

A Fire that Spreads (Part 1)

The Church has, over the centuries, held service to the poor as one of her core missions. Wherever and however, she finds them, the Church, through word and work, seeks to love the poor and assist them out of their material, intellectual or spiritual poverty. (CCC, nos. 2444 & 2448) And this is a fire she has sought to kindle in each of her children through space and time.

10/08/2025

In 2012, that fire reached a group of staff from Strathmore University who asked themselves what they could do both as individuals and as an institution, to have a greater impact on the immediate society about them. This one question led to several others such as "What is our forte?", "What are we really good at?", "How can we use this strength or strengths towards helping the people in our immediate neighbourhood?"

Some of the answers came very quickly: for example, being a university it was patently clear education was their forte. Other answers were only found after a bit more searching both online and off. For example, to the question what they could do with or in education to

impact and uplift those near them, the answer was found online from half-across the globe: Midtown-Metro Achievement Centres for boys and for girls.

Midtown began in 1965 with a few members of Opus Dei and cooperators in Chicago who recognised the need to help at-risk boys escape the problems of the inner city. With no money or staff, they established the Midtown Centre for boys and eventually the sister centre for girls known as the Metro Centre. What began as a summer sports and skills program for twelve boys has since grown over the past fifty years into a year-round after-school and holiday program that serves more than 1,000 boys and girls annually.

In importing the idea to East Africa, that small group of staff members from Strathmore began what is now

known as *Macheo*: a weekend and holiday programme that serves high school students from three informal settlements near the university. *Macheo*'s focus is unashamedly academic: students from these settlements come to the university on Saturdays and during the school holidays for various learning programmes that include remedial classes in math and languages, life skills lessons and mentoring from university staff and students.

It can be said that the very fruits of the programme are what has kept that initial fire going, growing and spreading all these years. Spreading to other separate learning institutions such as Strathmore School (Lavington) and Regis Academy (Runda).

In 2024, Strathmore School begun their version of *Macheo* called *Mawio* (meaning "sunrise" or "dawn" in

Swahili. It is synonymous with "macheo"). It is dedicated to empowering students from greatly challenging backgrounds from their sub-county (Westlands) by providing them with the necessary tools and guidance to enhance their educational journey. The Saturday program is designed to improve the academic performance of junior school students and create a supportive community for their families.

15km north-east of Strathmore School is Regis Runda Academy. They too were set ablaze by the *Macheo* Programme and in 2025 started one of their own baptised *Sulwe*. (In Dholuo, *Sulwe* means "Stars". Significance? Stars shine best during darkness.) A small group of staff in Regis asked themselves the same questions and realised that they were perfectly located next to Githogoro slums with almost 15 schools to

impact. The tinder had been ignited. The fire was spreading.

(From the 1st to the 3rd of October, individuals from around the world, involved in such projects will be sharing insights, ideas and experiences at the BeDoCare Conference to be held in Strathmore University. You can learn more about the Conference and register your attendance [here](#).)

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