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We Call Him Father Wally

Be generous, and you will be prosperous. Help others, and you will be helped.

~ Proverbs 11:25

I went to college at DePaul University in the late 1970's. During that time, I was privileged to encounter a man by the name of Father Walter Brennan, a theology teacher and also a fraternity moderator. A fraternity moderator is a spiritual counselor who advises the fraternity brothers both collectively and individually, particularly when they have gone astray. On occasion, some of our brothers in our fraternity engaged in behavior that merited a little counseling to say the least.

Father Wally was a well-educated man who kept us grounded. More importantly, however, he mastered the art of connecting with others in an unassuming, down to earth way that made all feel comfortable. Consequently, most people were shocked to learn that Father Wally had two doctorates, one in theology and one in philosophy.

As an Irishman from the neighborhood, Father Wally fit the bill in many ways. He had a quick wit, great skill as a storyteller,

and a wicked sense of humor. Though he earned advanced scholastic degrees, Father Wally came across as a regular guy, with no airs, dispensing his wisdom in a manner not typical of a learned man steeped in the academic world.

Father Wally's innate ability to relate and communicate with others transcended his brilliant work at the university. He was a great teacher. He also possessed the unique and effective way of relating to kids our age. He attended our fraternity parties, had a beer or two, and fit right in. Whenever the fraternity took road trips, such as skiing trips to Colorado, Father Wally would be right there with us. He did not ski and would not participate in some of the more adventurous things we did as college students, but he was as much a part of those trips as anything I now remember. Amazingly, he also attended all of our "Hell Weekends," the annual initiation rites of the new brothers, and most often he provided the only link to common sense and sanity.

Bringing the Mass to the Masses

We think of the effective teachers we have had over the years with recognition, but those who have touched our humanity we remember with a deep sense of gratitude.

~ Anonymous student

Rather than requiring fraternity brothers and friends to attend church services, Father Wally brought his service to us. He would ask one of us to pick up a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. Father Wally might choose to have mass wherever we happened to be. On campus, he'd say, "Let's go sit on the grass," referring to an open space in the quadrangle. He sometimes conducted mass at our residences, before or after classes, on any day of the week.

It was a privilege and an enriching experience to attend Father Wally's services. Despite his ability to relate to a bunch of knuckleheads like us, he was a deeply spiritual priest. A member of the Marian Order of Servites, Father Walter Brennan was a great scholar of the Scriptures and also a widely respected historian of early Christian literature. His treatises on the Christian faith, and in particular on the Virgin Mary, were published worldwide. Father Wally was often recognized for his eloquent views on the importance of Mary in the history of the Church and is the author of the book, *The Sacred Memory of Mary*.

In a most unique and powerful way, he reached out and connected with us at a level at which we could relate. He taught us the great lessons in life, but at the same time was someone with whom we could both identify and respect. Father Wally dispensed his wisdom to us at an age and time when we needed it the most.

As our spiritual advisor, counselor, and friend, Father Wally's impact was far-reaching and profound. He became a friend to each of us and was someone whose influence remains to this day.

It didn't matter how many years skipped by, Father Wally was always there if you needed guidance or simply wanted to say hello. He celebrated and performed the ceremonies of my fraternity brothers who married and baptized their children. He was there to console us and to preside over the funerals of those we loved, including the funeral of my own mother. If you called or visited him, no matter how many years out of college, that strong, vibrant connection was still there. He was always ready to see you and was always prepared to listen. In my case, now twenty-five years after leaving DePaul University, Father Wally's influence and impact on my life continues to be extraordinary.

While Father Wally was the quintessential dolphin for each of us, his influence reached across the university and beyond, during his more than twenty-five years of service to the DePaul community. During his tenure, Father Walter Brennan was

voted, by the entire student body, as the most popular and most respected professor at DePaul University. Quite a distinction, considering DePaul University is the largest Catholic University in the country with over 20,000 students.

A Ministry in the Streets

The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk their position, their prestige and even their life for the welfare of others. In dangerous valleys and hazardous pathways, they will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and more noble life.

~ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

During his years at DePaul University and as our fraternity moderator, Father Wally chose to live in one of the most economically depressed and dangerous areas in Chicago. He could have lived wherever there was a parish and still teach at DePaul. He chose, however, the most desperate neighborhood in the city. The Lawndale and Westside communities had suffered the most damage following the riots on the days following Martin Luther King's assassination. Many Westside residents lived hard lives, amidst sky-high crime rates, run-down streets, and abandoned buildings. Few residents could escape the cycle of poverty that engulfed the area.

Father Wally was never one to back down from what he thought was a righteous cause. If he felt that something was wrong, he took a stand. He confided in us that he marched with the protestors during the infamous Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. He said he rarely spoke of it for fear of retribution. Father Wally also said that he never regretted

marching alongside of the protesters because he knew in his heart their cause was right. When he spoke of that day, he was very quiet. Father Wally seemed to carry sadness for the deep divide that existed during that time and especially for those whose voices were not heard. Father Walter Brennan had a bit of a rebel in him, to be sure, but he rebelled in the most conscientious of ways and always stood on the side of the disenfranchised. It was what endeared him to so many: Father Wally's unwavering support of what was just.

Father Wally was surprised to find that the priests of this inner-city parish, Our Lady of Sorrows, rarely stepped outside its gates. Like some academics that never leave the proverbial ivory tower, the priests of this historic parish had little contact and no real connection with the surrounding neighborhood. The priests who lived in the rectory never left the parish walls to involve themselves in the neighborhood, or to even visit with their parishioners. This was something that Father Wally could not understand. The term "parish" meant neighborhood and community to him.

When Father Wally asked his fellow priests why they did not circulate within the community, the response was uniform: It is too dangerous out there. Father Wally felt that the community desperately needed the priests to walk among them for that very same reason, and he decided to force the issue. Hence, this remarkable scholar, teacher, and counselor expanded his ministry to yet another level. He chose to walk the streets of the Westside, alone, and at night.

Father Wally once told me, "I taught during the day and night was the only time I had available. It was also the most important time to be there for the people in the greatest need." So, this very short, unassuming and unfailingly kind Irish priest walked the streets of the desperately poor African-American neighborhood on Chicago's Westside with no sacred or signifying garments, no shield, no special badge, and no indication of privilege or position. Father Wally walked the streets as a simple

man, a human being, and most importantly, someone who cared.

At the height of the summer, during intense heat, he would don his Chicago Cubs hat, a simple shirt, black dress socks, shorts so long they almost touched his gym shoes. I told him once that he didn't wear shorts, they were short pants! In the winter it was a parka reaching far below his knees. Fashion was not Father Wally's concern. He didn't care what he looked like; his concern was what he meant to people and how he could be of service. He established a roving ministry. We called Father Wally the Mother Teresa of the Westside.

More than a Presence

*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch,
a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest
compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which
have the potential to turn a life around.*

~ Leo Buscaglia

As a result of his nightly walks and his exceedingly close ties to the community, Father Wally realized as the years passed that his mere presence in the neighborhood wasn't enough. He would tell us that he saw a twelve-year-old boy standing on a street corner, waiting for the bus, wearing a girl's torn shirt, on a freezing cold January night. Asking the boy why he had that shirt on and why he wasn't wearing a coat, the boy responded that it was the only shirt he had and he did not have a coat. So Father Wally took that child to the store and bought him a shirt and a coat. He would perform these kinds of deeds daily, for twenty-five years.

Father Wally would say, "Until you're there, in the neighborhood, you simply don't understand the needs that people face." He would tell us that the extent of the poverty was staggering, and that the toll on the human spirit was beyond measure.

Father Wally said people need hope and in this neighborhood, they were desperate for it. He explained that his assistance could not be a one-time event and he needed to be there on an ongoing basis. He believed it was important to teach those he helped that they could help themselves, and know it was possible for them to have a better life.

