

# No problem, just opportunity for Spalding group after Haiti mission canceled

*Editor's note: This reflection was written following the cancellation of Archbishop Spalding High School's July 8-15 mission to Haiti due to unrest in the poverty-stricken nation.*

The power of a person's will to do good and to share love with others is something that should never be underestimated.

After learning that our school trip to Haiti was cancelled and that I didn't need to be at the airport at quarter to 4 the next morning, I felt disappointed, and then proceeded to go right back to bed. That was it.

It wasn't until the morning, upon realizing that, as Pat Brady (chairman of Archbishop Spalding's religion department and mission trip leader) put it, he had received "about 15,000 emails" from our students pleading with him to find a way for us to spend this week helping others, that I learned we wouldn't let this week go to waste. Driven by what I can only describe as our students' selfless desire to serve, we set out to spend our week in the nearby community doing just that.

Our first day, we prepared dinner for the Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, the only one of its kind in Howard County. While I was watching these kids preparing a meal for 50 people, seeing them interacting joyfully, listening to their laughter, I was reminded of a common sentiment from prayer before meals: "Thank you, Lord for this food, and bless the hands that prepared it. In Jesus' name, Amen." Watching them, I couldn't help but think I was seeing that blessing in action.

The next day, we visited the Bible Museum in Washington D.C. I was humbled to see the way these young adults absorbed what they saw. It seems with every passing day that our country becomes more divided and pulled further away from Jesus' word, and yet here were nine teenagers captivated by the history of the Bible and the

powerful message of the Gospel.

On Wednesday, we helped deliver furniture for Hope for All, a social services organization in Glen Burnie. We also helped organize and sort canned goods at the Anne Arundel County food bank. I think it's fair to say that these activities can be considered quite monotonous, but someone must have forgotten to tell this group. Seeing them truly enjoying what they were doing and enjoying each other's company is such a good reminder for all of us. It was once again humbling to see their ability to focus on the good.

Our last day of service was spent at Villa Maria School in Timonium, and we interacted with kids who have experienced severe trauma during childhood, leading to behavioral and social concerns. Ministry of Presence in action can be a beautiful thing. Personally, I often struggle serving others when there isn't concrete evidence of the impact I'm making, yet here were our students freely showing love to complete strangers, for no other reason than an inherent desire to spread love and a mature understanding of the power that choosing to do good can have on others. Seeing this was like having someone pulling on my heartstrings, convincing me that yes, this is the right direction, this is the pathway to love and to God.

We rounded off the week with a wonderful day at Hershey Park in Pennsylvania. It seemed fitting to end our trip in Deacon Rod Mortel's hometown of Hershey, since it was through him and his foundation, High Hopes for Haiti, that we were originally brought together for our plan to serve in Haiti.

After each service outing, we came together for dinner. There was a genuine sense of family with each homemade meal. As the plates were scraped clean, it was only a matter of time before the singing began. Song after song, whether it be "We Are One Body" or "Fish With Me," would gradually lead us towards deeply moving conversations. Why are we so fortunate? Why do bad things happen to good people? What are we called to do? What will we do now? The honesty, openness and vulnerability with which these students approached these conversations brought out the very best in me.

In spite of all of this, the truth is I'm still disappointed we didn't get to spend this week in Haiti. This was not the week I was expecting. It hurts me to admit that if it

were up to me, I would have spent this week toiling in disappointment and self-pity, while commending myself for *almost* doing something good. It was unequivocally the will and love of our students that made this week a reality, and for that I am grateful. I have seen firsthand the unbelievable power of love, and that those who persist in choosing love can never be underestimated.

I am a better person because of it.

*Also see:*

Prayers, then applause from mission to Haiti during return to Baltimore