

Montreat College's Student Voice THE WHETSTONE

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Spring Break: Service Driven

Editor's note: During spring break in early March, Montreat College sent two groups of students and staff on short-term mission trips—one to Bluefield, West Virginia and another to San Lucas, Guatemala. The following accounts are thoughts from some of those who participated in and ministered to others through these alternative spring break experiences.

West Virginia

Johnny McDowell:

As we stood around in a circle holding hands, Chaplain Steve asked us to pray one word that we wanted to get from this mission trip. Words ranged from love and compassion to empathy and friendship. It cannot be disputed that these prayers were all answered. As we left on February 29 to go to West Virginia, we were all excited and apprehensive about what we were going to do.

Our trip was broken into two distinct sections: the poverty simulation and our service projects. Both were mentally and physically challenging for most of us twenty some volunteers, but the second part of the trip was the harder part for me.

We had our days split into two: in the mornings we did service projects and in the afternoons we worked with the urban kids. Throughout the week we really did make some tangible and practical impacts on the Wade Center in West Virginia. Yet for many, it was working with the children that really made the trip worthwhile.

Every day after school, the Wade Center runs a club for the inner city children, during which we helped the kids with their homework, played games (basketball mainly), and then had dinner with them. The thing about these kids is that many face neglect or abuse at home, and many get dinner at the center because they are not guaranteed it at home. This is a real ministry for the kids. Jacob Owens, Alisha Zaczyk, Ashleigh Douglas, and I volunteered to work with the middle school kids. This was challenging, to say the least, as these kids would not listen to us, obey us, or show any respect for authority in general. Therefore trying to get these kids to do homework was a constant struggle that didn't get any easier. The hardest part was knowing that

we were there to do our best for the kids, but also knowing that because of their past experiences they couldn't trust us. Yet by the end of the week, the kids had grown fonder of us and us of them.

We had an eventful week and we all got something from the experience. Whether it was the humbling homeless simulation, working with the kids, or bonding with the group, it is fair to say we all felt that we really made an impact for God on our trip. I have to say that, for my first spring break trip, it was memorable and impactful, and I am glad I gave up a suntan for it.

Michael Dechane:

I don't think of West Virginia as a hot spot destination for students on spring break. Most of the Montreat College students I work with would agree with me on this. This year, some spent months planning trips to beach houses and faraway parents. Some, in classic college spirit, didn't plan much at all, and simply struck out on a road trip with friends in a beater car. I tagged along with 19 students and the college chaplain for a week at the Wade Center in Bluefield, WV, for a spring break unlike anything I experienced in school.

We drove through the rain after classes ended, arrived in Bluefield, and immediately began what our hosts called a "poverty simulation." We knew it was on the agenda, but none of us knew what it would entail, which was part of the design.

We learned that the Wade Center exists to help children, teens, and young adults through after school programs and mentoring relationships. They work with about 100 students and young adults a week. Staff at the Wade Center estimate that less than 10% of their students have a father at home. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2004 Report, 18.9% of people in Mercer County, WV live below the poverty line, over 6% higher than the national average that same year. Driving in, we saw plenty of closed factories, abandoned buildings, and subsidized housing in the heart of the downtown area.

After sobering us up with some



facts, we drove down the road to the Union Mission Home, which has been serving the community's disadvantaged population for nearly 80 years now. In the cramped basement we found piles of newly donated clothing, for which we exchanged our own. Back at the center, we all changed into our new outfits and, after having most of our personal possessions (and all our money) taken away, were given brief instructions and then locked out of the building to spend the night. It was 33 degrees and raining, with a steady wind that didn't let up. Most of us huddled in a stairwell and tried to sleep. I crawled under a slide on a playground and couldn't believe how hard it was to think about anything except wanting to be warm and to sleep. At sunrise, seeing all our students stretched out on scraps of cardboard laid on the concrete was a picture I both did, and didn't, want to send home to their parents.

Later that morning we walked to the projects where we met some of the kids we would be working with. We played some games, tried to learn names, and had a lot of fun, surprisingly. Afterwards we were split up into groups of three or four and turned loose on the town with lists of tasks to complete, including "collect 100 aluminum cans" and "eat lunch." I couldn't bring myself to ask somebody for food, or for money. I decided our group could forgo lunch, as pride and shame literally overwhelmed me. An act of kindness from a woman outside a McDonald's floored me. Unasked, she just stopped her car, motioned

me over, handed me twenty dollars, and said she "couldn't stand to see anybody hungry." She asked if we knew where the Salvation Army was, and told me to buy some lunch for myself and my "friends." All I could think to say was "thank you" and "God bless you." While one of the girls in our group bought burgers, I walked behind a dumpster and cried for several minutes, uncontrollably. It felt like the God I believe in had spoken directly to me through that simple act, and I'm

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VERSE of the MONTH

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

II Corinthians 8:9



what's
in
side
more
spring
break?