



MLK Day of Service Provides OPPORTUNITY FOR ENCOUNTER

In the spirit of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., youth from the Diocese of Saginaw engaged in the work of social justice on Jan. 14. They worked hand in hand with teens from the Archdiocese of Detroit as part of a continued effort to foster opportunities for encounter among the youth.

“We’ve built up a relationship with the Diocese of Saginaw,” said Joyce Francois, a regional director of youth ministry with the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Francois and Mark Graveline, director of youth ministry for the Diocese of Saginaw, saw an opportunity to build bridges across racial, cultural and socioeconomic gaps by giving youth from the Archdiocese of Detroit and the Diocese of Saginaw an opportunity to get to know each other and share experiences.

Youth from Sacred Heart Parish in Detroit have visited the Diocese of Saginaw to sing at several Feed the Fire Masses with Bishop Joseph Cistone, and last summer a group of teens enjoyed a day at an Amish farm and canoeing the Cedar River in Gladwin.

“We were invited to come up and have the experience of being in the country,” Francois said, adding that knowing that people cared enough about them to organize and provide the day for them was very impactful.

“Our kids felt like they want to reciprocate,” Francois said.

That is how about 25 youth and adults from several

area parishes – Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, Bay City; Sacred Heart Parish, Gladwin; Holy Spirit Parish, Shields; and St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Saginaw – joined more than 500 volunteers from across the Archdiocese of Detroit in working towards social justice.

Young Faith Activators of Christ’s Teachings (YFACT), a part of the archdiocese’s Urban Youth Ministry, plans the annual event. Youth choose prayers, worship music and rally activities to connect participants with Dr. King’s message of social justice.

“First, it was a day of solidarity. We remembered and celebrated the life and work of Dr. King by serving with one another. Second, our hope was to foster friendship,” Graveline said.

Volunteers stuffed teddy bears for homeless children through the nonprofit Project Night Night, before dividing into groups assigned to one of about 20 sites for service projects. The Diocese of Saginaw youth were assigned Cass Community Social Services, an organization dedicated to providing food, housing, health services and job programs.

Saginaw and Detroit youth teamed up and split

Tom Valtierra, Talia Alaniz-Medina and Angelica Ramirez, all from St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Saginaw, prepare a salad for a soup kitchen run by Cass Community Social Services.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH



into three groups. Some helped prepare meals in the agency's soup kitchen, which provides more than 1 million meals each year. Two groups worked with Green Industries, which Cass Community Social Services created to employ people with "significant barriers to employment."

Some sorted and shredded paper for their document destruction program; businesses pay Green Industries to pick up and shred sensitive documents. The shredded paper is then sold to a paper mill to be recycled. The final group made mud mats from recycled tires that were illegally dumped. Sales are used to hire the approximately 85 adults who have found sustainable employment with Green Industries.

The day of service concluded with a rally at Sacred Heart Church in Detroit filled with prayer, worship music, youth testimonies and a challenge to continue working together towards social justice in the spirit of love, peace, justice, unity and faith. Participants sang hymns "We are Called" and "How Great is our God" and prayed that they may speak out in times of injustice.

"Dr. King's message is based on the dignity of every human person. Every person's value is based upon God who created them. As Catholics, we are called to stand with anyone who has suffered injustice," Graveline said.

Though the event is only for one day, Francois says the goal stretches far beyond.

"We provide the introductions, and then it's up to the youth and the youth ministers to continue that relationship," she said. Some parishes develop ongoing relationships with the organizations where they served; others find connections with individuals.

"We try to get kids who are from different realities to be together for that day," Francois said. "This helps them pray for each other, learn about each other. It helps them know that God is working in the lives of others."

Francois and Graveline hope to continue to strengthen the relationship between the youth of their two dioceses. Francois plans on bringing urban youth to the Diocese of Saginaw for another day of recreation and connection this summer.

"It was just a beautiful interaction," Francois said of last year's visit. "(Getting) them to really know each other better is the goal." †

1. Participants in the MLK Jr. Day of Service pose for a group photo after a rally at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Detroit.

2. Youth participate in a rally at Sacred Heart Church, which included prayer, praise music and a call to action.

3. Liam Graveline of Sacred Heart Parish in Gladwin makes a poster for the solidarity march to encourage people to pursue social justice.

4. About 25 youth and adults from several area parishes: Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, Bay City, Sacred Heart Parish, Gladwin, Holy Spirit, Shields, and St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Saginaw, joined more than 500 volunteers from across the Archdiocese of Detroit for the sixth annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

5. Participants in the MLK Jr. Day of Service march holding signs with words such as "love," "peace," and "justice" before entering Sacred Heart Church in Detroit for a rally.

6. Cody Jasso from Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish in Bay City works on a mud mat made from tires for Green Industries, a part of Cass Community Social Services in Detroit.

