

Urban Harvest Ministries

Tom and Lidia Grassano, urban missionaries



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The Pursuit of Academic Excellence

God has designed every human being with a destiny, a purpose, and a future that only he or she can fulfill. Many in the inner city cannot grasp this simple, scriptural truth. Their lives, families, and environment do not reinforce this fact. *But we as a church are called of God to increase people's capacity to fulfill their destinies, bringing glory to His name and bringing change to their lives and their families.* This means we must work toward a change of worldview—in work ethic, academic excellence, moral values, families responsibility, and all in the context of Christ-centered faith.

Roadblocks to pursuing academic excellence begin when children are young. Little Elena (not her real name) is a prime example. Elena is a delightful young girl in the first grade. But Elena is easily distracted. Since her mother is often sick and is also caring for a two year old and a baby, Elena's school work simply does not get done. Other children's homes are simply so chaotic that they are not conducive to doing homework. Many of these children have been informed by their teachers, "If you miss any more homework, you're not going to pass." Even worse, many children are told from the time that they are young that they are stupid, worthless, and unwanted.



Diana Wiggins helps a young student during Kidz Klub.

Kidz Klub is a lifeline for these children. It provides a structured environment where they can do their homework and develop their reading and writing skills. Somebody is there to encourage them and hold them accountable. It helps children and teens to have a good attitude about learning and a healthy understanding of their abilities and how to develop them. They learn how to work hard and they are rewarded and encouraged in their academic successes, encouragement often lacking in their homes.

"Class sizes are big and many times the students don't understand a concept when it's presented to the whole class," says Diana Wiggins, director of the Kidz Klub. "The children need somebody to explain it to them one-on-one. If they don't have that, they will lack the basic skills and continue poor performance in their classes. Then they start to think, 'I'm not smart enough to understand this.' They just shut down. Now they know they don't have to do that! They know we'll help them understand it. It's helping them with their self-confidence, and their work is improving. It also instills the truth that, 'Just because I don't get something the first time, doesn't mean I'm never going to get it. I can do all things through Christ!'"

"We see this especially in the teens. They will say, 'I can't do this... I can't do this...' But then when you sit down with them and say, 'Yes, you can. Let's go through this step by step,' they develop the confidence and ability to succeed. They come to us beaming, and say, 'I went to class and I understood what was going on!'"



Why aren't the public schools helping these kids? They are trying. But in a community where more than 90% of 8th graders read below grade level, and more than 75% of high school students drop out, the problems are immense. It's an epidemic. One youth said, "I didn't start doing well in school until I came to *The Harvest Center*...Yes, they have after-school help at my school, but there were so many students and so few tutors, I wasn't getting the help I needed."

Homework really needs to be brought back to the homes. That's why in the midst of tutoring the children we are beginning to work with the parents, teaching them how to help their own children with their homework. In this way we are empowering families so that this cycle of *home* not being conducive to *homework* can be broken.

The best case scenario for Elena is for her mother to receive Christ, and for everything at home to be in order—for it to be a peaceful, loving, learning environment. That's why we pray fervently for Elena's family and for the families of every child connected with *The Harvest Center*. We are present in their homes and in their lives so that Christ may be seen. We knock on their doors and present real answers to the real problems that these families face every day.

This is holistic ministry, not just ministry to the whole person, but also to the whole family so that the family is restored and fulfilling its purpose. Sometimes this takes months; sometimes it takes years. But we will continue helping each child understand and pursue academic excellence so that he or she can fulfill the destiny chosen for them in Christ before the foundation of the world.

A SAFE PLACE

A Testimony by Karen Blake

I quickly wiped away the tears that welled up in my eyes. I didn't want anyone in the crowded pizza place where we were sitting to see me crying.

It was the first time I met with Pastor Tom and Lidia Grassano. We were talking about my husband and I coming to work with *The Harvest Center* for three months to assist in training their children's ministry workers. During the conversation Pastor Tom said, "It's been said that *The Harvest Center* would be a place of healing." Something about that statement touched me so deeply; I felt like somehow I needed healing; I couldn't hold back the tears.



Karen with some of the many children who receive Life at *The Harvest Center*.

In actuality, I had no idea how much healing I really needed – and those would not be the last tears I cried!

Six weeks after we began the training, everything came into full view. The Lord exposed the affair my husband was having and with that the double-life he had been leading for several years. Pastor Tom and others tried to reach out to him, but he refused the help. My husband was suddenly out of my life and I was left with the realization that for several years I had been lied to... Deceived. Betrayed.

As devastating as that was, it was just the tip of the iceberg. The deception, manipulation, and control stretched far back into my early childhood where there had been long-term sexual and emotional abuse. It was so intense that I buried some of it in my mind for years. As the Lord removed the giant walls and revealed truth, my shattered soul was also revealed. The truth was unconscionable, the inner conflict unbearable.

I told God that *I was done*. I didn't want to die. But living was far too painful. Trapped in between the two, not wanting to do anything anymore, *I was done*. "No, you're not," the Lord told me. My heart cried out, "Well then You're going to have to come and rescue me because I cannot rescue myself!" And He did!

It was the Lord who brought me to *The Harvest Center* in June of 2003. And since that time to the present the Lord—Who is excellent in counsel and wisdom—has brought me healing. He has taken each shattered piece of my emotions and thinking and spirit and will and put it back together the right way. HE has made ALL the crooked paths straight. ***Only God could do this!***

But I needed to be in a special place for this rebuilding to occur. I needed a place where there is no deception and manipulation, and no one trying to take advantage of me for unjust gain. I also needed a place where people speak the truth with love and bring correction with gentleness. I needed a place where there is spiritual safety, where the leadership is not engaging in sin and thereby opening the door to spiritual evil and deception. I needed a place where people pray, and truly want the best for everyone. All this and more I found at *The Harvest Center*.

The Harvest Center truly is a place of healing! It is a safe place. Safe—not because the people take you in, put their arms around you and hug you—although they do. It's safe because the walls of righteousness and the walls of love, the walls of mercy and of holiness—the walls of everything God is—have been established and are in place. People can come in and find everything they need in Christ.

Somebody had to build those walls and righteous wall building is not without cost! It takes perseverance, courage, and an unswerving dedication to honor God at all costs, even when not doing so could make you look better or more "successful." I thank Pastor Tom and Lidia for choosing to build those walls and be righteous wall builders. Because of their decisions and leadership, I have received full healing from the Lord. I am excited about serving the Lord again!

I am thankful for you too. For every time you stood with and prayed for Pastor Tom and Lidia to keep on going, to keep doing what's right, to keep pursuing the heart of God and build those good walls, I thank you. And I thank God for healing me and setting me free. ***Our God is ABLE!***

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20

