

## **Mission Reflection**

### **Opening Meeting (2007-2008)**

*When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into the U.S. Gulf Coast, they set a new precedent for devastation and destruction. In their wake they left behind untold human misery and suffering that continues still in the communities all along the Gulf Coast.*

–Ken Meinert, Senior V.P. Operation Home Delivery, Habitat for Humanity

As we mark the two-year anniversary since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, let us take a moment to appreciate how fortunate we are for the comfortable lives that we lead...

[Students from the service trip took the photos we are viewing in March of this year...]

There are so many areas that have yet to be touched. Almost all of the houses that withstood the floodwaters are empty; the streets are eerily quiet. Some of these areas are next to neighborhoods that have begun to rebuild. It seemed to me that our efforts were only a “drop in the bucket.” I had asked myself (more than once), “Are we *really* making a difference?”

It is almost overwhelming to come face-to-face with so much devastation. I realized that even a drop into a bucket does make a difference. A drop creates ripples, and the ripples move outward from that drop. The people working in the house across the street might inspire you to come home. Your return might inspire your next-door-neighbor to return home. Your neighbor’s return might inspire your neighbor’s neighbor, and so the ripples grow.

*If we did all the things that we were capable of, we would astound ourselves.*

–Thomas Edison

Last year during the spring break of 2007, a group of ten Holy Family University students pushed the boundaries of what they believed they were personally capable of when they took part in the first annual Habitat for Humanity Mission trip [to New Orleans, LA].

As members of the community of Holy Family University we have been blessed with the opportunity to truly live our Mission and to deepen global awareness. Habitat for Humanity seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness and to make decent shelter a matter of “conscience and action.”

To have compassion for other is a start; however, to *act* on it is the goal. The students involved with the trip understood that simply *having* compassion for others does not necessarily change things; however, *practicing* compassion by translating it into active involvement could make a difference in the lives of those residing along the Gulf Coast. These ten students chose to *live* compassionately and to spend their break in service to others.

*When we give dignity to others, when we give others a hand up, we honor their worth as humans on the planet that we all inhabit and we truly see the face of God in the services that we perform for others.*

–Michael Bruen

What is the reason behind a Mission trip? Why travel to a far away place when you may not *really* be helping? The money itself *could* be more beneficial to those in need. In Fr. Mac's words, our service puts "flesh on the Mission statement." The Mission becomes more than an arrangement of words on a page or even words written in our hearts. It becomes a living, breathing, vibrant being; it comes to life.

The Core Values of FAMILY, RESPECT, INTEGRITY, SERVICE, RESPONSIBILITY, LEARNING, and VISION are embodied by the service trip to New Orleans...

### FAMILY

*Rebuilding the human spirit and discovering the oneness of the human family...*

What makes us different from one another compared with what makes us similar to one another? When working side-by-side with the homeowners and interacting with groups from other schools, the students appreciated that they may have been different in some respects from those around them, but recognized that all were united by common values. Many of the students came to know homeowners on a personal level; those affected by Katrina became more than faces in photographs or statistics in a news report. Through this personal contact, much of what the students thought that they knew or were expecting to happen while in New Orleans was abandoned. What they were left with was an understanding of the human experience.

### RESPECT

*The dignity of the human person is acknowledged...*

I respect those who have struggled through the hardships they have endured. Respect is developing an appreciation for differences in SES, culture, religion, and ethnicity. Based on this respect for and appreciation of individual differences, we become aware of *how* we express our feelings about the environment, the people in it, and their circumstances. I believe that a Mission trip affects *all* aspects of a person; if you allow yourself to become immersed in the experience, you cannot help but to be affected socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

### INTEGRITY

*Concern for moral values and justice...*

If we believe that we have been uniquely created in the image and likeness of God, then the dignity of the human person is deserved because we all have an inherent God-given value. We are *all* people of worth.

### SERVICE and RESPONSIBILITY

*Teneor Votis*

The motto of Holy Family is *Teneor Votis* ("I am bound by my responsibilities"). The Mission is brought to life by members of our community who are aware of their responsibilities to themselves, our school and local community, as well as to the global community and God. Service means serving *human* needs...not only our own.

## LEARNING

*Instilling a desire for lifelong learning...*

We can learn from one another through interaction among members of our community if we respect the value that each of us inherently possesses. Through the preparation for this trip, the students learned that they all had something of value to contribute *and* that they could learn from the other students in the group. This trip provided an opportunity in learning to handle seeing extreme issues (i.e., poverty, hardship, devastation) and turning a potentially uncomfortable situation into an opportunity for personal growth and change.

## VISION

*Build a vision for the future...*

To provide the opportunity for a better future we need to lead by example and teach students the types of behaviors we hope to instill in them, through our word *and* deed.

The following excerpt was taken from a poem (*N.O. Hope*) written by [student] Sara Beck about her experiences during the service trip:

Together we built a house and filled it with hope,  
With the promise of helping other citizens cope.  
No one person should have to rebuild after disaster,  
So with my help, I could make transition faster.

- Sara Beck (class of 2008)

On behalf of the ten students involved with the trip, Ashley Sbarbaro, and myself, we would like to offer our sincere gratitude to S. Francesca, Moya Kaporch, Senior Administration, and members of the University Strategic Planning Advisory Committee for affording us the opportunity to represent Holy Family in the effort to rebuild New Orleans.

I would also like to thank those involved in the application and preparation process for the 2007 trip: Mike McNulty, Rita Casey, Linda DiGennero, Diana Piperata, Fr. Mac, Kelly Kendrick, and Lisa Corbin-Kalinowski.

-Megan L. Meyer