

The Office of Spiritual Life at Carroll University recently led an Alternate Spring Break (ASB) trip to the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. We took two chaplains and 12 students to Montreat Camp and Conference Center to serve with their staff repairing and preparing their popular hiking trails before summer season begins. Our students fortified a river embankment, cleared trails of weeds and dead trees, constructed a camping outhouse, and built rich community throughout the week. Additionally, they served with a local congregation providing weekly meals to the unhoused community in Asheville.

Some highlights from the trip, according to many of our students, included visiting the historic Biltmore Estates near Asheville and exploring the amazing architecture and beautiful grounds. Everyone loved hiking at Montreat and being surrounded by greenery again, amidst the long Wisconsin winter. Jason, the Montreat grounds keeper, guided us with great patience and grace throughout the week, both to beautiful locations on the grounds, and also in new and interesting work that many of us had not done before. Students especially loved sawing apart a fallen bridge for removal, learning how to use Pulaski tools to remove roots and old logs, and collecting the perfect rocks to build up retaining walls along embankments. Finally, spending time together, intentionally, outside of the classroom was meaningful for many students. It was beautiful to witness the new connections and deepened friendships that grew throughout the week.

While very fun, we also learned a lot with and from each other during our ASB. Our devotions for the week focused on how our work, service, and worship can all be the same thing. We talked a lot about what it means for work to be a form of worship, and how the way we engage with work changes when we are doing that work for God rather than ourselves. We learned that in community, much is possible that we cannot do on our own, like carry mounds of wood and supplies up a mountain to build an outhouse, or saw apart a bridge when you've grown fatigued, or work through a challenging experience you don't know how to process. In community, we supported each other through each obstacle that likely would have halted the work of an individual. The last, and perhaps most important lesson we learned throughout the week is that barbecue is a noun (not a verb) and very delicious!

Of course, we made sure to bring Pio Pete everywhere we went!

“Looking back on the Alternative Spring Break trip I took to Montreat, NC with the Office of Spiritual Life at Carroll, I have taken a lot home with me. During this week, I was able to build a community of meaningful and supportive relationships with those who I was serving with. We were able to serve during the week and I learned more about what it means to serve and how to do so with an open heart and mind. I also have taken home how we can see God in our service work, as well as the work we do everyday. I cannot express how grateful I am to have had this experience to grow in so many ways!” -MB ‘25

“The trip was full of love and purpose. I really made a connection with everyone who went, and I felt loved by everyone for who I was. It was a very fulfilling and inspiring experience.” – Alison ‘23

We are grateful for the support of the Presbytery of Milwaukee in making this service opportunity possible for our students.

