

How they spent their summer vacation: Forty-one youths attend inaugural Baltimore WorkCamp

By Catholic Review Staff

While enhancing the safety, warmth and weatherproofing of Sparks-area homes, the 41 youths who participated in the inaugural Baltimore WorkCamp strengthened something of even greater importance.

“WorkCamp really helped me grow in my relationship with God,” said Anna Sepanic, a parishioner of St. Timothy in Walkersville and junior at Walkersville High School, of the experience coordinated by the St. Anthony Shrine Parish in Emmitsburg.

For one week starting June 21, high-school-aged youths from Frederick County parishes - including St. Timothy, St. Anthony Shrine, St. Joseph in Emmitsburg and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont - stayed at the Monsignor O’Dwyer Retreat House in Sparks.

After an initial training day, the youths split into crews and headed to seven work sites every day to paint decks, fix stairs, replace windows, patch drywall and, in one instance, replace a toilet.

“The work was fantastic, but it wasn’t the ultimate reason we organized this experience,” said Mike Miller, a youth ministry volunteer at St. Anthony Shrine, in an email. “We really wanted the youth to grow in their Catholic faith throughout the week.”

To that end, the campers attended daily Mass, celebrated by Father Martin Nocchi, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption in Govans, and shared in devotions during trips to and from the worksites and during lunch. Every day, Will Lyons, director of Baltimore WorkCamp, reminded the youths that they were there for their spiritual growth.

In the evenings, campers enjoyed programming with musician Clint Felts and primary speaker Jimmy Morgan, as well as other speakers, including Barbara Anderson, pastoral life director at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg, and Marissa Alspaugh, director of youth ministry at St. Timothy.

“Jimmy and Clint were fantastic,” Miller said, “and through their songs, witness and the activities they directed, our youths understood that they were ‘Building the Kingdom of God’ - our theme for the week.”

Many found a spiritual angle to the physical work they performed, as well.

“I loved seeing the happiness of our residents and the fact that they were so willing to help us and be a part of our prayer discussions,” Sepanic said.

John-Paul Legare, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Emmitsburg and freshman at Frederick Community College, said he attended WorkCamp “to be Christ to another person.”

“What I didn’t realize at first is that others showed Christ to me,” Legare added. “The talks that were given, witness of my fellow crew members and the joy of the residents all helped me listen to what God has to say to me. ... After a week at WorkCamp, it is pretty hard not to hear God’s voice.”

Hannah Keeney, a parishioner of Thurmont’s Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont and senior at Catoclin High School, said she learned “how to work with

others as a community, and it was a lot of fun, too.”

“I learned at WorkCamp to do the smallest things with great love, even at home,” she added, “and that God has forgiven us for our mistakes.”

Cecelia Bosche, a parishioner of St. Anthony Shrine and a junior at Catoctin High School, said the week helped her “better understand what it means to be Catholic.”

Next year’s Baltimore WorkCamp is in the planning stages. Miller said he hopes parishes from across the archdiocese will participate.

For more information, visit BaltimoreWorkCamp.com or email BaltimoreWorkCamp@gmail.com

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