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M.S.N. Student Impacts Michigan Community With Health Equity

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Friendly neighbors, thriving school districts, low crime rates and location might be on most American's checklists when they're house hunting. But many residents in Kent County, Michigan, cannot afford to be this selective.

Improving the quality of life — physically and spiritually — of his Kent County neighbors is the goal of Cedarville University Master of Science in Nursing global public health nursing student Gary Osantowski.

Osantowski is a full-time recovery room nurse at Spectrum Health Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but he considers nursing his second career. Last fall, he found his calling as a part-time intern at Kent County Health Department (KCHD), where he advances health equity and social justice throughout the county. Now, Osantowski is not only serving hospital patients, but underrepresented minorities in his community.

According to the KCHD, health equity means all people have equal opportunities to thrive in their health, regardless of race, class, gender or other social conditions. Osantowski is working with the KCHD to foster that kind of environment in the Kent community, where a large number of underprivileged minority groups lack health equity.

While working at the hospital, Osantowski discovered the internship during a Health Equity Social Justice Dialogue Workshop held at the KCHD. It was through this experience that he felt God leading him in a new direction.

"I went to that workshop, and it really opened my eyes to the issue of racism. It blew me away and really opened my heart to the point of feeling and seeing issues from a different perspective," said Osantowski.

After applying for and receiving the internship position, Osantowski began pursuing his new calling with vigor, while continuing his work at the hospital.

At the KCHD, Osantowski researches the racial disparities in the community, such as affordable housing, transportation and job security and measures the effectiveness of the department's efforts to eliminate inequality.

In addition to this internship, he and his wife, Lynn, participated in a church plant inside a primarily Hispanic inner-city neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This allows the couple to "meet people right where they're at" and more effectively reach the underrepresented Hispanic population with the

gospel. Gary Osantowski has served in a soccer ministry and Lynn Osantowski tutors children learning to read.

However, their mission reaches even farther. After helping organize the church plant, the Osantowskis decided to move in to the neighborhood where the church building will soon be located. “We really felt that we couldn’t be a part of the community without living in the neighborhood,” he said. “We want to live, work and worship in the same community.”

According to Gary, the Grand Rapids community “has the highest population density of children in Kent County, but it also has the highest poverty rate.” By living in this community, working to create health equity in Kent County and worshipping alongside his neighbors, Gary hopes to share a complete picture of the gospel in his life.

“I came out of a very broken upbringing, so I understand what it is to be broken and what it is to find wholeness in Christ. I really believe that part of the answer for these people’s individual journeys is a relationship with God that will really restore them,” said Gary.

Gary’s experience in Cedarville’s Master of Science in Nursing global public health program has further encouraged him to promote social justice and the gospel. “My education through Cedarville has been very practical because it’s really helping my wife and me in the mission that we’re attending to,” he said. “The last couple years have been the most exciting years our lives.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.