

STORY BY MIKE LATONA

# on the MOVE

## Missions of service, missions of friendship

World Mission Sunday and World Youth Sunday, to be celebrated on back-to-back weekends (Oct. 21-22 and 28-29), will have special meaning this year for young volunteers from three Monroe County parishes.

Youth groups at St. Helen's in Gates, Holy Name of Jesus in Greece, and Holy Cross in Charlotte went on memorable mission trips to faraway places over the summer, helping the rural poor in the southern United States. Teens from St. Helen's spent July 23-30 in central Alabama, and Holy Name and Holy Cross joined forces for an Aug. 13-19 trip to the coal-mining hills of Kentucky.

In both instances, youths and adult chaperons paid their own way for the opportunity to repair homes and meet residents. Not only did the teens improve their painting and carpentry skills, they said, but they also learned about environments and lifestyles much different from their own.

### A real eye-opener

Five teens from St. Helen's, accompanied by their youth minister Gina Jennison, went on the Alabama mission. Their service project was arranged through some Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph who operate a mission in Pine Apple, Ala.

"We have a really strong service group and we were ready to go beyond our own community," Jennison remarked.



Photo courtesy of St. Helen's Parish  
St. Helen's youth minister Gina Jennison paints the trim on a house in Alabama. Jennison took five teens from her youth group on the mission.



Photo courtesy of Holy Cross Parish

Teens from Holy Cross and Holy Name of Jesus parishes work on a house in Neon, Ky.

The group repaired homes in the Pine Apple area, and also spent time with children in a learning center and with elderly people in adult day care.

St. Helen's performed much of its service among African-Americans in the distinctly segregated town. Stephanie Muscato, 16, and Elizabeth Farrell, 14, noted that a set of railroad tracks separated the white section from an obviously poorer black section.

"I never thought anything could be like that. I was wondering, isn't that outlawed? Why do they allow a society like that?" Elizabeth remarked.

"I'd thought that stuff was over," Jennison added.

Tina Farrell said that the animals in the difference between rural Alabama and suburban Rochester. "I saw chickens, dogs and cats running around," she said.

Johnston noted that many homes were run-down and lacking in modern conveniences. "I don't really take a lot for granted," she said. "I don't really take a lot for granted anymore," said Debbie, 16.

She said that the residents were very helpful and that the service was appreciated. "I'm not that nice," she remarked.

McGee, 15, felt the trip was a faith-filled experience for both the workers and residents. He said that "other people are exposed to Jesus through the service you do," while at the same time, the St. Helen's group grew closer to each other and to God.

### 'Blessed by God'

The Holy Name/Holy Cross mission trip was set up through H.C.M.I., a nonprofit organization serving low-income households in eastern Kentucky in the Appalachian region. It was led by five adults from Holy Cross and five teens from St. Helen's. Holy Name youth minister Anne Casey,

one of the adult workers, said she got the idea to visit Neon, Ky., from the youth group at Rochester's Asbury First United Methodist Church, which had undertaken a similar mission project. From there, Holy Cross, which collaborates with Holy Name on many events, became involved as well.

The group worked hard, doing such home repair as framing, landscaping, roofing, insulating, painting and cleaning. Teens were also able to meet the residents; Alaina Muscato said she worked at one house where a man who had mined many years in the coal mines was plying of lumber.

The area surrounding Neon was so quiet and peaceful, Alaina said, that natives seemed to enjoy living a simpler way of life than a city environment might offer.

"It was so peaceful, you really got used to it," said Alaina. "The people there don't care about being rich and modern."

Frank Evans said he befriended an elderly woman whose house he was working on. "She didn't have much money, so I brought her a bucket of chicken from a restaurant," said Frank, 17. "The last day she said, 'Truly you children are blessed by God.'"

Those words of praise, Frank commented, were "a lot better than any money." Alaina said she was moved by the kindness of the rural poor. "I have made a lot of new friends and I will hold them close in my heart from now on," she stated.

Frank added that after he begins college next year, he hopes to return to rural missionary work through a campus ministry program.

"The poverty you see in America is usually urban. But you never see rural poverty," he remarked. "It was humbling to see the actual poverty people were in."

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