



Words From the Regional Director, Kathleen Groh, about the IVC and Della Strada Award Recipient, Sam Salas

The Ignatian Volunteer Corps is a rather young organization and has existed for only 22 years. It was formed by two Jesuit priests, James Conroy and Charlie Costello and a small group of retired people. They envisioned a process that people over 50 would be able to use their life experiences and skills to serve those materially poor and grow spiritually in the Ignatian tradition.

Since those early days with 11 volunteers, IVC has grown to 20 Regions across the United States and over 500 IVC volunteers. We are Region 8.

The tagline for the IVC is Experience Making a Difference. When I became the Director of the IVC for the Metro Area six years ago, I was pleased that my life experience as a religious educator would help make a difference for a small number of volunteers and extend the reach of the IVC into new non-profits. I also knew that I had a lot to learn about Ignatian Spirituality!

Upon reflection, I have experienced that IVC began making a difference in my life, too. I have met incredible volunteers and am in awe of all that they do to give hope and compassion to those they are working with in their sites.

I have met amazing people who are directing the non-profits that open their doors to them.

I have experienced through their reflections and deep faith their love for one another, the people they encounter and the sites in which they serve. Indeed, Christ is among us whenever two or three are gathered in his name. I want to thank them for this gift and ask God to continue to bless the IVC.

Sam

I met Sam Salas six years ago when I became the Director. He had been serving at the Hospitality House and came into the meeting space with his usual quiet presence, gentle smile, and knowing eyes. I soon learned that he wasn't going to say much at first, listened intently and acknowledged opinions. He let everyone else talk and reflect, but when he did speak, we all listened. He had summed it up well.

Last fall, I was unable to lead the monthly meeting in November and sent out an email to all the volunteers assuring them that any one of them could lead the meeting. I would have all of it organized, get the building open, etc., but we still need someone to pull it together. There wasn't a response to the first message so I sent another one!

The phone rings and the soft voice of Sam was on the other end. He asked, "Do you think I can do it?" Of course, he could and I told him so excitedly. He did a fine job and a teacher remarked, "You could tell he was an educator. He kept us on track!"

Once again, I had to miss a meeting and he was quick to respond and lead another time. Sam was always there to meet a need.

He has met many needs through the years from Headmaster at Breck where he started a service program that still exists today. He serves here at the Basilica in the Shoe Ministry, too. Sam has been sought after to serve on the boards of the Children's Theater, YMCA, Catholic Charities to name a few. He is a well-respected board member of the Cristo Rey Jesuit H.S, also. I know he has been invaluable to Hospitality House for Youth Development and they are being honored here tonight.

Sam has shared with the IVC volunteers his love for this site and is very impressed by the warm and deeply felt prayer life that seems to come from deep within the staff and children so naturally.

I received an Easter email from Sam and attached was a prayer from Thomas Merton which he shared with Hospitality House. It gives a simple yet profound look into the intimacy of Sam's spiritual life, too.

Sam, it is with our best wishes to present you with the Madonna Della Strada Award this evening.