

Praying with Our Feet:

East St. Louis Urban Immersion Retreat



East Side Heart & Home Family Center

705 Summit Avenue

East St. Louis, IL 62201

Phone: (618) 875-7295

Email: familycentereaststlouis@gmail.com

Website: www.familycenterestl.org

Overview:

This one-day urban immersion retreat is structured so that students can create connections with East St. Louis: its history, its present reality, and its people. Participants will challenge the dominant narrative of East St. Louis by meeting and spending time with residents, wrestle with the contemporary challenges in East St. Louis by first contextualizing its history, and discern their personal and collective responsibility to take action and to “pray with their feet.” The retreat will be modified slightly to meet the needs of each group.

The retreat happens in three, interconnected parts, as follows:

Part 1: Undoing the Misinformation—What do you *know* about East St. Louis and how do you *know* it?

To begin dismantling the dominant narrative of East St. Louis and to confront their own preconceived ideas, participants will have the opportunity to experience the city for themselves. We will spend time driving and/or walking around East St. Louis and meeting with residents who will share their stories with us. Together, we will sit in and sort through the discomfort of acknowledging and challenging our own prejudices and unfounded fears.

Part 2: Wrestling with the Reality—What is the present-day reality in East St. Louis and how did it come to be?

After learning about the history of East St. Louis, participants will spend time reflecting on the interconnectedness of interpersonal and institutional oppression, both in the past and happening today. We will explore the question, “Why are people poor?,” emphasizing the systemic ways that poverty is created and maintained.

Part 3: Call to Action—So...now what?

Having critically engaged with East St. Louis’ history and present reality, the participants will be challenged to depart from the Family Center with open eyes, open hearts, and a commitment to “pray with their feet.” The commissioning invitation is to transform the world by first being transformed by the world.

Goals:

- 1) To begin the process of dismantling the dominant narrative of East St. Louis
- 2) To engage in experiences, reflections, and discussions that will encourage critical thinking about active and passive participation in the marginalization of others
- 3) To recognize the historical and contemporary manifestations of oppression and racism interpersonally and institutionally
- 4) To be prayerful in our discernment of personal and collective action

Readings:

- 1) 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26
- 2) Postscript of Dorothy Day’s Autobiography *The Long Loneliness*
- 3) Thomas Merton’s 1966 *Letter to a Young Activist*

Activities:

- 1) Screening of *Against All the Odds*
- 2) Drive around East St. Louis
- 3) Brief walk around the neighborhood
- 4) Facilitated group discussion and commissioning activity