



Build-A-Boat: Set Sail with St. James

Written by Vicki Petrella and Colleen Gomez, St. James the Less Catholic School, Diocese of Columbus — Columbus, Ohio

“Service at St. James is different from other schools because we understood the problem and fundraised to address the need. We didn't just collect money for a cause.”

— Heather, 8th grader at St. James the Less School

What?

A few fast facts . . .

- ▶ Students and teachers wanted to help in some way after the 2004 tsunami.
- ▶ 50 eighth graders
- ▶ Teachers:
Vicki Petrella
Colleen Gomez
- ▶ Curriculum Area(s):
Language Arts, Communication Arts, Social Studies, Science, Music, Art, Religion
- ▶ Community Partners:
Precious Blood Priests

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The Big Idea

Our students answered a call for help from a Precious Blood Mission in India that serves a community devastated by the December 26, 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. They built a boat, which restored a family's income; built a daycare center; and revived a village's sense of hope.

Investigation

Together with our students, we investigated ways in which, as a parish, we could help a *Precious Blood Mission* (which is an order of priests and nuns that staff a particular parish) in another part of the world. We contacted our former assistant pastor, *Fr. Angelo Anthony*. He came and spoke to our students. **Fr. Anthony explained that a Precious Blood Mission in India needed help to restore a fishing village that had been affected by the 2004 Tsunami.**

We knew the students wanted a tangible goal toward which to work, so **we decided to earn money for a boat, fishing nets, and a motor.** We found out that it would be pos-



sible to purchase all of these items for around \$3,000. The students were amazed by how much \$3,000 could buy in a developing country. **This was a valuable lesson for our students about the disparity of wealth in the world.** ▶

Rigor, Relevance and Relationships

Service-learning has demonstrated the potential to provide a curriculum that is rich in rigor, relevance and relationships—three elements of learning that play a crucial role in the school improvement process, according to Bill Daggett and his associates at the *International Center for Leadership in Education*. Consistent with these elements, research clearly shows that students who participate in high quality service-learning experiences become more engaged in learning, more committed to their communities, and more empowered to make positive life and career choices.

International Center for Leadership in Education, www.leadered.com

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Preparation

We want students at *St. James* to appreciate the legacies of people who have “made a difference.” Beyond this, **we want the students themselves to make a positive difference and continuously create legacies of which they can be proud.** Toward this end, we use the *Celebrating Everyday Heroes* materials (available from *Partnerships Make A Difference*) in our Religion curriculum for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to help students identify positive role models in the world and in their own lives.

At the end of each year, our 6th grade students recognize their

RIGOR . . . *In Social Studies, each student completed a project about a country in the area affected by the tsunami, for which they examined damage reports and relief efforts in each of the countries.*

-- Vicki Petrella

“Everyday Heroes” at our Service-Learning Awards Ceremony. This recognition helps initiate the 6th graders into service-learning and prepares them to take a more active role the following year. Building on the 6th graders’ interest, we then implement a two-year model for service-learning that begins with student exploration of a given

project and related issues during their 7th grade year and continues with fundraising and other positive action during their 8th grade year. For the “*Build-A-Boat*” project, our 7th graders did a great deal of research. During Communication Arts class, they learned about tsunamis, relief organizations, India, weather alert systems, and the Precious Blood Order. In Social Studies, each student completed a project about a country in the area affected by the tsunami, for which they examined damage reports and relief efforts in each of the countries.

We made a connection through email and postal mail with the Precious Blood priest who was servicing a refugee camp for the people from a fishing village in the southeast corner of India. **After the research, the students had a better understanding of the issues facing the tsunami survivors and were excited that they could help.**

The teachers decided a good way to initiate the service-learning project was to choose a school theme for the year that would support the *Build-A-Boat* project. The theme “*Set Sail with St. James*” was chosen and provided the larger framework for the project and related activities. ▶

Action

In 2005, the outgoing 8th grade class wanted to leave a parting gift to contribute towards the *Build-A-Boat* project. They took a collection after their Lenten performance for the parish, and these donations served as our seed money for this project. This set a wonderful precedent for all future projects, and our students have made the collection a tradition for the last five years.

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The collection has allowed the 8th graders to “pay it forward.” The 7th graders also wanted to contribute, so they organized a bake sale for the family picnic on the last day of school.

At the beginning of the Build-A-Boat project, students, teachers, and parents brainstormed fundraising projects. Our big events included the annual OSU/Michigan Submarine Sandwich Sale and a pancake breakfast. Parents helped with our fundraising efforts by volunteering their time for our activities and events.