Father Wally knew this took money and he had little of it. So he organized efforts to raise funds to provide tuition for the children of the neighborhood so they could realize their improbable dream of going to college. He would buy clothes and food for entire families and provide transportation for countless individuals where none existed. Father Wally initiated two annual fundraisers: a summer picnic and a winter sports memorabilia auction that garnered the strong support of his current and former students of DePaul. Many of our fraternity brothers, now out in the working world, supported his efforts. A magical evening that brought together generations of students, and even their parents, became an annual event to visit with old friends and to support the mission of our mentor. In the spirit of the night, \$35,000 to \$40,000 was raised to support Father Wally's efforts in the community.

Father Wally dispensed these funds wisely and with a purpose. He used some of the money to offer part-time jobs for people to work in and around the parish. He knew kids could develop a sense of self-worth and motivation if they were offered a real job and were paid for their efforts. Father Walter Brennan searched the streets for those longing for a place in the future, and in the generous soul of a tireless humanitarian, the children of the neighborhood found hope.

Years later, reflecting on his efforts, Father Wally said, "I needed to do this; I had to do this." It was important to Father Wally to make connections with the kids who were simply hanging out. Many of those kids were not the ones who came to church. He felt that maybe he could prevent them from heading into trouble. If they were without critical connections at home,

such as having a father present in their lives or having a positive support system, then perhaps he could be a surrogate father or offer a secure environment.

Father Wally opened the parish doors of Our Lady of Sorrows in ways that had never been available in the past. The television room was now a place for the kids to come and watch basketball and football games. The kitchen in the rectory was a place to make a sandwich and enjoy food, which was scarce outside those walls. Now there was an oasis in the neighborhood where kids could gather safely and be surrounded by a positive influence.

If tragedy struck out in the streets, beyond the safety of the parish walls, as it often did, then it was time to be with the people where they lived. In a neighborhood where the sound of gunshots was common, and boarded-up buildings and empty lots made up the landscape, a small priest would step out his front door, alone, to walk among the poor and the forgotten.

A Neighborhood Full of Brennans

To touch the soul of another human being is to walk on holy ground.

~ Stephen Covey

As you might imagine, Father Wally was a humble man. Whenever he had the time to meet and share a meal with former students, there was a single requirement: The meeting could never, ever, be at a "fancy" restaurant. Fancy was the word Father Wally used to describe any place that excluded the common folk. If the restaurant was a place where you had to dress differently and could not be yourself, he simply would not go there.

I was fortunate to meet often with Father Wally for breakfast and the occasional dinner. If I could get him out for dinner, he would request, "that little place, with the good food." He was

speaking of a pizzeria in the middle of an inner city block, with three booths and two tables. We regularly met for breakfast, early in the day, and always at a place called Uncle Mike's. Uncle Mike's was the classic American breakfast joint. A counter and a few booths filled with city workers, police officers, mail carriers, neighborhood residents and retirees. A waitress named Sally and a great short order cook named Gus made up the entire staff. Eggs any way you like them, potatoes, and a hot cup of coffee. Father Wally was right at home.

One day, at breakfast, Father Wally told me a story of a young child he met while walking the neighborhood. Over the years, he supported this young man's dream of a life free from the crime of the neighborhood and he offered him the shelter of the parish and gave him positive encouragement. Father Wally was proud of this young man as he went on to graduate from school, marry, and raise a wonderful family. The young man came back to see Father Wally one day and told him that he had two sons who he wished to have baptized. He said he named both of his sons Brennan.

Father Wally laughed so hard telling that story and then said, "You know there are a lot of people named Brennan in the neighborhood now." Father Walter Brennan looked out the window, and for a moment I saw a look of peace and a sense of pride on his face. Just as I was thinking of something good to say to him, he looked back, smiled, and said, "I sure hope all the Brennans are staying out of trouble!"

Father Wally represented so much to me that I constantly sought to reaffirm our deep connection. Simply being around him gave me a sense of contentment and purpose. Of course, he was to become the spiritual advisor and a member of the original Board of Directors of Dreams for Kids.

