



Around the time the Pastoral Care Commission at The Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids began discussions about how to help area students, they learned about the "Faith Community Partnership" between the Anoka-Hennepin School District and area faith-based organizations.

The group was formed to raise awareness and understanding of compelling community issues and to mobilize people to help meet the basic needs of students.

Through the Faith Community Partnership, churches have adopted schools and provide food, personal hygiene and other basic items to help students and their families.

Steve Sorsen, the chair of Epiphany's Pastoral Care Commission, said the group decided to join the effort and was pleased to learn that Crossroads Alternative High School was available to work with.

"We wanted to go where we could have the greatest impact," Sorsen said. "When we saw this opportunity to help we thought it was perfect."

The partnership began with a meeting with Nancy Chave, Crossroads principal. Chave spoke to Crossroads teachers and asked what would benefit the student body. One request on Crossroads's wish list was a dishwasher for its family and consumer science (FACS) classroom. Sorsen brought the request back to the commission and they made it happen.

"Having a dishwasher doesn't sound like a big deal, but it's a big deal to us," Chave said. "The teacher can do so much more because she has the dishwasher. It's also more sanitary than boiling water on stove to wash the dishes, which is what we did before we received the dish washer."

From there, the commission began to work on collecting school supplies for students and food so the school could create a food shelf. As of this school year, all high schools in the Anoka-Hennepin School District have food shelves for students.

"Receiving the school supplies was important," Chave said. "We have more kids coming to us for school supplies than ever before."

"With Epiphany's help, students had everything they needed to start a good school year." With more than 50 percent of Crossroads students receiving free or reduced priced meals, the food shelf is very important. The food shelf also stocks personal care items, such as toilet paper and toothpaste. Chave said many students do not live with their parents and are "couch hopping" (staying with friends).

"For them to bring some supplies with them is a pretty big deal," she said.

Sorsen said as winter comes the commission will talk about donating coats and other winter items. Jean Mackey, Epiphany's human resources generalist and graphic designer, said the group will talk about what they can do for the students at Christmas time. Mackey, who also serves on the commission, had asked Chave if the school is interested in hosting speakers.

Chave said the students like to talk with adults about their careers.

Sorsen recommends others in the faith community to look into the Faith Community Partnership.

"It's a good thing, it will have a huge impact," he said. "I know we are just scratching the tip of the iceberg."

Chave said Crossroads students were surprised someone in the community volunteered to help them. An alternative learning center, Chave said students come to Crossroads with many needs and challenges. Classrooms are small and in addition to academics and study skills, staff focus on students' social and emotional growth.

"They were amazed that someone actually thought our school was important," Chave said. "They are so grateful for the school supplies and food donations." Chave's goal is to teach the meaning of "partnership" and she is looking for ways Crossroads students can give back to the church. "We want our students to forge relationships with adults in the community so they know our kids our good citizens," Chave said. "They want to contribute and given the opportunity, they will raise to the occasion. The students are very generous considering many of them have very little."

*Photo caption: The Church of the Epiphany and Crossroads Alternative High School have formed a Faith Community Partnership. Left to right - Jean Mackey, Epiphany's human resources generalist and graphic designer, Nancy Chave, Crossroads principal, and Steve Sorsen, chair of Epiphany's Pastoral Care Commission. The church provided the school with a dishwasher because during class, students had to boil water to wash their dishes. The church also provided school supplies to get the students off to a good school year and will work to help stock a food shelf.*