



## Catholic Heart Workcamp 2019

### Youth Mission Trip to St. Croix, USVI

*Pictured: Brandon Ramirez, Jake Chapman, Deandre Perez, Wyatt Krause, Christian Molina, Demetri Dry, Christine Lockwood, Jessica Zuniga, Abigail Spino, Jillian Albus, Mason Sirianni, Christian Gorham, Garrett Kleypas, Kelsey Kleypas, Victoria Dry, Savannah Rendon, Araceli Perez, Katrina Dry, Kyle Kleypas, Wyatt Wentrcek*

For the past eight years, Notre Dame Catholic Church has been participating in summer youth mission trips to **Catholic Heart Workcamp (CHWC)**. The organization's website states, "*Catholic HEART Workcamp is about SERVICE, CONNECTION and LOVING OTHERS. It all started in 1993 in Orlando, FL with 100 participants and has grown to over 13,000 participants annually. CHWC provides parish youth groups, teens and adult leaders service opportunities to restore homes and HEARTS, feed the hungry, lift the spirits of children, bring joy to the elderly and disabled, and offer assistance while partnering with social agencies.*"

While past groups from Notre Dame have served in communities such as Denver, Oklahoma City, Wichita and Nashville, this year we were excited to announce our first International Camp to St. Croix, USVI. The week spent serving this beautiful island and its people was certainly an unforgettable experience for all!

After a long day of travel, our group of 16 students and 4 adults arrived to St. Croix awestruck by the clear blue water, white sands, and overall beauty of the island. But at the same time we also could see that St. Croix was definitely a place of need, and we were eager to find out how we would serve for the week. We quickly got settled at St. Mary's Catholic School, by laying out air mattresses in classrooms where we would sleep for the next 7 nights. The first evening was a wonderful opportunity to also meet over 100 additional campers who traveled from Texas, Mississippi, Illinois and Wisconsin.

The next morning began with Mass at Holy Cross Catholic Church on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. There couldn't have been a better start to the week. During the homily we were encouraged to prepare ourselves spiritually to receive Jesus, but also to go out to serve others just as Jesus first washed the feet of his disciples. This was a great message to remember as we attended Mass again each morning before departing for our worksites to be the "hands and feet of Christ." Later that evening, campers were offered an opportunity to get to meet the other 6 students and adult leaders they were teamed with for the week and to learn about the many work projects that would be completed around the island.

For the next four days, campers would load up with their sack lunches and tools and either walk to their nearby work location or be transported by bus across the island. Some of the projects included painting residential homes in areas still recovering from Hurricane Maria (which hit the island on September 20, 2017), painting classrooms and murals at local schools, visiting and playing games with residents at a home for the disabled, and serving meals at a local soup kitchen. The largest project of the week was at St. Dunstan's Episcopal school. This school,

where former San Antonio Spur Tim Duncan graduated from, has been closed for 23 years. It is now being restored as a location to house large groups of volunteers who come to serve on the island as well as being designated as a future hurricane shelter when needed. Each camper spent two days during the week at St. Dunstan's completing tasks such as power washing, scraping paint, and beginning to transform the facility with a new coat of paint.

Perhaps the most eye-opening experience of the week came for the campers who would pack and deliver over 60 meals each day to be taken to a very impoverished neighborhood with Sr. Anna Guadalupe and the Missionaries of Charity. The campers were told that this most likely would be the only meal these men, women and children would eat for the day. Abigail Spino, a recent graduate from Our Lady of the Hills said, "I saw God the most during our trip when we went to feed the hungry in Fredensborg. While there, we delivered food and snacks to families in need. They were beyond grateful for the food we were giving them. When we ran out of snacks, a man we had given a few bags of chips to, offered to give a bag or two to another resident who had none. This man was so generous with the amount of food he had, even though it was very little." Another camper, Jillian Albus, a recent graduate from Geneva School of Boerne, recognized that "it literally was one man's trash is another man's treasure. These people would collect trash from other parts of the island in the front of their community and dig through it to find what they could use and what they needed to live by." The campers hearts' were deeply moved by what they witnessed and of course the humility of the Missionaries of Charity and Freddie, another local, whom they accompanied on these journeys.

After long days in the heat, campers certainly get to enjoy some fun as well. Each night at CHWC is packed with high energy games and music, before transitioning to a time of prayer which included Eucharistic Adoration and an opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Before departing from St. Croix, we spent our last day snorkeling and having lunch at Buck Island National Monument. The rare spotting of a sea turtle which swam directly under us and the few hours spent on the preserved beach were a nice reward for a week of hard work and service!

Our group would like to thank the CHWC Office, along with Tim Kozrya (International Camp Director) and his team, for their yearlong preparations in making this mission trip experience such an unforgettable success.

We would also like to thank the parishioners of Notre Dame for the prayers and support of our trip. This trip is made possible through several fundraising efforts, private donations, and second collections. We are grateful for your generosity and prayers! We would also like to thank the parents who entrusted us with their children, joined us in prayer, and enjoyed the week through the many pictures sent. As one parent stated, "Catholic Heart Work Camp is a great way for our youth to explore what it is like to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus. My boys have always come back charged and refreshed in their faith (although physically tired)! Thank you for providing these opportunities!"

To see more pictures from our trip, please visit [www.notredamechurch.cc/chwc](http://www.notredamechurch.cc/chwc)

For more information on future mission trips contact:

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