

CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Gardner-Webb Students Help Repair Louisiana Homes Damaged by Hurricanes

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Working with Samaritan's Purse, Group Spends Their Spring Break Serving Others

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—The 10 Gardner-Webb University students who participated in a mission trip to Lake Charles, La., over spring break were determined and dedicated. They endured a nearly 15-hour drive in a van to reach their destination, where they woke up at 7 every morning to go work on four houses. They slept in a church and showered in a trailer.

The group signed up to help Samaritan's Purse on a disaster rebuild project, said Neal Payne, associate minister for student ministries. Lake Charles was hit by two hurricanes in 2020, and Samaritan's Purse is halfway through the number of houses they have committed to repair or rebuild.

"Much of what our teams were doing was finishing work as these houses were almost complete," Payne explained. "So we were either the last team or one of the last teams to work on these houses before the homeowners were able to move back in. That was an awesome privilege. We actually finished one of the houses on Thursday and got to have a home dedication for the homeowner and friends. The work consisted mostly of trim, painting, flooring, cabinetry, and installing appliances."

Even though Emma Hegler, a first-year student from Stanley, N.C., had never been on a disaster relief trip, she decided to take this one, because she wanted to glorify God by serving others. "The people at Samaritan's Purse are amazing," she praised. "They are great examples of what it looks like to live like servants of Christ. All week, it was clear that they were not only ministering to physical needs but

spiritual ones as well. The residents were all incredible people who had many different stories and came from many different walks of life.”



Payne agreed with Hegler’s assessment. “Samaritan’s Purse is exceptional at utilizing volunteers to get the projects done, even if the volunteer has no construction experience,” he related. “They had already been in Lake Charles for over a year, so the local population is very welcoming of volunteers, because they have seen all the good that has been done.”

He added that most of the teams were given the opportunity to meet the homeowners, who were very appreciative, especially when they found out the Gardner-Webb students gave up their spring break to come and work. “As with all the trips I have led over the years, seeing these college students serve the Lord and grow in their faith through this experience is always a highlight,” Payne reflected. “This was an amazing group of students who didn’t complain one time—not even about the super long drive—and really gave it their all for the week we were down there.”

The most memorable part of the trip for Hegler, an international business major, was hearing and seeing the testimonies of the people she met. “One of the things that our foreman said to us was that your story is the most powerful tool you have in sharing the gospel,” she shared. “This was definitely exemplified to us in the vulnerability of our leaders, as well as in the gospel conversations that took place while we were just painting a door or nailing down trim.”

In addition to Hegler, the students who participated in the trip were:

- Ella Brown

- Savannah Burns
- Dakota Davis
- Garry Hobbs
- Hannah Huffman
- Kyndal Jackson
- Sophia Jordan
- Caleb Milkey
- Nikkiera Newson

To see more details about the project, visit the Samaritan's Purse [website](https://spvolunteer.org/project-response/333) (<https://spvolunteer.org/project-response/333>).

Learn more about the Office of Christian Life and Service. 

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