City (on St. John's campus) and the country's first accessible parking spaces, respectively. Both projects have been accomplished and are in use.

SUMMER ROBOTICS CAMP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

steps, increase speeds, etc.) to finish the course faster, but without sacrificing precision. "Most of the St Martin's students got below 6 seconds, and three set new Clavius Project world records!" said Pitts.

Pitts added that the SJC High School campers also did very well, noting that these students are already on a science track at the school. "They are competitive and thirsty to learn...Robotics has been a fun and practical way for them to learn and they embraced the program," he said.

The camp concluded with a jamboree in Swift Hall at St. Martins during which students tested their new knowledge with robotics challenges and games. Many of the campers' families attended.

Following the camp, Pitts met with educators from SJC High School and St. Martin's to discuss their observations of the experience and how the schools can sustain and grow the effort.

In sharing his impressions of the camp, Pitts offered, "What stands out the most is the commitment these kids and their families made to be there every day. Most walked long distances to be there. Many took the bus to be there. One 16-year-old mentor lives an hour away, took the bus each day, and sometimes the bus broke down and she made it anyway. None of the high schoolers had a car or drove. They all made a huge commitment each and every day to be there, never

complained, and were always respectful, eager to learn, and so very grateful. I will miss these kids, and I will really miss being called "Mr. Jeff"!



Donor Profile: David and Nancy Danis

One of the first things a visitor to the home of David and Nancy Danis notices is the lovely artwork. Nearly all the paintings were done by Nancy herself. One also soon recognizes the couple's generous spirit as Nancy humbly mentions that one of her recent pieces generated \$4,000 at a charity auction to support Boys Hope Girls Hope of Illinois, based in Wilmette, Illinois.

Charitable giving is what we have come to discuss today and the Danises have graciously agreed to open their lovely home in the Central West End of St. Louis. They have been married for 52 years and raised five children. Dave, who achieved great success as an attorney, says, "I know I have been blessed. Once I came into some significant earnings, I knew I had an obligation to give back, to share with those less fortunate."

For Dave and Nancy, sharing with others isn't something new. Even as a young mother, Nancy donated her time, volunteering for several organizations, including Ranken Jordan Pediatric Hospital, while Dave served on the boards of several charities. Nancy explains their approach, "When we were young we didn't have a lot of money, so we donated our time. As our financial circumstances improved, we did more. We continue to seek causes that need help."

"I know I have been blessed. Once I came into some significant earnings I knew I had an obligation to give back, to share with those less fortunate."

-David Danis

will our personal involvement be welcome? Nancy and I look for people who exhibit true leadership. The second issue for us is the need for our dollars to truly work. We don't like giving to charities that use 40 percent of the

money to fund operations. Finally, it is important for us to see how our money is helping, and that means personal involvement, visiting the charity and seeing the programs in action."

The Belize 2020 initiative meets all three criteria for the Danises. Dave is a graduate of St. Louis University High School (class of 1961). He attended Regis University in Denver and received his law degree from Saint Louis University. The Jesuit presence plays a big part in the couple's support of Belize and St. Martin de Porres Parish in Belize City in particular.



The connection between the Danises and Belize began about 15 years ago. Fr. Rich Buhler, S.J., led a retreat to Belize that Dave attended. When he witnessed the extreme poverty in the neighborhood surrounding St. Martin's, he saw an opportunity to do some good.

Dave and Nancy are long-time friends of Fr. Paul Sheridan, S.J., founder of Boys Hope Girls Hope, and worked with Sheridan during the organization's formative years. Initially, Dave thought the Boys Hope Girls Hope model could be applied in Belize City. Dave contacted several friends from other charitable efforts, and they began exploring ways they could help. Shortly afterward, Fr. Matt Ruhl, S.J., was named pastor of St. Martin's. He became instrumental in working with friends like the Danises in the United States to form a true partnership with individuals in Belize to support the parish and, by extension, the neighborhood.

Dave and Nancy were among the first to contribute to the Belize effort and have focused their giving on programs that help the children of Martin's. One example is the music program, which they continue to support each year. Dave and Nancy have traveled to Belize several times to see firsthand the good their gifts have accomplished, but they know there is still more that needs to be done. They continue to provide support and encourage others to join them in supporting the Belize 2020 effort.



Fr. Brian Christopher

Named Interim Pastor of St Martin's

EFFECTIVE AUGUST 1, Fr. Brian Christopher, S.J., became interim pastor of St. Martin de Porres Parish, replacing Fr. Matt Ruhl, S.J., who now serves at St. Peter Claver Parish in Punta Gorda in the south of Belize.

Belize is a place of significance for Christopher. His first assignment after ordination was working with gang-involved youth in Belize City, where he co-founded a non-profit organization providing job training and placement to young men and women who had dropped out of school. He returned to Belize in August 2017 to help the Society of Jesus discern how it will live its mission there. And, this spring, Christopher knelt in the sanctuary of St. Martin's to pronounce his final vows in the Society of Jesus.

