

Contact: Nancy Farrell

Director of Institutional Marketing

Telephone: 413-265-2589

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**Elms College Students Carry SSJ Charism**

**into the World on Mission Trips**

Every year, at spring break, students from College of Our Lady of the Elms go out into the world on mission trips. These trips allow them to live the mission of the college and the Sisters of St. Joseph, and bring to life the Catholic social teachings that form the base of the Elms experience. The trips also extend the students’ education by instilling the importance of cultural sensitivity and service to others, and teaching them how how to safely conduct themselves in new environments and cultures.

This year, groups visited Baltimore; New Orleans; Trenton, N.J.; Jamaica; and Nicaragua to help out in a variety of ways.

Specific tasks vary from site to site, but projects on mission trips often include light manual labor, visiting with the ill and elderly, working with children in schools and communities, and helping in soup kitchens, food pantries and thrift stores. A final phase focuses on reflection of the experience, readjusting students after the immersion experience, and discussing ways to identify service opportunities while continuing the work right here at home.

In Jamaica, Elms volunteers worked with Passionist Volunteers International. They visited infirmaries, nursing homes, schools, and agencies for people with severe developmental disabilities. Additionally, nursing students received hands-on experience in volunteering at local health clinics.

In Nicaragua, the Elms group partnered for the third year with Amigos for Christ. While there, they worked alongside the local Nicaraguans from rural communities to help build their water systems. They also helped with the building of a chicken coop to support a local family with food and income. Additionally, the group helped with the building of La Chuscada School.

In New Orleans, 12 years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Elms group returned once again to partner with St. Bernard Project. They were busy at work all week painting a house and doing landscaping so that a family would soon be able to move into their new home. “The work with SBP is always very rewarding to the Elms group, for they find great satisfaction in helping a family rebuild their homes and their dreams,” said Eileen Kirk, assistant director of Campus Ministry at Elms College.

In Lawrenceville, New Jersey, Elms volunteers worked for the first time with the Center for FaithJustice. During their week, they were involved with a number of social service agencies and volunteered their time with schools, a soup kitchen, and a social service agency for adults with developmental challenges. Rooted in the Catholic tradition, the Center for FaithJustice affirms the essential relationship between what we believe and how we live.

Before leaving for Spring Break and traveling to Jamaica, Nicaragua and New Orleans, many of the service participants attended a commissioning Mass, where they received a special blessing from college chaplain Father Mark Stelzer; during the service, they were each anointed with oil and given a prayer stone.

The service experience profoundly affects those involved and is one of the most personal ways that the Office of Campus Ministry instills in Elms students a foundation of spirituality, an awareness of the world as a community, and a lifelong commitment to social justice.

**About Elms College**

Elms College is a co-educational Catholic college offering a liberal arts curriculum that gives students multiple perspectives on life. Founded in 1928 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Elms College has a tradition of educating reflective, principled and creative learners, who are rooted in faith, educated in mind, compassionate in heart, responsive to civic and social obligations, and capable of adjusting to change without compromising principle.

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