

Forging Ahead

By Lisa Boris, Andrea Silva and Lauren Vater

What does it mean to start a Dominican community? As the only all-volunteer house in the Dominican Volunteer program, this is a question we have grappled with in these first few weeks. While our fellow volunteers find themselves in prior-established homes, we, Lauren Vater, Lisa Boris, and Andrea Silva, have come together as strangers endeavoring to form uplifting relationships, pray together, share meals, and reflect on our experiences in ministry. Inspired by the Dominican charism of prayer, community, ministry, and study, we forge ahead courageously in this year together.

Upon arrival in the Bronx, our immediate concern was to unpack and get oriented to our new surroundings. After taking care of details such as public transportation, where to find a grocery store, figuring out which church to attend, and budgeting our stipends, we were free to focus on combining our visions of community. Main priorities were to establish a prayer and meal schedule and to divvy up chores. We decided to pray together five times a week, three of which we would also take turns cooking. Furthermore, we discussed the importance of having community exist beyond scheduled times. For us, this meant participating in each other's lives on a deeper level than as if we were simply roommates.

Moving to the Bronx has been quite a transition. Acclimating ourselves to this metropolitan setting has been both challenging and adventurous. We find ourselves in a predominately Latino neighborhood, where we definitely stick out as the new kids on the block. Sometimes we get more attention than we are comfortable with. On the flip side, we are enjoying the open air markets (exotic fruits), rhythmic music, and friendly faces we see on a daily basis. We look forward to making friends as we become more involved in *la comunidad* (the community).

It has been eye-opening to discover the high cost of living in New York, even in an area as poor as the South Bronx. For example, the local stores can charge whatever they want for goods and services, forcing people to pay a lot because they have no alternative. A sobering realization is that while we are intentionally living on a tight budget, many families struggle to survive on even less.

Now a month into our journey, things are starting to run more smoothly. Instead of an hour long commute to work, we have figured out the subway system so that our travel time is cut in half. We know which grocery store is the cheapest, and have gotten free passes to the workout facilities at Fordham University. Local contacts have connected us with other volunteers in the area, as well as shown us inexpensive ways to enjoy the city. As a community, each of us feels blessed that we have worked so well together thus far.

As we are Dominican volunteers who do not live with Dominicans, building connections with the surrounding congregations of Blauvelt, Sparkill, HOPE, Caldwell, and Amityville has been essential. To facilitate relationship between our community and theirs, we have a support team comprised of 8 sisters. The sisters invite us to participate in events occurring at their congregations and extend kindly their hospitality. They have also been very involved in moving us into our new home and helping us start this year in the Bronx. We are thankful for the prayers, support, and other help we have received so far, a constant reminder that we are members of the family of Dominic.

The knowledge that we are a part of the extended community of Dominic has helped sustain and encourage us as we forge ahead in this new endeavor and work to create a brand new Dominican community.