

Walworth County youth do mission work at home

By Sam Lucero - Catholic Herald - 07/08/2004

Like many parish youth ministry programs in the archdiocese, St. Francis de Sales in Lake Geneva and St. Benedict in Fontana have sponsored summer work camp trips around the country for young parish members. They're an opportunity to build a sense of Christian community among the youth and be of service to the poor and elderly by making home repairs.

The two Walworth County parishes decided to stay home this summer and offer a work camp experience to youth in their own back yard.

"Our parishes have made a commitment to alternating a long distance mission trip with a more local mission trip on a yearly basis," said Michelle Mandry, youth minister at St. Francis de Sales Parish. "Two years ago we served with Catholic Heart in Milwaukee. ... Last year we went to Alabama" for a work camp experience, she added. The popular summer parish activity teaches teens "what ministry is supposed to be, an incredible blessing for themselves."

Beginning June 27, 28 teenagers, five college-age youth leaders and eight adults set up camp at East Troy's Camp Timber-lee, a Christian camping center. Each day the group gathered for morning prayer before piling into minivans and driving to five separate work sites.

The work sites were located in the towns of Delavan (Delmar subdivision), Lyons and Genoa City, all within 30 minutes of East Troy. According to Mandry, she and St. Benedict youth minister Ed Konieczka had been planning the work camp since last September.

Adults from both parishes worked to locate residents in need and to assess the work needed on their homes. Mandry said Doug Schuldt, a youth minister at St. Francis de Sales,

and Michael Juranek of St. Benedict Parish visited the work sites to see whether the work needed was suitable for the youth. Juranek's wife, Julie, is a senior citizen benefits specialist for Walworth County and was able to help the parishes identify elderly residents in need of home repairs.

Schuldt, a building contractor, said he has participated in four mission trips. This year he served as a trouble shooter, traveling from work site to work site each day, evaluating the projects and answering questions and making sure everybody had the proper tools they needed. "I also give them a cheerleading section," he said.

In addition to the daily work schedule, the young workers were treated to special evening programs organized by young adult leaders, parish young adults now in college who took part in work camps while in high school. "One of the young adults is part of the worship team at St. Paul's (Newman Center) at UW-Madison," said Mandry. The worship team led the music at Masses on June 27 and July 1. In addition, several of the UW students were able to assist in evening prayer services.

Another added ingredient to this summer's work camp was a videotaped presentation by Bishop Richard J. Sklba. The bishop taped a daily meditation that focused on service to others. "He spent quite some time talking with us and allowing us to tape his reflections on themes and the focus of this week-long mission experience," said Mandry.

"This has truly proven to be a wonderful way to include the gifts of many of those in our area," the youth minister added. "We believe that the gifts are shared will bear fruit in the lives of those who serve and who are served."

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CONCENTRATION

Matt Ziobro, 16, from St. Francis de Sales Parish in Lake Geneva, helped fortify the dilapidated porch with the help of other teens and their adult leader, Michael Juranek of St. Benedict Parish in Fontana.



PRAYER AND LUNCH

Jenna Vanderstappen, 18, center, reads a spiritual reflection during a lunch break with other teens at a work site in Lyons June 29. Pictured from left are Colin Devlin, 17, Cora Peters, 16, Laura Juranek, 18, and Eric Boldger, 15.