One day, in the spring of 2001, at one of our early morning breakfasts, I reminded Father Wally that we were not getting any younger and it might be a good time to document his philosophy and approach to community involvement. I asked him, "Why

don't you write something that we could use as a guide, so that others could read it and learn what you have accomplished? You could use this as an opportunity to explain the ways you have managed to bridge the gap between blacks and whites. It can be a treatise on how to reach all children of poverty and positively impact their lives."

At first, Father Wally was resistant. He felt that simply reading this information would be a poor substitute to actually being in the neighborhood, walking the streets, and making connections. He believed that the only way one can truly make a difference was to show up every day in the trenches. Trust, in his eyes, came from constant work and affirmation. I fully understood Father Wally's concern, but I also believed that to be able to pass on his wealth of knowledge could only yield a great benefit.

I said to Father Wally that if he could teach people to do what he had done, then more of us could have an impact in the work he had begun. At first he said that this approach would not work because it was about trust. The people in the neighborhood trusted him because he was there everyday and never abandoned them. It worked because he was there.

As our discussion progressed, it proved to be an amazing insight into the depth of Father Wally's knowledge of the cycle of poverty and of race relations. It was a morning I will not soon forget. We talked about the day that was sure to come, when Father Wally was no longer here among us. He began to see the value of leaving something behind.

We both knew that when Father Wally passed on, this poor and mostly forgotten community would lose their champion. The people whom he had given so many years of his life to would be sorely in need of others who cared. Perhaps some others could step in, and the community would trust them because they were Father Wally's friends.

This idea intrigued Father Wally, and it excited him to know that his work might go on long after he was gone. He decided he would write up a plan, a "blueprint." Within this blueprint

would be his insights, gained through many years of experience in working with the poor and connecting with people of different races and cultures.

Blueprint for Harmony

I believe that there is a plan and a purpose for each person's life and that there are forces working in the universe to bring about good and to create a community of love and brotherhood. Those who can attune themselves to these forces-to God's purpose-can become special instruments of His will.

~ Coretta Scott King

About a week later, Father Wally called me at my office and said that he had finished his blueprint. He was going to e-mail it to me. We both laughed because Father Wally was far from being a technological wizard. The kids he helped had recently set up his computer and taught him how to use it. As was his nature, he was both bewildered by the advancements of our time, and excited about learning a new skill. He even planned on taking a computer course so that he could stay current with the times. I can remember the first time he asked to use my cell phone. He had no idea how to use it and held it like a walkie-talkie. As soon as he realized that all the kids in his street ministry had cell phones, he got one too. On his cell phone, he was forever walking and talking, staying in touch, and making a difference.

That afternoon, Father Wally pressed the right button and successfully e-mailed his blueprint to me.

When I received and read his manuscript, I gained new insight into the brilliance of Father Wally. I found the document to be a simple, straightforward, yet profound view into human nature. The blueprint has prescriptions for all of humanity, yet can be applied on the street level.

The blueprint also offers keen insights into what separates individual human beings or groups of people. Father Wally clearly spelled out that it is a lack of understanding that divides individuals, communities, races, cultures, religions, and even nations. From this lack of understanding and ignorance about one another, prejudice is born and it grows, which then further clouds our vision. If we are able to better understand one another, we can begin to bridge the divide that exists between us. We can then tear down those walls and learn to appreciate one another.

In his writing, as in his everyday life, Father Wally pulled no punches. He wrote about the differences between blacks and whites, and why there is so much misunderstanding that exists between the races. He spoke about the characteristics of each group and how, if we were able to focus on those common characteristics, we would find the differences easier to accept.

Father Wally wrote of the fact that almost all of us in this country are descended from some other place. When we begin to understand and appreciate our respective origins and how they impact family and neighborhood, and how collectively we have become the United States, much becomes clear to us. Ultimately, Father Wally wrote a blueprint of understanding and cooperation and of potential harmony among people of all colors.

It was in his deep spirituality that Father Wally held the belief that God works through each of us, and once we understood the suffering that existed among those in great need, we would do God's work here on earth by being generous and kind. In the words and actions of Father Wally, "When you want to help someone, first you have to understand who they are. When you understand who they are, then you can gain acceptance. When they accept you in their life, they will trust you. When they trust you, you can truly make a difference."

