

HILLSDALE DAILY NEWS

Group serves needy in county

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HILLSDALE – Concerned about mission work in their community, a church youth group has set out to do good in “their own backyard” this week in Hillsdale County.

The Confirmation Group of about 45 at St. Anthony’s Catholic Church in Hillsdale has nine teams working at more than a dozen sites this week as part of a local effort to help those in need, those who are elderly or disabled.

In the past, the group has traveled to different places around the country doing mission work through programs like the Catholic Heart Work Camp. Then, organizers realized needs were prevalent in their own community.

Project Manager Heather Tritchka-Stuchell said about 30 adults are involved as well. Not all of the adults are working every day this week; some are coming in for one or two days.

Linda Snyder is the food coordinator with some groups such as the Knights of Columbus providing special dinners.

The kids are camping this year at Hillsdale High School and walking over to the church in the morning for breakfast. After attending mass at 7:30 a.m., they eat breakfast and head out on their jobs at about 9 a.m.

Tritchka-Stuchell said mission work is important because love is an action.

“By finding out who in our community needs help and then working for them, as well as visiting with them, demonstrates love to our neighbors,” she said.

On Monday, one group spent a majority of the day scraping layers of paint off the railroad viaduct on West Bacon Street. They ended with primer, and on Tuesday, some color was going up in the form of a mural on the cement

supports underneath the bridge. Sami Lehman, the teen coordinator for this job, is also working with Josie Miller, Shannon Petersen, and Emma Hammel.

Stopping by to talk with the teens Tuesday morning, artist Tritchka-Stuchell said the left side (going down the hill) will be a skyline of Hillsdale, while the right side will be a skyline of Hillsdale College. Sami said they are grateful to have her experience with how murals are done professionally and they are hoping people will be as respectful of the art project as they have been with the others done in previous years in downtown Hillsdale.

All the teens working on this project will be heading off to college in the fall and said they are happy to be part of something that can beautify their town. They've all had art classes and were part of the youth art display at Studio 42 several months ago.

Shannon said the project is especially meaningful to him because he looked into doing it as a National Honor Society project during his senior year. But because of insurance and safety reasons, the idea wasn't used. Then, when he was at a Rotary meeting for being student of the month, he spoke with Tritchka-Stuchell and Emma's father, Jake, about it. They were able to get permission through M-Dot through a process of meetings and Shannon was on that team.

"Residents keep coming by to say they appreciate what we are doing," Shannon said.

Sami added that "it's really awesome to see the impact and the whole town coming together."

Also appreciative of Jonesville Lumber, the group said the business sold materials at cost and recommended what paint to use.

The group's first effort in Hillsdale County came in 2010. Project ideas every other year come from their own church family center, the Senior Center and other places that know of those needing help. A letter is also sent to area churches to gain ideas.

Project needs such as rakes, paint, brushes and more are collected and made available in the church's social hall for the workers to take as they head out to their destinations. Monies come from fundraising projects such as spaghetti

dinners, donations and grants from the Hillsdale County Community Foundation.

Amy Miller, coordinator of the Youth Ministry Program, noted other projects include everything from building a fence, to yard work, to sorting, organizing and painting.

“Anything that needs to be done, we will do – as long as it’s safe for the kids,” Miller said. “We work during the day and have fun activities at night. They are an amazing group of kids.”