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Multiplying Urban Discipleship

Madison Claire Cannon

Cedarville University, mccannon@cedarville.edu

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MULTIPLYING URBAN DISCIPLES

BY MADI CANNON '17



WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF CEDARVILLE UNIVERSITY, GOSPEL INTENTIONALITY COMES TO MIND, BUT PERHAPS NOT IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT. BUT CEDARVILLE STUDENTS ARE PLANTING SEEDS THAT HAVE ALREADY REAPED A HARVEST ON THE STREETS OF AMERICA'S CITIES.

For more than 30 years, Cedarville has cultivated a relationship with Inner City Impact (ICI), a program for children and teens in Chicago. Each year, Cedarville sends a team of students to support ICI's ongoing ministry to at-risk youth. For some of these students, what begins as a short-term trip develops into long-term city ministry.

GROWING A FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP

Since 1972, ICI has served children and teens in urban Chicago. Many of these youth face significant challenges in their neighborhoods and family lives. ICI provides them with a safe place to hang out, helps them build healthy relationships, and teaches them life skills. Most importantly, they learn about God and discover their self-worth in His eyes.



Each spring, a team of Cedarville students spends a week serving youth through ICI programs. They focus on building relationships with the youth and supporting the full-time ICI staff.

Cedarville team members usually spend their mornings volunteering in public schools. They assist teachers with classroom projects and tutor kids who need help with their studies. By completing these hands-on tasks, the team allows teachers to focus more time and energy on their students.

In the evenings, the Cedarville team organizes age-appropriate games, teaches Bible lessons, and interacts with children at ICI facilities. Through their time with the

kids, Cedarville students have many opportunities to share the Gospel.

“We prepare our students to be a blessing and serve well as they seek to serve and share the Gospel with young people,” said Brian Nester, Director for Cedarville’s Global Outreach. “In the end, we not only want to see people come to Christ, but also to see the ongoing long-term ministry at ICI strengthened by our efforts.”

TRANSFORMING LIVES

ICI strategically serves in neighborhoods with great need. Among them are Logan and Cicero, two communities where a large number of people live below the poverty level. The ICI staff builds relationships with the Logan and Cicero youth, helping them with homework and walking beside them as they face family problems. In many cases, these relationships extend to the children’s parents.

Ultimately, ICI’s desire is for youth to learn about Jesus and be transformed by the Gospel. During the 2017–2018 school year, ICI worked with nearly 1,600 kids, with more than 350 involved in one-on-one Bible studies. Through the ministry of ICI, it is evident that only the Gospel can bring lasting change for these at-risk youth. When the Gospel changes their hearts, it touches every part of their lives and community.

“We try to provide an opportunity for youth to see what it means to see the Gospel not just preached but lived out in their lives,” explained BJ Bechtel ’99, Chief Executive Officer of ICI. “Our goal is for them to experience the love of God so that they can rethink their worldview, rewrite their futures, and ultimately be transformed.”

Undoubtedly, ICI’s focus on Jesus gives Cedarville students a vision for urban discipleship. Through the short-term trips, Cedarville students witness how the Gospel is impacting families and communities, which inspires them for future service in inner-city settings.

LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY

For some students, what begins as a short-term trip at ICI eventually leads to summer internships or full-time positions. A perfect example of this is ICI’s CEO.

Bechtel, a youth ministry graduate of Cedarville, first became involved with ICI through a short-term trip his sophomore year. While serving there, Bechtel discovered he had a passion for sharing the Gospel with kids in the city. He returned to ICI for two more spring break trips and then completed a summer internship. The fall after graduation, Bechtel became a full-time staff member at ICI, where he has continued to serve for more than 19 years.

“These trips really helped give me a ministry direction,” explained Bechtel. “I built relationships, learned how to raise support, and applied what I learned at Cedarville to ministry in the city.”

Bechtel is not the only Cedarville student to join ICI after participating in a short-term trip. Many other students have discovered that God had a long-term plan to use them in the lives of Chicago youth. According to Bechtel, nearly half of Cedarville alumni who have joined the ICI staff have been connected through short-term trips or internships.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Many Cedarville students who serve on a spring break trip in Chicago continue their relationship with ICI after graduation. Some alumni bring teams from their churches or youth groups to serve during the summer, while others are currently serving as pastors, nurses, and teachers in other areas of Chicago. More than 20 people who have been on short-term trips are now teaching in the Chicago area.

Rachel Leake '18, a Spanish education graduate, served on two spring break trips to Chicago with ICI, first as a team member and then as a team leader. Leake, who is now teaching in Chicago, believes her time at ICI helped her recognize her strengths and discover where God wanted her to serve.

“Through going to ICI, I met a lot of people from local churches and organizations,” said Leake. “I also counseled middle school girls at an ICI summer camp for a week. All of these things gave me

confidence in my decision to move to Chicago because I knew that the Lord had prepared me.”

Spring break trips may be a small part of ICI's ministry in Chicago, but the long-term impact of these trips is evident. These trips are not only helping transform the lives of inner-city youth with the Gospel, but they are also preparing Cedarville students for lifelong service in the urban neighborhoods of Chicago and beyond.

Madi Cannon '17 is a Research Assistant at Empower Ministries International and a freelance writer. She is currently pursuing a Master of Theology degree at Dallas Theological Seminary.

