

“Students with Special Needs Program”

During a visit to the University in the 2007-2008 time period Ede and I met with Br. Jack Curran, Vice President Development, and Br. Joe Loewenstein, President Emeritus of the University, and the subject was how to assist university students with special needs. A program was in place; however, in a survey conducted it was determined the program was not reaching the objectives of the University. The services being rendered in the existing program were on a volunteer basis by students, teachers and staff members of the University, essentially serving during their spare time; a noble effort, but short of the mark as it lacked capacity to adequately serve the needs of students. After carefully describing the need for a more robust program the solution presented to us by Br. Curran and Br. Joe was a) the need to hire staff, and b) provide funds for staffing a new program.... and the key question; would the Western USA Lieutenancy consider funding the program?

Upon our return home we presented the proposal to Lieutenant Powers and with approval of the Council of the Lieutenancy it was agreed to provide \$ 12,000.00 to fund the program for the 2008-2009 school year.



Br. “Joe” Loewenstein

Br. Jack Curran

In short order the new program was underway including employment of an occupational therapist to train students in a wide array of special equipment including Braille Embossing equipment, audio taping of textbooks, TV monitors with zoom magnification, Braille Transcriber, Braille typewriter and computer software “JAWS”. JAWS computer software that converts written text into audio sounds and students with visual impairment “hear” the text shown on the computer monitor....Amazing! Staff personnel translate English and Arabic text into Braille for students with visual impairment in addition to photocopying, scanning and reformatting text for electronic transmission by “JAWS” software equipped computers for them and enabling students to access voice enabled word processing.



Occupational Therapist Assisting Student



Student Using Special Equipment



Br. Jack Curran, V-P Development, with Mary Sabella (Student Councilors) and staff and students

In the school year 2009 fourteen students registered for the program; two blinds students, six students with low vision, one with hearing loss, two with mobility challenges and three students using wheelchairs. At the conclusion of the school year three students graduated with Baccalaureate Degrees. Typically, students with special needs major in Language (Arabic & English), Computer Information Systems, Education, Mathematics and Social Work. The University recognized the role computers play for learning especially for the visually disabled and arranged to have each student analyzed by a professional concerning their use of computers and subsequently tutored them to improve their computer skills. An example of the effectiveness

of the Students with Special Needs program is recognition exhibited by other groups involved with students needing educational assistance. Examples include Handicap International, a United Kingdom based non-profit agency which promotes services to students with disabilities and selected the Students with Special Needs Program at Bethlehem University as the model to be introduced to other learning institutions. The Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired visited the University for five days to observe facilities, programs, and equipment and interview professors and several students in the program.

The Israeli Occupation has had a devastating impact on the Palestinian economy resulting in high unemployment rates, and placement of graduates is a serious concern. The following examples illustrate that with proper attention students with special needs can assume a positive role as a contributing member of the community in which they live. Br. Jack Curran and Br. Joe cited several instances in which students in the program have been gainfully employed in a variety of positions; the result of a good project programmed to meet their needs. The recent gradual increase in tourism and pilgrimages has opened opportunities for students majoring in Hotel Management and Administration, Nursing, Accounting as well as at rehabilitation hospitals. The University plays a key role in activities in the Holy Land with many graduates positioned in important responsibilities in hospitals, humanitarian works, and other professional activities frequently involving employment with the thirty-three religious Orders based in the Holy Land.

Students With Special Needs program is an excellent illustration of people with good intentions and willingness to assist one another. It is a classic example of the University and students with special needs working in conjunction with the Western USA Lieutenancy as a prime example of a “Win-Win” situation. The program continues to prosper and ultimately the

University decided to include funding for the program under their annual budget, and the program no longer is dependent upon year-to-year financing by the Western USA Lieutenancy or other funding sources to fund the program.



Student, Occupational Therapist, Brother Joe

Ede and I, with the able assistance of the Western USA Lieutenancy, feel honored and humbled by the recognition exhibited by Bethlehem University by presenting us an award for providing assistance to the program.

