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## Faith community lends a hand to Puerto Rican newcomers

Families from Puerto Rico are continuing to arrive in Cleveland, and the local faith community is stepping up to help children get a successful start in CMSD schools

Donations from the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and La Sagrada Familia Church have been pouring in to the Thomas Jefferson International Newcomers Academy in the form of school supplies and uniforms. The donations have been distributed to many of the about 300 children whose families fled the island in the wake of Hurricanes Maria and Irma.

The Rev. Robert Reidy of La Sagrada Familia said helping to make sure the children have everything they need is important to him and his congregation, many of whom are from Puerto Rico or of Puerto Rican descent.

“It was a natural connection since many in our parish have family members who are being affected by this,” Reidy said

The minister and church employee Mimi Colon visited Thomas Jefferson recently to help distribute uniforms to some of the newcomers. An anonymous donor gave the church \$1,000 to help the District’s new Puerto Rican students, so Reidy worked with District staff to obtain information on clothing sizes and genders of the Puerto Rican



*Rev. Robert Reidy and Mimi Colon of La Sagrada Familia Church distributed uniforms to newly enrolled CMSD students from Puerto Rico.*

students and Colon went shopping for the clothes.

Uniforms have been one of the biggest areas of need for the new students, said Senaida Perez, the family engagement and student support coordinator for CMSD’s Multilingual Multicultural Education Office.

When the families arrive in Cleveland, most of them have few belongings,

having lost much of their possessions in the storm, said Perez, who has helped enroll the displaced students. Parents are usually unable to purchase uniforms on their own since their jobs were on the island and they’re stuck looking for work in a strange new city.

That’s why the donations are so crucial.

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## Faith community helps newcomers get prepared for school

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“I want these kids to go to school feeling like everybody else and to feel comfortable in school,” Perez said.

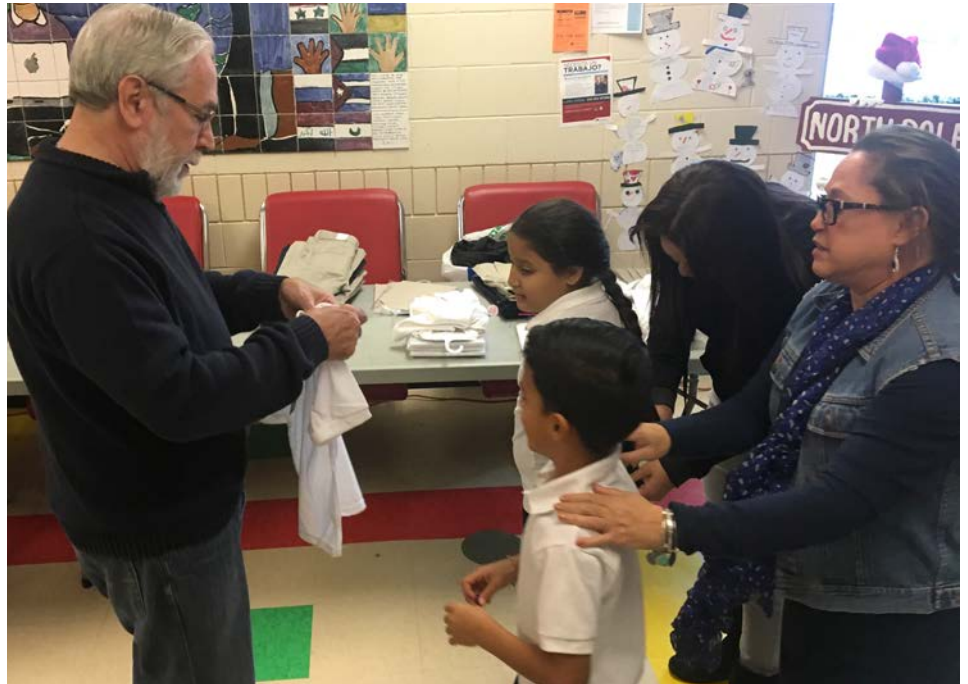
The donation through La Sagrada helped provide uniforms to more than two dozen newcomers.

“As long as the uniforms fit, I’ll be happy,” Reidy said. “I want to make sure the children can take advantage of what they receive.”

