

This past month has been jammed packed with new experiences of others, myself, and most importantly God. Well my favorite apostolate has changed from the Everest school to my high school youth group at Immaculate Conception in Highland Park. I have been most impacted by the kids there. This youth group is made up of mostly girls, and I help to lead it on Sundays. Now these kids live in an area where Christianity let alone Catholicism isn't as common. The community they live in is made up of mostly Jewish people. Most of these kids go to public school and really haven't had many deep experiences of God because of their lack of opportunities.

So for the weekend of October 7th through 10th, we actually took 8 of the kids on a mission trip to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Now if you remember watching the news, there was some really bad flooding in Baton Rouge. Two months later, there are still houses that have not been gutted! That was our mission when we went down to Baton Rouge. It was the highlight of my mission year up to this point. Nothing has compared to the experiences I had on that mission trip. Altogether we gutted and cleaned 4 houses in a matter of 2 days, we helped the missionaries of charity in New Orleans with feeding the homeless (I actually sanded for 2-3 hours here), we visited a nursing home that had a lot of residents that don't get visitors, and we spent over 32 hours of bonding time in the car. To make the trip even better, we actually teamed up with a boys group from D.C. and I got to see Michael Perenich and Benedikt Esterl, two of the missionary boys stationed in Washington, D.C. It was really nice seeing them because I didn't get the chance to really talk to Benedikt in the coed week of the summer program, and I got a lot of time to really get to know him personally on this trip. I also enjoyed the fact that I got to work with them which was something that I never expected since I went to Chicago and they went to D.C. Another thing that was really nice was being back in the south of the US. It made me really miss home and the southern hospitality that you receive from almost everyone you meet. I mean we went down there to serve, but we received so much more than we gave spiritually and even physically! The amount of gratitude we received was quite profound, and made each and every person on the mission trip a little more grateful for what we had. The experience I had that was most impacting for me was at the nursing home in New Orleans. There I met a woman named Shirley. She was hard of hearing so we actually had to yell for her to hear us, but my experience with her is something I will never forget. I was wearing a mission cross around my neck, and when it was my turn to introduce myself, Miss Shirley's eyes were locked on my cross. Soon she started fidgeting with something around her own neck and finally produced a small golden cross. She told us that she was Catholic. It was really neat to find out very quickly in our conversation that we already had one thing in common. Well Miss Shirley might have had a cross, but there was something else, some other item that I had and she didn't that she wished she did have. I had a scapular. Now, this was a very special item for me because I got it at the end of my summer training program for the mission. It was my deepest connection to Mary that I had and every girl missionary in the US this year has one, but at that moment, I felt a tug on my heart. I

tried to push the feelings down because I knew exactly what God was trying to tell me at that moment. I really didn't want to give up my scapular! When we were leaving her room, I was the last one there. I slowly pulled off my scapular as I walked up to the side of Miss Shirley's bed, and I knelt down beside her. I looked her right in the eye and told her with a little pang in my heart because I was about to give up something that I cherished, "Miss Shirley, this is my scapular. I would like you to have it." Immediately her eyes lit up and she thanked me more than 5 times as I put the necklace around her. As I got to the door of her room, I looked back one last time, and Miss Shirley was fast asleep clutching her new found scapular. I felt an overwhelming rush of peace. At that moment I knew that everything was going to be okay. She needed it so much more than I did, and Mary was always going to be with me whether or not I had that scapular. It's moments like these that are the reason I do mission work. This is what makes everything worth it. These moments when you feel like you have made a difference and when you feel so connected with God.

My mission year has been very very fruitful for me and that weekend alone bore much fruit. I am so much more appreciative of everything that I have, and I really felt united to Christ suffering when I looked into the eyes of those afflicted by the floods. I am so blessed to have been able to go on this mission and for the experiences I have had thus far on the mission. I can't wait to see what else God has in store for me!