

Wayland students serve in the surf, sun and city

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Wayland
Baptist
University
student
participants
in Beach
Reach level
a sand
sculpture
on the
beach at
South
Padre
Island
before dusk
hits.
According
to students,
the city
required
the
sculpture
to be torn
down daily
to avoid
riots.

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sun and city

By Teresa Young

Wayland Baptist University

KENNER, La.—From the storm-ravaged Louisiana Gulf Coast to the shores of South Padre Island, 21 Wayland Baptist University students devoted their spring break to ministry.

Twelve students and three sponsors headed for the New Orleans area to work with victims of Hurricane Katrina in Kenner, La., and nine students and two sponsors journeyed to South Padre Island for the annual Beach Reach effort.

In South Louisiana, the Wayland team worked on homes and businesses damaged by Hurricane Katrina and the flood aftermath, removing furniture and old sheetrock from homes that were salvageable, in preparation for other crews who will repair the homes. Working with a youth group from Weatherford, they also cleaned out a strip mall that had stood in nine feet of water for months.

Students expressed amazement at the devastation caused by the storm and the evidence still remaining. Homes marked with numbers indicating the dead found inside left poignant reminders of the storm's toll.

"Six months later, you'd think there would be some sense of normalcy, but that's not the case," said Joe Hoyle, a sophomore from Perryton. "I've never seen devastation like that in my life. The flood damage in this whole community is just amazing. I'm sure New Orleans will never be the same. God has really given me a heart for the people of New Orleans, and my heart goes out to those who were affected."

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Though the working conditions were sticky, dirty and foul-smelling at best, the students agreed the trip was an amazing experience, and they saw God

at work.

“We were working at one house, and the lady introduced us to a mailman who was known as a local hero,” said Molly Flowers, a freshman from Amarillo. “He lived on a boat and had used his boat to rescue more than 600 people trapped in their homes. But he didn’t really take any credit—just said that God had helped him. That really encouraged me.”

Freshman Zach Hawkins of Burkburnett shared the gospel with a family struggling with drug addiction, and he saw them rededicate their lives to Christ.

“You never know how you can change someone just by talking to them,” he said.

Senior Hugh Ellis of Lovington, N.M., was impressed by the outpouring of love and support that faith-based organizations have provided to the storm-ravaged region. “The Wayland group was always hard at work and never grumbling or complaining. They really lived out true Christianity—loving each other and taking care of each other,” he said.

At South Padre, the Wayland team was part of a 300-student brigade spending their week ministering to their peers in the spring break parties on the beach. The group cleaned beaches, witnessed to students, served free pancake breakfasts at an island church and manned free van rides to hotels, bars and restaurants, sharing the gospel during each ride.

Though the assignment was not easy, team members said God worked mightily, thanks to a strong emphasis on prayer.

“At Beach Reach, I learned the power of prayer. We were on our knees before the Lord all day long, and he answered our prayers. He used us to do his will,” said freshman Sarah Ketchem of Lubbock. “Getting to share with someone how much Christ loves them and what he did for them on the

cross, gives me more joy than absolutely anything else in this life.”

Ketchem and others said a series of huge sand sculptures carved by a man from Maryland who makes the trip annually at his own expense served as valuable conversation starters for sharing the gospel. “I was standing near one that was a large picture of Christ’s face, and I asked this girl what she thought of it,” Ketchem recalled. “She told me, ‘I came here to get away from him, and he’s still here.’ I got to really visit with her about her relationship with God, and we exchanged e-mail addresses so we can keep each other accountable.”

Joe Perez, a sophomore from Panhandle, echoed the value of prayer on the trip. “To see how prayer fuels the entire week at Beach Reach was awesome,” he said. “You think sometimes that people aren’t listening when you share the gospel, but they are. We took advantage of every opportunity, and God used everything we did that week.”

Donnie Brown, director of Baptist Student Ministries at Wayland and a sponsor on the Beach Reach trip, admitted the week took him out of his comfort zone, but he saw God work in the lives of young people. He applauded the work students did during the week normally reserved for playtime. “Did the Lord save 30,000 spring breakers? Probably not. We don’t know how many accepted Christ, but we know that seeds were planted and students were obedient to the cause of Christ,” he said.

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