The Jewish Federation of Cleveland was also eager to help the District’s newest students. Volunteers who tutor CMSD students through the Jewish Federation’s Public Education Initiative heard about the influx of families and the extent of their needs and immediately started purchasing school supplies to send to CMSD, said Jessica Bell Semel, director of the PEI program.

“These kids are moving here with nothing from an island that’s been destroyed,” Bell Semel said. “The volunteers feel that a small burden for them will make a big difference for someone else.”

Although the Jewish Federation doesn’t have any PEI tutors in the International Newcomers Academy, Bell Semel said the



connection that the volunteers feel with children at other sites was enough of a driving factor.

“Even though most of our volunteers don’t live in Cleveland, they feel like the schools are a part of them,” she said. “They feel that the kids deserve whatever they need to get them in school.”

The bookbags, notebooks, pencils and crayons are now in the hands of the Puerto Rican students, who are enrolled at sites across the District, including the International Newcomers Academy, Marion C. Seltzer School and Buhner Dual Language Academy.

## Church partnership at Wade Park goes back decades

Of Lee Buddy and the Rev. Paul Hobson Sadler, only one is the principal of Wade Park School, but the two share the same passion for serving its students.

A partnership between Sadler’s church, Mt. Zion Congregational Church in University Circle, and Wade Park School has continued to flourish for more than three decades and through multiple changes in leadership.

Today, the minister and members of his congregation help out with school trips, tutoring, school uniforms and, as

Sadler puts it, pretty much anything the students need.

“It’s a partnership where if we have a need, we can call Mt. Zion and they’ve never told us ‘no,’” Buddy said. “Rev. Sadler finds a way to make it happen for the kids here.”

Sometimes, those needs require money. Which is why Wade Park has its own space set aside in the church’s budget. Mt. Zion has helped stock the school store, where students can cash in “Eagle Bucks” that they earn for good behavior or grades in exchange for books, games and toys.

And when Buddy takes his student ambassadors to places like Washington, D.C., and New York City—what Buddy calls learning journeys—Mt. Zion sometimes steps in to take on the cost of students’ travel expenses.

Another one of the church’s initiatives dates all the way back to the beginning of the Wade Park partnership in the late 1980s: an annual Thanksgiving dinner donation. Each year, the church purchases dozens of turkeys and ingredients for side dishes, assembles it all in boxes and gives them to Wade Park

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## Church joins Fathers Walk to put men's health at the forefront

For busy dads and father figures, visiting the doctor for regular check-ups often falls to the bottom of a long list of responsibilities.

Leaders at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church and Dike School of the Arts noticed this and decided to bring health education and screenings to men in the Central neighborhood at an opportune time: the annual CMSD Fathers Walk.

Each year, hundreds of men across Cleveland and Cuyahoga County walk their children to school and participate in school events that celebrate the special roles of fathers and father figures. Dike Principal Alisha Evans saw this as an ideal time to partner with the church and turn the focus to men's health.

"This is so important to our community because many of our children have lost their parents due to health conditions  
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## Wade Park has special bond with church

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families who can't afford to make a meal for the holiday. The initiative has grown each year and the church gave out more than 100 turkeys on Thanksgiving.

Since Buddy became principal at Wade Park in 2015, the partnership has expanded beyond financial support. Sadler and his congregation are now familiar faces in the hallways and help out with events, like the recent "Amazing Shake" social grace competition.

Church members sign up each year to be part of the school's career day, where they talk to students about their jobs and introduce them to new possibilities for their futures. Over the past few years, students have met architects, engineers, poets, police officers, publishers and more—all thanks to Mt. Zion.

"There have been so many points of connection with our congregation, and the church benefits tremendously from the opportunity to serve Wade Park School," Sadler said.

The partnership has strengthened because of Buddy's enthusiasm and commitment, Sadler said. Although the principal is a member of a different church, he goes out of his way to visit Mt. Zion and get to know the congregants. Buddy recently brought a group of students to the church's mission fair so members could introduce themselves to the children who benefit from their donations and volunteerism.

Over the 15 years he's worked with Wade Park, the minister said he has seen the school transform in positive ways.