The full text of Father Wally's brilliant blueprint and extensive insights on race relations and his work with the members of the Lawndale and Westside communities of Chicago is available in its full edited text on the Dreams for Kids website, www.dreamsforkids.org/father-wally-scholarship

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Carrying On “Pup’s” Legacy

Lord help me live from day to day, in such a humble sort of way, to give a smile, help lift a load, for those I meet along life's road, and when I come to my journey's end, my life I have not lived in vain, if one dear friend can smile and say "I'm glad I met him on life's way."

~ Author unknown

With Father Wally's blueprint blazing on my computer screen, I left a message on his voicemail. That afternoon, as I awaited his return call, I got a phone call from a young man named Jamal. He was one of the kids closest to Father Wally. Jamal told me that Father Wally had not answered his phone calls that entire day. He and some of the kids had gone to the parish and, uncharacteristically, Father Wally did not answer the bell to his room. The kids asked someone to check his room and he was found slumped over at his desk. It was March 8, 2001. Father Walter Brennan had died of a massive heart attack.

I was scheduled to have lunch with Father Wally the next

day. We had spoken just the day before, after he e-mailed his blueprint to me. That he was now gone was difficult for me to comprehend. When someone is taken away from us suddenly, we may have a difficult time processing the reality. Depending on the circumstances, we are often left with unfinished business and an unshakable sense of regret.

However, as I slowly came to terms with this sudden, harsh reality, I was filled with a sense of peace that a great man had completed his work among us, and was now safe at home. Father Wally's life was complete and because of the way he had lived, and how deeply he connected to us, he will always be with us.

To me, he was the finest example of someone who walks his talk. He was the people's priest. Father Walter Brennan took his faith and his obligations directly to the people. Finishing the brilliant blueprint of his life's work was one of the final, and possibly the very last act of his life. What a blessing it was that Father Wally completed his manuscript and left it as a guide for us to move forward and to continue his work.

The memorial wake for Father Wally lasted all throughout the day as he lay in state within the Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows. Father Wally's funeral mass was scheduled for 7 p.m. that same evening. During the day, Jack Brennan, Wally's brother, had encountered a man at the wake who was crying in a distant row. Jack walked back to see him and asked, "Did you know Father Wally?" The man looked up and said, "Know him? He raised me."

Footprints in the Sand

At the deepest level, it's real love and care that people crave. Give those things, and you'll receive them. Through your caring deeds and actions, you'll truly make your mark on the world.

~ Howard Martin

The breadth and depth of the people Father Walter Brennan had touched was magnificent to behold. In all, over a thousand people came to pay their respects to Father Wally. People came from DePaul University, the academic community, students from as far back as the 1960's, parents of students, Chicago area politicians and leaders, and perhaps most importantly, people from the Lawndale and Westside communities of Chicago. The cross-section of those in attendance for the funeral mass was astounding. Together, students who had become lawyers and judges, business executives and entrepreneurs, sat with people who had grown up in a neighborhood isolated by poverty.

People, now middle-aged and secure, whom Father Wally had driven to school as children because there was no one else to drive them, and those for whom he had bought textbooks or clothes or food, attended the funeral. Ex-prisoners, whom he had counseled, attended as well. He visited prisons and jails often and counseled and cared for those who were incarcerated.

Countless adults, whom Father Wally "raised," brought their children to pay their respects to the man whose legacy continues to live in them.

Father Wally always had a group of kids with whom he maintained the strongest ties and there, in the middle of the church, center row, that entire group of kids tearfully huddled. Among this group were those kids who had found him when he did not answer the bell days before.

I was honored to be asked to deliver Father Wally's eulogy. In my words to the congregation of Father Wally's living legacy,

I drew from his blueprint, discussing how it represented his philosophy and approach to bridging the gap between various cultures. The diversity of those in attendance was a strong and powerful testament to his wisdom. The life of Father Wally had not just brought us together for a day, but instead, had connected us for a lifetime. He had filled our minds with knowledge and filled our hearts with compassion.