"It's a real gift being back here at Martin's," said Christopher. "In the five years I lived here previously, there wasn't a single day that went by—when I didn't have a sense that we Jesuits are in the right place, at the right time, engaged in the right struggle."

Christopher originally hails from St. Louis where he completed his undergraduate studies at Saint Louis University. Since entering the Jesuits in 1997, his training has taken him to underserved neighborhoods of Chicago and St. Louis, as well as to Ethiopia, El Salvador, Honduras and several times to Belize. He has ministered to victims of drug-gang violence, refugees, students and parishioners. Christopher holds bachelor's degrees in philosophy and



Interim pastor, Fr. Brian Christopher, SJ, hangs out with students of St. Martin de Porres School.

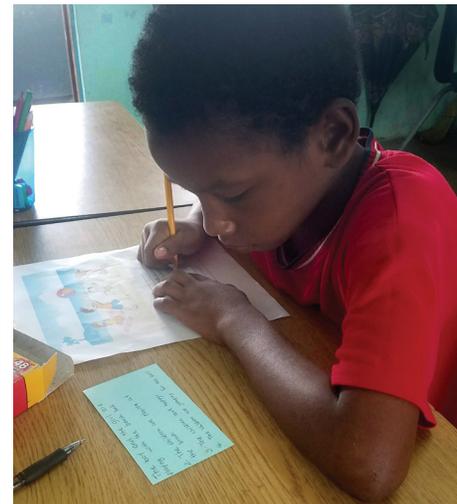
Russian and master's degrees in social philosophy, divinity and theology, the latter with an emphasis on conflict transformation and religion.

About Belize, Christopher added, "The sense of mission—the sense that Christ is doing something here—is palpable. I don't mean to make it sound easy. This can be a rough place, and lots of people are hurting here. Many days it feels like two steps forward and three steps back, but even then—maybe especially then—the sense that Christ is at work runs deep. You can feel it when you come to Mass here, and you can feel it when you walk around our school's campus or around the neighborhood."

LITERACY PROGRAM CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

date, all students in Infant 1 through Standard 1 (kindergarten through second grade) have been assessed in reading skills and comprehension. Literacy Coach Roxanne Encalada, who previously served as head teacher for the lower division at St. Martin's, said, "More than 360 of our students have been assessed using A-Z reading assessment methods and teachers are working very hard to continue moving them forward in building their reading and writing skills. We are excited!"

The O'Shea Foundation was instrumental in the launch of the Readers for Tomorrow program in 2017 with a gift that allowed the introduction of improved reading instruction methods and more than 1,000 books for lower division students.



A new grant from the O'Shea Family Foundation is helping build literacy and a culture of reading for students at St. Martin's.



Education Fellowship Recipient Dawn Wade Graduates From SLU, Is Recognized for Excellence

Congratulations to Dawn Wade, administrative vice principal at St. Martin de Porres School in Belize City, who earned her master's degree in special education from Saint Louis University (SLU) this spring. In addition to earning her degree, Wade was recognized as the J.J. O'Brien Outstanding Graduate Student, a prestigious award named in honor of a past professor in the School of Education.

After 26 years working at St. Martin's, Wade came to SLU in 2016 to pursue her master's degree in special education. She received a full-tuition fellowship from the university through its partnership with Belize 2020. The fellowship program supports qualified educators seeking graduate degrees in special education, early-childhood education, educational

leadership and other areas of serious need in Belize.

Wade is now back in Belize as the first special educator in Belize City, and continuing her work. "Belize is my home; I am deeply committed to serve the students of St. Martin de Porres School, neighboring communities and my country," Wade said.

"Schools in Belize by nature are inclusive; however, they lack some of the basic resources to facilitate full inclusion," she continued. Other than children with physical disabilities and certain other challenges, students in Belize are educated in classrooms alongside peers of the same age.

Wade said she plans to use her new knowledge and hands-on experience to educate teachers about the



Dawn Wade stands with SLU President Fred Pestello, Ph.D., on graduation day. Photo by Saint Louis University

varying degrees of learning disabilities and how they can address the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms. She also hopes to provide support services for children, principals, teachers and parents of children with special educational needs.



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Remember Belize 2020 in Your Year-End Giving Plans

As you prepare for year-end tax planning, please add Belize 2020, an Ignatian Partnership to your gift list. Your donation will

support Jesuit ministries in Belize, providing children and families in need with resources that nurture spiritual, physical, academic and economic health, including:

- Counseling services, music and art, and extended day programs for students;
- Early childhood learning opportunities through day care and preschool programs;
- Health and well-being assessments;
- Youth enrichment programs; and
- Scholarships



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT. Your gift will make a difference in the lives of hundreds of Belizean children and families.



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