



Mentoring Marcus

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Fifth grader Marcus Richardson had the congregation in tears as he shared how his tutor, Tom Michalk, and **St. Paul's UMC Houston** have invested in the young at MacGregor Elementary School.

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"I really did not think I was contributing much to Roman and Marcus initially, but Bob Mahlstead encouraged me to keep showing up at MacGregor Elementary School," says †Tom Michalk, who has been a part of **St. Paul's UMC Houston's** Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS) program for several years. "Now, our hour together is the highlight of my week.† I have no training to do this, or special skills.† I guess I'm basically a pretty selfish guy.† Most of what I do is for my family (the extended me) and for myself."



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Tom was paired with Roman and Marcus about four years ago and has enjoyed seeing both of them grow, and seeing their friendship develop.† Roman was unable to attend the service with Marcus that Sunday morning.† Their weekly hour together consists of reviewing assignments, working math problems or flashcards, reading and comprehension, and then a nice visit before Roman and Marcus return to class, and Tom to work. Says Tom, "It would be great if we could double the number of VIPS. †It's the only thing I know to do that guarantees a positive effect. There's no possible downside to the one hour a week commitment."

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Marcus and Tom shared about their experience during worship at **St. Paul's** in September and captivated the audience. "I did not know what Marcus was going to say, and he brought the house down," shares Tom. "It was the first time I had really known how much his grades had improved, and how much our time together means to him.† Which was cool, because it's the best hour of my week—no contest."

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MacGregor Elementary is just a few blocks east of **St. Paul's UMC** and the Texas Annual Conference offices. The church has been mentoring there for more than 15 years. "Our focus is generally on helping the student in math or reading," says **St. Paul's** program coordinator Bob Mahlstead†, noting that approximately 75% of the students are classified "at risk," †with many coming from single-parent households.



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 Adds Bob, “We usually have a dozen or more St. Paul’s members volunteering here annually, working with 15-18 kids. Many volunteers come from our Men’s Bible study group which has probably produced the most consistent, tenured mentors over the years.” Bob has worked with the program approximately 12 years and currently mentors two fifth graders.

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 “They are excited to see me when I show up at their classroom every Wednesday morning,” he shares. “Often the teacher

gives us the identical or similar work that they are doing during that class period, but my student can ask questions or I can point out mistakes in a way that is constructive to the learning process.† I see each of my boys independently on separate days so they get individualized attention, which the†teacher can not always give them in a class of 22 or so other students.”†

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 Tom encourages others to Invest in the Young in this easy manner. “A recent study concluded that it only takes one person, outside the home, to make a difference in the life of a child,” he says, adding, “I know there was one such influence in mine.” There are no qualifications necessary for this job other than willingness. “If you can read, and spare an hour a week, you can encourage a struggling student. I can now say I leave every session with gratitude in my heart for being able to do this, and to hear Marcus echo that sentiment during our share time at church made it all the sweeter.”



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