



WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CATHERINE KASPER

Growing Futures Through Gardening

Gonzalee Martin
Founder of Growth in Agriculture
Through Education (GATE)

Since 1993, when Growth in Agriculture Through Education (GATE) was founded, Gonzalee Martin has been cultivating much more than just fruits and vegetables in Slataper Farm, across from the McCormick Place Apartments. The program focuses on the residents, especially the teenagers, of the neighboring apartments, to educate them about agriculture, so they can grow their own food and live healthier lifestyles. His goal for the teenagers is for them to develop an “interest in learning” about “growing food and the different things that go into gardening.”

This summer, he is working with three young men, ages 14, 15 and 17, all of whose parents are immigrants from either Myanmar or Africa. The teenagers work hard for long hours in the hot sun, but they do so gladly and appreciate the benefits. One expressed the value of

the program by saying GATE “teaches us more about leadership,” to which they all agreed, and that the program “teaches us to work as leaders and as a team.” Gonzalee emphasizes that by growing something, young people learn the “discipline of being patient.”

This virtue, along with what Gonzalee describes as the “unique skill set” that comes with gardening,

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can truly change the lives of the young people he works with, who come from very low income families. With this discipline and interest in a trade, Gonzalee hopes he can encourage them to try to go on in school, learn more about agriculture, and get a degree. Because of their start working on and growing the plants themselves, “on the other side of production,” Gonzalee hopes this will enable them to thrive in the “white collar side of

agriculture,” if they choose to pursue it. With careers in that area, which will only be more important in the future, as the world has more mouths to feed, he believes they could “create a wonderful life—with a capital ‘W.’”

The beliefs and values of the Poor Handmaids advocate the “sharing of ministry and nurturing leadership.” Over the years, Gonzalee has shown a dedication to sharing his knowledge of agriculture to people who are in great need of help, especially young people seeking direction. Through GATE, he has also instilled those young people with discipline, a work ethic, and a sense of leadership that will last a lifetime. Furthermore, Gonzalee exemplifies another call of the Poor Handmaids, for people to “rejoice in their gifts,” by using his for a much greater good.

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To learn more on Blessed
Catherine Kasper and the
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