

ServeFest finds a natural home at Nativity

By Matt Palmer

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Like so many parishioners at Church of the Nativity in Timonium, Ellen Franklin has a passion to serve local and international communities.

A member of the parish's Haiti mission team, Franklin had always wanted to take part in the annual ServeFest, a daylong event that brings people of different faiths together to beautify and restore Maryland sites.

Franklin and fellow Haiti team members cleaned windows throughout St. Vincent's Villa, which is a Catholic Charities outreach that, according to its website, provides comprehensive therapeutic services to children whose behavioral and emotional needs have not responded to interventions and services provided at home or in the community.

"It's an amazing place that does amazing work," Franklin said of St. Vincent's. "To make it as nice and as homey as it can be for these kids is really important for us to do."

Nativity served as the Baltimore County central location and hosted a rally that gathered Servefest contributors. Hundreds of people of all faiths celebrated, sang and prayed together.

"That was a very powerful moment, very special," said Brian Crook, Nativity's missions director. "I think that's what God has called us to do. That's what Jesus prayed - that the church would be one. It's very powerful when you get to witness that."

Crook said, together, many denominations could accomplish anything.

“There’s a different spirit and power present when churches come together,” he said. “I hope that we get a glimpse of the fact that God is so much bigger than one little church in Timonium and that he’s at work in the world.”

Just across the street from Nativity, younger Nativity parishioners were working to plant flowers, add mulch and clean up Ridgely Middle School.

“I want to help out the Baltimore County community,” said Caitlin O’Connor, who has become active at Nativity during the last year and participates in a small group with high school junior girls. “I am in the grace of God and I’m hoping he’s leading me in the direction to help out today.”

Fellow small group member Lauren Becker added: “I love doing things that help out God’s people.”

Crook said Nativity parishioners are eager to engage in service projects and in ministries.

“Hopefully it’s part of our culture, part of our DNA,” Crook said. “We talk about serving here on the weekend, serving at Nativity and getting up out of the pews. You can’t grow and you can’t experience God, you can’t enter fully into that relationship with God just by coming to church on Sunday. We’re always encouraging folks to get up out of the pews and get involved in missions, ministries and small groups.”

Franklin will travel to Haiti with Crook this summer to live out that challenge and help the people of Haiti.

“I’ve been blessed,” Franklin said. “I want to give back. I love (serving) with other people and feeling that connection. It’s not a chore. It’s fun.”

For a video spotlight on Nativity’s high school small group, visit tinyurl.com/nativityserve.

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