"Wade Park has the character and quality of a private school now," Sadler said. "If I lived in Cleveland and had a young child, I'd send him to Wade Park because I know he'd get a good education."

Buddy and his students greatly appreciate the generosity of Mt. Zion, but Sadler says he and his congregation feel blessed with the opportunity to help.

"I want this relationship to go on long past my time at Mt. Zion, so that many years from now, the pastor of Mt. Zion can say they kept a continued relationship with Wade Park."



Church leaders and members of Mt. Zion Congregational Church helped assemble and deliver boxes full of items for Thanksgiving meals that were distributed to families of Wade Park students.



Mt. Zion Congregational Church Rev. Paul Hobson Sadler talked to Wade Park students during one of many visits to the school during the longtime partnership.

## Church offers health fair for fathers

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like diabetes or cancer,” Evans said. “I feel like fathers need to know to care for their health now, before their child has an empty spot in their lives due to something that could possibly be prevented.”

Health educators and medical professionals from the Cleveland Clinic, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center and the Cleveland Office of Minority Health set up stations at Mt. Sinai. They waited for over 100 men and their children to make the mile-long trek down Woodland Avenue from the school to the church—some dads holding their children’s hands, others carrying their kids on their backs.

Drivers passing by honked their horns and rolled down their windows to shout their approval. Dads and children waved at the cars and walked on, some of them stopping every once in a while to tie a loose shoelace or snap a selfie.

Jason Wells smiled down at his third-grade daughter after the pair completed the walk.



*Fathers and father figures made their way from Dike School of the Arts to Mt. Sinai Baptist church for a men’s health fair.*



*The father of a Dike School of the Arts student had his blood pressure checked during the men’s health fair.*

“If they had something like this when I was little, it would have felt good to see my dad and other dads out there walking,” Wells said.

Dexter Holmes said his 5-year-old granddaughter called him and asked him to join the walk because her father was not able to participate.

“It’s important to me that she still gets that balance,” he said. “I enjoy being able to walk with her and see her smile because she understands what it’s about.”

Once the group filed into the open church basement, they munched on snacks and listened to the experts who came armed with knowledge and piles of pamphlets.

Cleveland Clinic community outreach coordinator Devon Hickman told the men that now is time to get serious about their health, if they haven’t already. He rattled off sobering statistics, including that African-American men are more likely to develop — and die from — prostate cancer than others

“We have to get men to be comfortable with talking about their health,” Hickman said. “We have resources and unlimited opportunities to get screened, but we have to get them to take advantage of those.”

Frances Mills, director of the Cleveland Office of Minority Health, said the fair was a step in the right direction for improving the community’s health. She had several conversations with men who asked her about blood pressure and cholesterol and she encouraged them to learn their family health history.

“We need folks to understand to ask their parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents about family history. That’s a huge thing,” she said. “Once you know that your family is predisposed to heart problems, for example, you’re able to do more.”

Mt. Sinai senior pastor C. Jay Matthews has overseen the partnership with Dike for several years. The Fathers Walk is the most important event between the two entities, he said.

“We’ve seen the Fathers Walk grow over the last few years and now that we’ve added the health component, it will only strengthen the overall initiative,” he said.

The pastor said he hopes the men left the fair with plans to connect with one of Cleveland’s many medical systems and stay on top of their health.

That’s exactly what Wells, the third-grader’s dad, plans to do. He spent a few minutes at the St. Vincent Charity Medical Center table and completed a blood pressure test and left with some information that he said he needed.

“I’m glad they had that set up right there,” Wells said. “It’s been some years since I had a screening like that and I’m glad I got it done today.”

# Picture This: Faith community supports school success



▲ Members of Gateway Church Cleveland visited Benjamin Franklin School to host a staff appreciation breakfast to thank educators and other school employees for their hard work and dedication to students.

▼ The Meeting Place Church delivered a load of school supplies and classroom necessities like paper towels and hand sanitizers to Harvey Rice School.



▲ Steve Sanders, director for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Cleveland Chapter and former Cleveland Browns player, spoke at one of Ginn Academy's morning meetings about defining one's own vision of success.



▶ University Circle United Methodist Church collected book donations for Mary B. Martin School as one initiative in a longstanding partnership.

