

NEWS RELEASE

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Service without Boundaries: USM Students, Staff Head to Guatemala

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— For the past few years, University of Saint Mary students and staff make an annual trip to a foreign country for an adventure in service. This year is no exception, as a group of seven students and staff will travel to San Lucas Toliman, located on Lake Antitlan, Guatemala for a service-mission trip June 3 - 12.

The group of students, Tara Christy, Corey Hamilton, Courtney Manago, Jubilee Paige and Matt Mayes, accompanied by campus minister Kate Faggella-Luby and head football coach Scott Frear, will work with Side-by-Side Ministries to construct a community center in just over one week for the Guatemalan village. Side-by-Side Ministries is the non-profit portion of Strickland Construction Co., Olathe, Kan. This is the second straight year Saint Mary and Side-by-Side have teamed up to help Guatemalan citizens.

Faggella-Luby said she got involved with Roger Strickland, owner and founder of Side-by-Side Ministries in 2004 when Strickland's parent company constructed McGilley Field House, the university's state-of-the-art arena. He invited Faggella-Luby to accompany his staff during their annual service trips to Guatemala. His company funds a significant portion of the trip, and even donates all the construction materials. The building, which will be completely finished during the trip, will be used for adult classes, community and church meetings.

There's plenty to consider on trips like this, including the language barrier. Many of the Guatemalan people speak a rare version of Mayan, making non-verbal communication the key to getting the most out of the trip. Faggella-Luby said it can be a challenge, but everyone figures it out quickly.

"Our students quickly learn that you don't have to be able to speak the same language as another to understand them," she said. "You can actually go pretty deep with someone you can't even talk to just by sharing your presence, your smile, the crazy sign-language you come up with, to communicate."

She also said last year's trip was simply amazing. Without Strickland's donations, though, she wonders if trips like this one would even be possible. "We go on trips like these to build relationships with people, to share in their life experiences," Faggella-Luby said. "For this particular trip, the way we do that is by constructing a community building in the village. It is hard work, but it really gives everyone the chance to fully understand the true value of service. Without the help of Roger Strickland, it would difficult for us to plan a trip like this to say the least."

Airfare, travel expenses, food, lodging—it all adds up quickly. While Strickland finances a very large portion of the trip, the students and staff had to raise money to cover additional costs. Through various fundraisers, including a flower bouquet sale before and after commencement, the students were able to raise the necessary amount. The trip costs about \$1,400 per person. But for Faggella-Luby, that's simply just the cost of service.

"In Guatemala, we're helping an entire community," she said. "That can have a huge impact on everyone that participates and it can affect how everyone lives after it."

Faggella-Luby is no stranger to service trips. She's organized many, including last year's trip to Guatemala and annually coordinates spring break trips to the Appalachian Mountains to help rural Kentucky residents with home repair as part of the Christian Appalachia's WorkFest program.

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