Students prepare to embark on spring break service trips

BY JIM DUCKETT
CRUSADER NEWS STAFF

As the spring semester reaches its midpoint, some Holy Cross students may be headed home to some exotic location to relax and recuperate. However, a large portion of Holy Cross students have chosen to use their break to help other communities across the United States. These students, totaling over 350, are headed to locations throughout the Appalachian mountain range with the Appalachia Service Project, and to different sites across the southern states with Habitat for Humanity. The groups are headed to these sites to do everything from restoring buildings to helping to build community parks, while representing Holy Cross as “men and women for others.”

This year, the Appalachia Service Project will send 154 students to 13 different sites in Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, and Maine to perform any sort of service that these communities in those locations may require. Sponsored by the Chaplains office over 20 years, the project has expanded during that time and kept contact with the communities it helps each year. The project sets itself up with similar programs by offering time for reflection and prayer based on the work experiences that the students have. The students are treated as guests in the communities they visit and stay in housing that can range from churches to fire stations. “The relationship between the students and the community is what makes the program unique,” said Chris Barrett ’83, the director of the program, as he reflected on the fact that Holy Cross has made successive trips to several communities over the years. Elaborating on the interaction that the Appalachian project offers with the community Barrett said, “The relationships with the communities are as important as the work itself.”

Although students spend most of their time in these communities performing labor, they also have plenty of time to interact and converse with the people of the communities, as well as their fellow volunteers. Jared Belliveau ’02 mentined that, “On [the project’s] most basic level it opens your eyes to a part of the country you’ve never seen before and people you’ve never experienced.”

Belliveau continued to reflect on another aspect of the project in saying, “You get to work with other Holy Cross students who you wouldn’t normally get to work with.” By the time the volunteers return to the Hill in March, they will have done everything from building repair to helping young children learn to read.

Another program popular with Holy Cross students is Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit organization that works with low income families to build their houses. The 226 volunteers in this year’s program will help the College Hill (Worcester, MA) to assist ten different communities down south during Spring break. A unique feature of the work of this organization lies in the fact that the recipients of these houses will actually work on the site alongside the volunteers to construct their new homes. The trip is an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University in Oregon as well as the director of the Center for Philosophical Education in California. He is also an author and editor of several books focusing on topics such as the philosophy of science and the collective responsibility for war crimes.

Professor Jokic spoke of what peace activists need to know when dealing with the Balkans. They not only need to be familiar with the history of the area, but they also must not “fall prey” to any of the word games. By word games, Professor Jokic means phrases continuously used in the media that do not accurately describe the political situation in the region. Phrases such as democratic revolution, Serbian nationalism, and reverse ethnic cleansing, or re-venge killing, are non-descriptive or noted language, not describing anything, only presenting personal attitudes.

The first term, democratic revolution, refers to the 2000 elections when President Milosevic was re-elected and we are using political science to refer to the massive amounts of innocent people dying in the Balkans daily. Realistically, the situation is not as innocent or naive as it is presented by these terms. They create a false interpretation of the horrific conflict.

According to Professor Jokic, all of the phrases have a built-in bias attached to them. These phrases are justifying the United States’ military involvement in the Balkans as well as justifying the public’s inactivity throughout the course of these tumultuous events in the region. Professor Jokic believes that words such as “re-venge” and “reverse” will only continue to excuse and justify the conflict as well as the public inactivity.

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