One of those present at the funeral was a man named Dale Tobias, who has become a trusted friend. A few days earlier, I had searched for Dale at the Ray Meyer Center basketball court to tell him the sad news. He was from the neighborhood. Father Wally had encouraged him in his studies, and became a constant presence in his life as he attended DePaul University. Dale attended, graduated law school, became a noteworthy attorney, and now works for the Chicago Transit Authority. He told me that he was at a complete loss. He said that he had spoken to Father Wally every day.

I asked Dale if he had spoken to him recently and he replied, "I spoke with Father Wally every single day for the past twenty-five years. I can tell you every place he has been and I spoke to him there. Italy, Ireland, Minnesota...every single day we spoke, no matter what."

Father Wally had also perfected the lost art of letter writing. He always sent handwritten notes to us all, never missing an anniversary, birthday, holiday or special occasion. So profound was their personal effect, that Dale had kept every single letter and card that Father Wally had ever sent to him.

Father Wally had taken Dale under his wing and encouraged him to believe in his dreams and convinced him that, no matter what the odds, Dale could achieve those dreams. He told Dale that he could count on him always being there for him and that he would never give up on him. It was twenty-five years later and still Father Wally had kept his word to him, as he had done for so many others.

In his ministry, Father Wally helped countless kids attend

and graduate from college, but more importantly, he drew no distinction between white or blue collar. If you aspired to work in the trades or to repair cars, he would help you get there and would inspire you to be the best.

Father Wally understood the importance of recruiting and mentoring kids who were at great risk, yet he also made it a habit to single out those who had the best chance of making a profound and lasting difference. Those were the kids who received the jobs around the church, were able to spend the most time with him, and were the ones with whom he maintained the closest ties. In a neighborhood filled with poverty and despair, Father Wally became an outpost of hope and the training ground for a life of promise.

The kids in Father Wally's inner circle were chosen for their willingness to learn how to make a difference, not just in their own lives, but also in the lives of those children who would follow them. The refuge of the rectory and the time spent with Father Wally would not only save them from negative influences in the neighborhood, but would also give them the skills to be future role models. His enduring lesson was a different look at the law of Karma: "That which is given to you, you give back tenfold."

For Those Who Love there are no Goodbyes

*I asked God to take away my pain. God said, "No."
It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.*

*I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.
God said, "No."
Her spirit was whole, her body was only temporary.*

*I asked God to grant me patience. God said, "No."
Patience is a by-product of tribulations; it isn't granted, it is earned.*

*I asked God to give me happiness. God said, "No."
I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you.*

*I asked God to spare me pain. God said, "No."
Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and
brings you closer to me.*

*I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, "No."
You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to
make you fruitful.*

*I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life. God
said, "No."
I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things.*

*I asked God to help me love others, as much as he
loves me. God said...*

"Ahhhh, finally you have the idea."

~ Author Unknown

I had met all of the kids over the years. They had their own name for Father Wally: "Pup." It was short for "Puppy Dog," one of the numerous street names Father Wally would come up with to call the kids.

The sudden loss of Father Wally was devastating to the kids in his inner circle. They were the ones who saw him every day. They were the ones who found him when he didn't answer his bell. I saw the pain on their faces as I looked out over the church. He was so close to those kids and he meant so much to them. How could they carry on? What would become of them?

Having walked over to where the kids were sitting in the church to say hello and to share our grief, I learned their loss was crushing. Father Wally was only sixty-five-years old at the time of his death, not old by contemporary standards but there

seemed to be so many years left for him to be with us.

I handed one of my business cards to each of the kids and wrote my cell phone number, telling them that we all had to stick together now, even more than before. We would have to carry on together in Pup's spirit. To stay connected would further his legacy and would reaffirm all that he had taught us. I encouraged each of the kids to call me at any time, for any reason.

"Let's keep his work going. Let's keep our connection strong. The greatest gift he gave us," I told them, "was bringing us all together. The greatest gift we can give back is to stay together and pass on his work."

