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GWU Students Offer Physical and Emotional Support to Hurricane Irma Victims

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Office of University Communications

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Team of Seven Spent Fall Break Serving in Clay County, Fla.

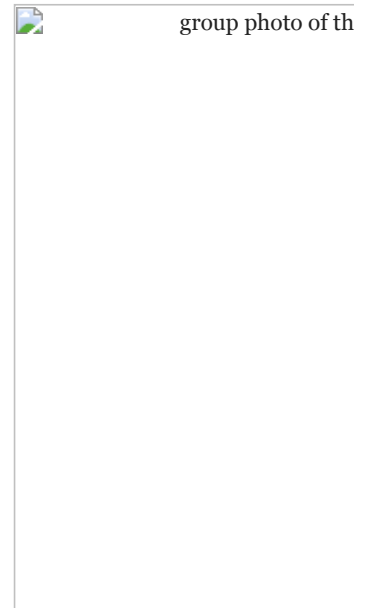
By Mallory Moore, '18, Intern for Communications

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—During fall break, a team of seven Gardner-Webb University students traveled to Clay County in the Greater Jacksonville, Fla., area to help residents whose homes were damaged during Hurricane Irma. Dr. Tracy Jessup, vice president of the Office Christian Life and Services, served as the team's leader. Partnering with Island View Baptist Church in Orange Park, they worked to remove mud, debris, and damaged furniture from

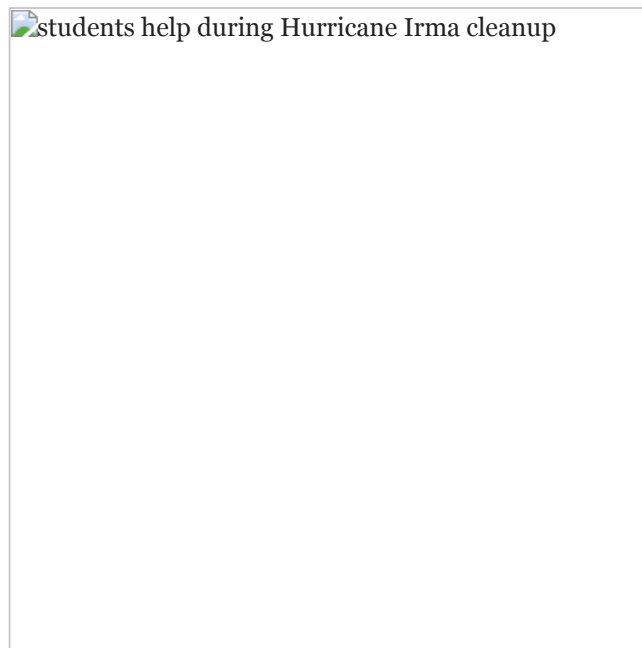
flooded homes. “It was a tough time for the residents, but they were so appreciative of all the help they received,” Elizabeth Phillips of Mooresboro, N.C., observed. “Most of the people we were helping were either elderly or simply without help.”

According to the Clay County Emergency Operations Center, 1,200 homes were flooded during Hurricane Irma in September. Upon arriving in Florida, the needs of this community were immediately evident to those on the Gardner-Webb team. “Although all of the physical work was challenging, the most challenging part was seeing the look of hopelessness in the eyes of the residents,” Phillips commented. “Seeing their homes and possessions destroyed by water wrecked their world.”

Many of the residents whose homes suffered extensive damage must now make a tough decision. After receiving a letter from the Clay County Building Division, these residents were given three choices for their home: elevate it, tear it down, or appeal the division’s evaluation that the home suffered “substantial damage.” Jessup shared the experience of working with one woman who had lived in the same home for 50 years and faced this difficult decision. “As we helped her remove interior and exterior debris, furniture, personal belongings, and document damages,” Jessup explained, “we often paused to comfort her as tears would well up in her eyes.”



Gardner-Webb students who went to Florida were front row, from left, Beth Jennings, Noemi Pascual and Amanda Collins; and back row, Sydney Christopher, Zoe Greeley, Liz Phillips, Andrew Meyer and Dr. Tracy Jessup (vice president of the Office of Christian Life and Service).



Although they were surrounded by devastation, Zoe Greeley of Bessemer City, N.C., another student on the team, recognized the opportunity for God to work through them. “The team’s ‘one body’ mindset taught me that disaster frequently brings unity,” she shared. “We had a lot of fun, even when we were working. I would love to go on another mission trip with Gardner-Webb.”

As these students worked to help Clay County residents, they also experienced the benefits of service, growing as a group and as individuals. “We went to show Jesus to the world, but the world showed us Jesus,” Phillips stated.

Other students who participated in the trip were Sydney Christopher of Forest City, N.C., Amanda Collins of Rock Hill, S.C., Beth Jennings of Kings Mountain, N.C., Andrew Meyer of Charlotte, N.C.; and Noemi Pascual of Asheboro, N.C.

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