Eighth grade students continued the research they had started as 7th graders. **Using print sources and the Internet, they learned about tsunamis, which countries were affected in 2004, and what other countries did to help with relief.** They also researched *Red Cross* efforts and *Precious Blood Missions* around the world.

Throughout their fundraising efforts, **students worked together using spreadsheets to keep track of sandwich orders, and to make invitations for presentations to the whole school using the program Publisher.** They also made presentations for the celebration at the end. **Our original goal was to raise \$3,000, but with the proceeds from our fundraising and donations, we earned \$3,700.**

Reflection

Students reviewed the “Celebrating Everyday Heroes” materials, which **helped them think about legacy, role models, the gifts they have, and the gifts they see in people around them.** They reflected about their own role models, and we tied this in with our study of saints before students received the sacrament of Confirmation. Students studied the work of Mother Teresa of

Our students were able to realize that they could make a difference from the other side of the world by taking small actions in big ways. Mr. Kulthouse, the recipient of our money from Build-A-Boat, wrote to the children and said, “In January of 2004, I lost my oldest son in a fishing accident. He drowned in the water before my eyes. In December of that year, the tsunami took everything else from me, including my wife. My remaining son and I waited in the refugee camp for relief. Your boat has given me my life and my liveli-

RELEVANCE . . . *In January of 2004, I lost my oldest son in a fishing accident. He drowned in the water before my eyes. In December of that year, the tsunami took everything else from me, including my wife. My remaining son and I waited in the refugee camp for relief. Your boat has given me my life and my livelihood back.*

-- Mr. Kulthouse, the recipient of the money from Build-A-Boat

hood back. There will not be a day of my life when I will not say a prayer for the children of St. James the Less.”

Attached to his letter was a picture of the boat with our school’s name on it. **As an added surprise, we also received pictures of a daycare center. There was enough money left over from our contribution to provide this for the children of the area. ▀**

A typical service-learning project includes five components:

Investigation: Teachers and students investigate the community/world problems that they might potentially address. Investigation typically involves some sort of research and mapping activity.

Planning and Preparation: Teachers, students, and community members plan the learning and service activities, and address the administrative issues needed for a successful project.

Action: The “heart” of the project . . . engaging in the meaningful service experience that will help students develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and will benefit the community.

Reflection: Activities that help students understand the service-learning experience and think about its meaning and connection to them, their society, and what they have learned in school.

Demonstration/Celebration: The final experience when students, community participants and others publicly share what they have learned, celebrate the results of the service-learning project, and look ahead to the future.

Assessment is part of all activities to ensure that the learning and development that occur through service-learning can be measured, and to help diagnose student needs, provide feedback, and improve instruction.

K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit. Created by RMC Research Corporation for Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

Meaningful Service: Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service.

Link to Curriculum: Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Reflection: Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

Diversity: Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

Youth Voice: Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Partnerships: Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

Progress Monitoring: Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

Duration and Intensity: Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

Source: National Youth Leadership Council (www.nylc.org)

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Calcutta, and how her efforts impacted so many. They discussed and read her speech about being a "pencil in the hand of God." Students then wrote essays that tied all of this together and explained how their service-learning work helped them make a difference. **As a group, they wrote a song entitled "I Am a Pencil in the Hand of God," and it has become an integral part of all our service-learning celebrations.**

Students also reflected in journal format on what service-learning meant to them. Chris wrote, "Other 8th graders in neighboring schools raised money to pay for a school trip to Washington D.C., while we raised money to help someone around the world by being global citizens." Heather said, "Service at St. James is different from other schools because we understood the problem and fundraised to address the need. We didn't just collect money for a cause." ▶

Celebration/Demonstration

We were fortunate to have great publicity for this project. *The Precious Blood Priests* sent a journalist from their publication, *CPPS Today*, to interview the students and learn about our efforts. *The Catholic Times* also came to do a story about our project. The students shared their efforts and helped the journalists

Relationships . . . *It is inspiring to watch them learn. It is exciting to see the missionary spirit that is being formed in the minds and hearts of the students at this school. We are all called to be brothers and sisters, and that truth is being shared in a very tangible way at this school.*

-- Fr. Angelo

gather information for the articles. Alexandra F. said, "We get to do projects that let us show our creativity. We do our own thing while we are still learning."

Through *Jean Giesige*, the *CPPS Today* reporter, we learned that *Fr. Angelo*, who first planted the seed for the fishing boat project, said,

"It is inspiring to watch them learn. It is exciting to see the missionary spirit that is being formed in the minds and hearts of the students at this school. We are all called to be brothers and sisters, and that truth is being shared in a very tangible way at this school."

