

Youths' participation in national conference includes service projects

INDIANAPOLIS - Kevin Souza put freshly baked chocolate chip cookies into small baggies, knowing they would be part of a delivery to women in prison.

"We saw that they needed help, and they put us to work," said Souza, 16, a member of St. Christopher Parish in Galt, Calif. "We're doing this for a women's prison."

Rachel Schmidt used scissors to trim an image of Mary and the baby Jesus as part of an effort to send Christmas cards to American soldiers serving overseas during the holidays.

"The soldiers are doing so much for us," said Schmidt, 17, a member of St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale, Iowa. "Who knows what kind of Christmas they'll have under fire while I'm at home with my family, unwrapping presents. They deserve something good from us."

The efforts and attitudes of the two teens reflected the strong commitment to service that was a key part of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 17-19.

During the conference, Catholic teenagers baked more than 5,000 cookies for distribution to people in prison. They also filled more than 5,000 backpacks with school supplies and personal hygiene items for children in Indiana's foster care system.

The youths sewed more than 200 dresses for children in Haiti. They also donated enough nonperishable food items to fill 15 pallets for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry and Gleaners Food Bank, two organizations that help the poor in central Indiana.

Kendall Howell, Megan Gafvert and Elyse Quast were among the many Catholic

teenagers who donated money to support a project that provides water purification systems and wells in Haiti.

“Drinking water is an important staple for every community,” said Quast, 17, a member of St. Apollinaris Parish in Napa, Calif., along with Megan and Kendall. “The whole point of this conference is to give back while we learn about our faith.”

“I’ve just been offered so much in my life, and sometimes I take things for granted,” said Howell, 15. “Small things can make so much of a difference. It’s our job as this generation of Catholics to do what we can to help others.”