What service did we provide?

Our group spent time in the Houma, LA area, staying at Hope community Church and working at several nearby churches, as well as the Bayou Baptist Association. The activities we did included organizing goods for hurricane season, demolition of a shed, painting and cleaning of different rooms, cleaning giant inflatables used for Block Party ministry, and a lot of other smaller projects and repairs. Our group was also invited to lead Sunday and Wednesday services at Hope Community. Each group member was involved in some way, either by leading worship, running children’s church, or sharing personal testimonies, and we were blessed by this experience, as well as by the positive reaction of the church. Although the things we did on our trip may not have always been big, our group of 15 was able to make a difference for people who didn’t have the time or resources to do it themselves. The genuine love and gratitude we were shown during our short time in Louisiana was overwhelming. This positive reaction meant so much to us and continued to motivate us to go back to work throughout the week.

What did we learn?

Volunteering in the Houma community was a blessing to all of us as we were fortunate enough to learn about their individual lifestyles, testimonies and the hardships that they as a community have faced. Located in the bayous of Louisiana, Houma has been through a number of horrible and terrifying natural disasters; such as hurricanes and floods. Despite this the community is always striving to be in the best of spirits as we were amazed to hear their stories shared with such appreciated and faith that there is a light at the end of the road. Serving in the Houma community has taught us to appreciate the things we have and to value those that are the closest to us. Prior to coming on this service learning trip we often complained about the things that we now know we should be thanking God for on a daily basis. It was a pleasure serving for the Houma community as their welcoming attitude, positive outlook on life and laid-back style of worship has made the trip unforgettable. Thank you Service Learning Center for providing us with such a great opportunity. We hope to return in the future.
How did the experience shape our faith?

Going into this service learning trip, I would not say I was strong in my faith. The very start of this trip started to change that. I knew nobody on this trip originally and had to start off by driving twenty hours with complete strangers. This took a lot of faith in God to do this. Once I got to Houma, I started to see God almost everywhere. I was not even looking and I would not have called myself a type of person who would even look in the first place. Meeting everybody down here and hearing their stories really showed me the importance of God. It is very hard to keep God in our lives especially when we have everything, which is what I do sometimes. Hearing the stories really made me reconsider my priorities that I have. Just by looks, I would not consider any of the people that I have met to be happy. Especially looking at their living conditions and also the disabilities that they have. Upon talking to them, however, they were some of the happiest people I have ever met. To me this was a clear sign of God. There is nothing on this earth that can give these people the happiness that they have besides the love of God and that is something I will never forget and I will continue to hold dear to that fact as I finish out my years at Calvin and whatever lies ahead.

How did the experience shape my understanding of my vocational journey?

I never imagined that a week of service-learning in Houma, LA would re-focus my eyes on my true vocation. Though easily blinded and led astray by school, work and relationships, service acts as a great eye doctor—it allows us to re-focus our eyes on kingdom work. Honestly, my experience often led me to think about the work that Jesus came to do on earth. He didn’t come for a week to serve in one community, but He came as the servant of all—He set the ultimate example. This is not to say that this week of service-learning did not matter, but rather, this week allowed me to be a servant, just as Jesus was. To me, serving and learning for a week brought me to my knees in humility and re-focused my eyes on my true calling, which is to love my neighbors and serve them out of love. The beautiful part of Jesus commanding us (His followers) to love one another is that there are no boundaries of love. Love is not limited to a career, nor is love more abundant in one specific career. Love is what we called to spread and give; it is a life of love I am called to live as a follower of Christ. So, if my true calling is to love my neighbors and serve them and the Lord, then I am over-joyed to do so. I've realized during this week that I can love and serve others deeply wherever I am called, but, as of today, I am thrilled to get the chance to love others through the career of nursing. With my eyes re-focused on the Father (thanks to a week of service-learning), I am eager to serve the King as I continue to study and pursue my degree.