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Students serve Billings during summer mission trip

Mary Howatt

*"I wanted to be free, so I tried to be, but I couldn't work it out."**

Moments into our first religious education class last fall, I was bombarded by teens asking the question: Can we go on a mission trip again this summer?

After a transforming Catholic HEART Workcamp experience in Milwaukee last summer, it was exciting to see this enthusiasm still brewing in them. How could we not harness that kind of enthusiasm and energy?

How could we not take another journey with our young missionaries? We were called. We were going west to Billings, Mont.!

"I was covered — I was bound, anchored to the ground, "I needed You to cut the cords keeping me down. . . ."

"A call is not enough, though. We couldn't just get on a bus and go. It required planning and preparations and a lot of fund raising. It was a commitment felt not just by our mission travelers, but also by their families and our parishes.

Between our three parishes (St. Agnes in Hunter, St. Rose of Lima in Hillsboro and St. William in Argusville), we hosted meals, a raffle, a babysitting night and a garage sale. We sold flowers, cookie dough, engraved pans, clothing and baked goods. We raked yards, waited tables and helped with parish programs.

Through a lot of hard work and the generosity and support of our communities, we were able to get all 18 of our participants on the bus and onto the journey of a lifetime. The work was great preparation for what we would face in Billings, and the gratitude we felt for the support sustained us throughout the week.

"I'm on a journey of self discovery. Jesus, only You can uncover me. "I'm gonna find who I was meant to be. Not who the world is telling me. Jesus, only You can uncover me."

The Catholic HEART Workcamp theme this year was "Soul Uncovered." According to the website, "We are called to wake up and do a little soul searching! To live life uncovered. When we look within at the core of who we are, we are awakened to learn that our faith journey is to be lived, asking the questions, 'How can I make a difference for the greater good?' and 'how can I serve to bring about Christ's love?'"

Our group was divided amongst 18 of 39 different teams stationed at 55 worksites throughout Billings, each charged with answering those questions. Some repaired a playground at a daycare for low-income families. Others made sandwiches for the homeless at a food bank. Some stayed at our host school doing maintenance on the baseball field and

in the parking lot. A few helped two Montana Rescue Mission thrift stores move into their new locations.

Most, however, had the opportunity to work with low income or elderly residents — weeding gardens, painting houses, fixing steps, or whatever the family needed. It was four intense workdays in sometimes 100-degree heat.

"I didn't know myself, so I played someone else, hoping I'd be loved. "You reached out for my hand, and took away my mask, and in Your eyes I saw that I was beautiful."

The mission trip was not just about doing service projects, however. Each day we came together in praise and worship. We participated in the Mass. We prayed for others, for healing and for faith. We prayed for forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation.

Each day we asked ourselves and others how we saw God that day. We danced. We sang. We laughed. We cried. We lived life uncovered. And now that we are home, we continue this journey of self discovery, recognizing that only Jesus can uncover us, and challenged to continue bringing about Christ's love through our service in our own communities.

**Lyrics from the Catholic Heart Workcamp theme song, "Uncover Me," by Andy Cloninger.*

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