

Students find satisfaction in service

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Because Melissa Brown began attending Nazareth Academy midway through her sophomore year, she found that she had to quickly make up her service requirement.

"It was just a big unnecessary stress at the time," Melissa recalled of her attitude, saying she grudgingly did some cleaning projects at school.

Yet it didn't take long for Melissa to discover the fulfillment derived from helping others. As a junior she was a bell-ringer for the Salvation Army, saying the experience "was really cool." Then, last summer she did an extensive painting project at a school in Colorado. Although Nazareth students are only required to average 20 service hours per year, Melissa said she's gone well beyond that.

"But you know what? I'd like to do more," said Melissa, a 17-year-old senior.

Terry Reeder, who coordinates Nazareth's service program, said that many other students gain a similar hunger for service through their mandatory high-school component.

"Young people want to do service, maybe even more than adults. They get a taste of it and that makes them want to do more," said Reeder, who serves as Nazareth's campus minister and social-justice teacher for seniors.

"The premise is that education happens not just in the classroom," added Chris Hood, Christian service director for McQuaid Jesuit High School.

At McQuaid, Hood noted, each student is required to perform 100 service hours over a four-year period. The school has sponsored such projects as a visit with Brockport-area migrant farm workers last fall, and the ongoing "Magis" program where McQuaid seniors visit weekly with children at numerous public and private schools in the city of Rochester.

However, Hood said, the service requirement can vary widely in scope. "We largely leave it up to the students," he said, adding that "the vast majority do go above the minimum (hours):"

Mike Pratt, 17, said he has already exceeded 100 hours even though he's only a junior at McQuaid. Among his service efforts have been playing trumpet in a musical group that performs at school Masses, and assisting with Our Lady of Mercy High School's annual dance marathon fundraiser.

"You can have a lot of fun while you're doing this," Mike said.

This past fall Mike also took part



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Devon Weider, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, gives a helping hand to Holy Family School second-grader Areya DeJesus during bingo day at the school Jan. 27.

Youth

in the Brockport migrant project by meeting with workers in the fields, seeing their simple living quarters, and visiting young children at a preschool. Mike said he was impressed by the workers' dignity as they strove to provide for their families.

"They never gave us any dirty looks. They really make it comfortable; they were happy we know about their plight. There was a certain element of feeling sorry, but I was more respecting them for what they did," said Mike, a parishioner at Fairport's St. John of Rochester. "It teaches you to be humble about everything you own — you've got to remember those people."

Back at Nazareth Academy, Reeder said she's promoting service retreats through both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Diocese of Rochester. She's also planning a student trip next year to Selma, Ala., where Sisters of St. Joseph minister to the poor.

Reeder, also, said the nature of service projects can be decided by the students. "Sometimes they'll take something and just run with it. I've had one freshman helping out at Rochester General Hospital who already has more than her 80 hours," she remarked, adding that another student sparked an initiative where Nazareth's senior class decorated and delivered a tree this past Christmas to St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Rochester shelter and soup

kitchen.

Melissa traveled much further for her service work last summer. While visiting Pueblo, Col., she helped repaint a middle school where her

aunt, with whom she was staying, is a teacher. Melissa then took her painting to the next level, creating a mural of a panther (the school's nickname is "Panthers") in one classroom and then painting a huge outline of the United States in a history classroom. Melissa explained that her goal was to provide stimulation after her aunt said many of the school's students struggle to get passing grades.

"My aunt has told me that they think (the artwork) is awesome, and they're so excited about it. I didn't really know I was capable of something like that. I really found out my talents," said Melissa, who added that she now wants to pursue a career in art.

She also seems headed toward what Reeder said is a chief goal of Nazareth's service program — developing a lifelong sense of Christian service.

"I want to inspire. I know this is going to sound really corny, but I want to make a difference in whatever I do," said Melissa, who attends St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario. "I don't care what it's for. I just want people to benefit from what I do and maybe pass it on."

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