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A very special Saturday evening

Students of Riverview Study Centre in Montreal experience rich human relations with very special people at Faith and Light.

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Faith and Light is an international association made of communities that welcome people with intellectual disabilities and their family, bringing all together in a Christian spirit of friendship, sharing, prayer and celebration.

On the second Saturday of each month, a group of young men from Riverview Study Centre in Montreal share very special moments with the F&L Holy Family community that meets at St Veronica's Parish in Dorval. Participants in the gathering are paired up to spend a couple of hours with a particular friend each evening.

First, there is a lively 'potluck' style dinner and celebration of birthdays or special anniversaries. As the meal wraps up, all are welcome to share some news about themselves or their family, such as a new personal project that they are working on. It is very endearing, for example, to see the enthusiasm with which Alrica talks about the plays in which she participates, or listening to Paul tell us about his work. In other occasions, we get to know of a medical challenge someone is going through and can provide the help of

our friendship and prayers. It may not always be possible to talk to everyone that evening, and yet, by these ways, true affectionate highlights of friends' lives and bright smiles are part of those evenings.

For the second half of the evening, we clear the tables and engage in an organized activity, paying particular attention to that special friend who appreciates our company and time. Here we get to bond more individually with a young person who has autism, for example, and to be a friend to him or her.

For those of us who are unfamiliar with these situations, it can be challenging or even uncomfortable to have these conversations because the feedback is somehow different from what we are accustomed to and it may even seem like we are not being a good friend.

With their sincere smiles our new

friends teach us to live in the present

However, we soon learn that this is not the case: we learn to listen better, we learn to reach out to them in different ways. We get to understand how this means a lot to these new friends we have made, because they often find themselves isolated. With their sincere smiles our new friends teach us as well to live in the present, and what an amazing gift it is to have life and loved ones around.

Understanding and trust grow quickly, leading to openness in those conversations. Nothing too formal, either, since these conversations take place while making a craft card or playing soccer, if weather permits. There are some friends who are seemingly more introverted. Others are extroverted and outspoken. But interacting with all them is always very special. Everyone is a great gift to the others. And we celebrate that.

These visits plunge us into a good wake-up call

to give our best to those around us

At the end of the evening, as families start to head home, and we head off ourselves, as we get into the car I always hear how everyone enjoyed the experience, the warm atmosphere of the whole community, in simple yet authentic affection. I feel like these visits plunge us into a new experience that serves as a good wake-up call to give our best to those around us.

Sharing his experience, Sebastian, a good friend of mine, told me how much the experiences at Faith and Light also help him to view his problems differently. I realize that connecting with someone who faces major challenges in life can result in unexpected discoveries: we go there to give some of our time, but we receive so much from them; we go

out of a certain comfort zone, and yet we find that we are welcomed as a friend.

These evenings have given me invaluable lessons on what it means to really love and about ways in which I can continually grow in the capacity to love.

Charles Barcant

Riverview Study Centre

Here is a link to the international website of Faith and Light

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