One of those young men, Devon Coleman, called me the very next morning. He said to me, "I'm really sorry for calling you so soon." I reminded Devon that I had asked him to give me a call for anything, at anytime. He was calling from his car and had become distraught while driving to meet Pup for lunch, as he did nearly every day. He did not realize until he pulled into the church parking lot that Pup was no longer there. Devon had been on autopilot.

The loss of Father Wally was so profound that in the days that followed, it seemed inconceivable that it had occurred at all. The other kids in the church that day, Jamal, Quintel, Rashon, and Kiarri all had similar experiences to share in the days following Father Wally's funeral. I am fortunate to have been granted their trust and to have developed a mentor relationship with each of the young men. We are still in regular contact and continue to share Father Wally's dream.

Within several weeks, the remaining kids joined us, along with Dale, to create the Father Wally Program, which is now a permanent part of Dreams for Kids' programming. Our mission is simply to carry on his work. To develop the program, we enrolled Father Wally's extended family, the many students he had impacted at DePaul University over the years, the members of my fraternity, and the core group of individuals with whom Father Wally made a profound difference.

Together, we have embraced the blueprint of Father Wally's life and are doing what we can to help sustain this great man's legacy. In following Father Wally's lead, we are humbled by the far-reaching impact of his life's work, and it inspires us to help all those we can in his name.

The Living Legacy

One person can make a difference and every person should try.

~ John Fitzgerald Kennedy

The Father Wally Program is an outreach scholarship program designed to aid worthy students from the neighborhood to continue with their education. The program also serves as an emotional outlet for those who want to keep Father Wally's spirit alive and to keep the core group of Father Wally's beneficiaries connected. This program and its mission have become an important part of Dreams for Kids.

The five young men of Father Wally's final inner circle were all attending college when he passed on. Father Wally had known each of them for most of their lives. Not only had they lost their most avid supporter, but their college careers were in jeopardy. They needed financial support to make it through. At Dreams for Kids, in the spirit of the newly created Father Wally Program, we took the attitude that no matter what it takes, we were going to make sure that those kids had the opportunity to finish their university education. The Father Wally Program, and the funds we raised in our mentor's name, has accomplished that goal.

After Jamal finished college, he went on to earn two advanced degrees, a Masters in Finance and a Masters in Business Administration. Jamal has also recently passed the CPA exam. Devon is currently the owner of a landscaping business

and is the managing member of a real estate investment company. His company rehabilitates properties in distressed neighborhoods. Kiarri finished college and obtained a Masters Degree in Business Administration and is working full-time in Atlanta. Quintel completed his studies at Southern Illinois University.

Most importantly, all four young men respond on a moment's notice to assist Dreams for Kids and its mission. They are fixtures at our annual Holiday Party for the kids and Jamal even fills in as Santa Claus. He said we needed a "Brother Claus" anyway, so it might as well be him!

The core principle of our ongoing Father Wally Program is that it must extend beyond the awarding of scholarship funds and also must focus on giving back to the next generation. We require our recipients to accept the responsibility of doing well in school, securing a meaningful career and keeping the program sustained for others. In doing so, we are keeping alive the legacy and spirit of a great man, whose words continue to resonate in our lives: "Remember that which is given to you, you give back tenfold."

Today, when you drive down the streets of the Westside and Lawndale communities of Chicago, homes are being refurbished and businesses are returning to the neighborhood. When you see the look of hope on the faces of the residents, you remember a time not long ago. If you close your eyes, you can see a little Irish priest they called Pup, dressed in shorts and gym shoes, wearing a Cubs' hat and walking the streets of a forgotten community, late at night, in a neighborhood that is now full of Brennans.

Long before the rebirth of the Westside, as Father Wally was walking its streets to deliver hope, there was another neighborhood in Chicago whose residents lived in equal desperation. In that neighborhood, Englewood, there lived a woman who was also small in stature. As with Father Wally, it would take a walk down the dangerous streets of her neighborhood to awaken a lifelong passion to make a difference. She too became larger than life. Dreams for Kids walked side by side with this remarkable woman and found the highway to a Christmas dream.