



Report to Franconia/Eastern District conferences 2015

Students help to rebuild hope

Three years after Hurricane Sandy slammed the East Coast, residents of Far Rockaway, Queens, New York, are still rebuilding what was lost. For a week last March, 13 Bluffton University students and staff spent their spring break trying to help.

In association with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), the group assisted Sandy victims whose homes had been heavily damaged by the storm, which caused more than 200 deaths and an estimated \$68 billion in damage overall. Among other things, they repaired cracked walls and floors and painted the homes of residents who couldn't afford to fix them anymore.

"Hearing there was still work to be done from Sandy really hit me hard, and I wanted to go make a difference there," said Rachel Keske, a junior from Lima, Ohio, and president of the campus organization SERVE. "The impact I had in helping these families take one step closer to normalcy will be one of the most beneficial feelings I'll ever have."

Keske worked for the same residents throughout the trip. She and MDS members mudded and sanded cracked and patchy drywall before applying a long-needed, new coat of paint. Although the process took all week, that week was full of laughter and inspiration for Keske.

"I never dreaded waking up at 6 a.m. to begin the day because I knew we would be helping them move their lives to the next step, after sitting still since October 2012," when the storm hit, she said.

Jenna Moreo, a junior from Spencerville, Ohio, worked in several homes. She helped repaint the interior of a house that had endured extensive water damage, loaded shipments of drywall for delivery to the houses and insulated a basement that had been flooded to its ceiling. "It may seem like all we had to do was work on houses, but it was so much more than that," she said. "We actually got to meet the homeowners and talk to them about what happened."

"Hearing how the people whose homes were damaged still have so much hope after two years" was definitely worthwhile, said Kati O'Neill, a junior from Wapakoneta, Ohio, who worked with Moreo on the basement insulation project. "You can't even imagine what happened to them and what they are going through. God is truly incredible and moves mountains."

Although there's still much to be done in Far Rockaway, the Bluffton students were happy to help as much as they could before returning to school, and many are eager to serve next spring break, too.

"To be able to give someone something back that we take for granted is a wonderful feeling," said Danielle Moore, a junior from Plymouth, Ohio. "It was a blessing to get to know the families and people at MDS."

"The thing is, we didn't 'give up' our break; that thought never crossed my mind," Keske said. "Serving in Far Rockaway was exactly what I wanted to spend my break doing."

'Plowshares' book available

Copies of "Swords to Plowshares," the picture book published recently by The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center of Bluffton University, may be ordered at www.bluffton.edu/lionlamb or by calling 419-358-3207. Cost is \$21.35—including tax—or \$24.50 for book buyers who would like it sent to them. All proceeds from book sales will support the center's peace education mission.

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