Our students created a Power-Point presentation as a summary of their project. They invited family and friends to celebrate at a party where they displayed pictures from the fundraising events that led to our success. They also built in time to thank some of our special donors and supporters. They created many displays of reflections and research projects and debuted the song that they had written as a class, which one of our 8th graders, Kim S., had put to music. **Our students' success story was shared with enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment and inspired other students and parents to become excited about future service-learning projects.** ▶

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Assessment/Evaluation

In language arts, **students conducted research and wrote formal research papers about the global issues related to this project.** In social studies, they were **assessed on their knowledge of geography and world regions.** By analyzing a United Nations report, they also demonstrated their understanding of the problems caused by the tsunami, and what those in the region who were not directly affected were doing to help their neighbors. ▶

Curriculum Connections/Standards

Social Studies: regions of the world, latitude and longitude, international issues (such as distribution of economic activities), landforms, climate, seismic activity, identifying information from primary and secondary sources

Religion: mission of service for the church, development of the Christian person's call to dignity, relationship, and service

Communication Arts: comprehension skills, writing process, utilizing a variety of print and non-print text for multiple purposes, writing informational essays or reports, using technology to summarize and present information.

Math: currency, data analysis, problem solving strategies

Science: physical science, weather, earthquakes, tsunamis

21st Century Skills

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* has identified the elements described in the sidebar on the right as the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Though the *Build-A-Boat: Set Sail with St. James* service-learning project clearly demonstrates connections to many of the skills, the following outlines two skills in detail.

Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy and Leadership and Responsibility: Our students realized that they were leaders by taking on responsibilities for learning and fundraising. They used their many individual gifts to make the project successful. They realized and appreciated each other's strengths and talents. His built real community within the class and the parish. The project allowed them to feel valued. They were each able to make a big difference in their own way. ▶

21st Century Skills addressed and demonstrated by the *Build-A-Boat* service-learning project:

- ✔ Global Awareness
- ✔ Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- ✔ Civic Literacy
- ✔ Health Literacy
- ✔ Creativity and Innovation
- ✔ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- ✔ Information Literacy
- ✔ Media Literacy
- ✔ ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy
- ✔ Flexibility and Adaptability
- ✔ Initiative and Self-Direction
- ✔ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- ✔ Productivity and Accountability
- ✔ Leadership and Responsibility

Source: *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* (www.p21.org)

So What?

Results and impact . . .

- ▶ 1,800 service and learning hours contributed
- ▶ More than 50 students participated in the *Build-A-Boat: Set Sail with St. James* project.
- ▶ \$3,700 raised to provide a boat for a fisherman who lost his in the tsunami, as well as daycare center

Now What?

A Call to Action:

Now that you have read about the St. James the Less students/teachers and their efforts to help provide support to victims of the tsunami, what could you and your students do to make a difference? Just like Vicki, Colleen, and their kids, there are people everywhere making a difference. Let us know what you and others in your community are doing by posting your information on . . . partnershipsmakeadifference.org

To learn more about how to support disaster relief, log on to . . .

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org

In addition, you may find these sites helpful:

FEMA:
www.fema.gov

UNICEF USA:
www.unicefusa.org

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Impact: Kids Using Their “Best Stuff” to Make A Difference

How did your students use their individual gifts, passions and strength of character in carrying out this project?

They used their gifts of writing, composing, singing, and technological expertise. They used their talents of persuasion to sell and their artistic abilities to draw advertisements. They used their speaking talents to present information. Each one shared the responsibility of fundraising by making and selling baked goods and submarine sandwiches.

Do you think your students felt empowered by this project? What “voice” and leadership roles did they have? How did they “take charge” of certain aspects of the project?

Yes, our students felt empowered. The pictures of the boat and daycare along with Mr. Kulthouse’s letter made a huge impact on the children. **There was no doubt in anyone’s mind that we had made a difference.** These students set the standards for service-learning at St. James. They left big shoes for future classes to fill.

In what ways did they develop a deeper appreciation/understanding of other viewpoints, perspectives, circumstances and/or backgrounds?

Service-learning helped them have a better understanding of problems around the world and allowed them to take ownership for finding a solution that they could accomplish.

How did they experience and demonstrate a stronger sense of community (within the classroom, locally and/or globally) and/or civic engagement?

The students educated the parish community when they requested its support. They also felt a close connection to the people of the fishing village in India. They had a better appreciation for the *Precious Blood* priests who serve our parish and those who serve around the world.

What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?

Our students were proud that they raised enough money to change many lives with simple actions. They also felt valued when they read the letter from the man who received the boat we bought. They were especially proud that the *Dominican Sisters* used the surplus to build a steel-framed daycare center for children who had lost a parent in the tsunami.

From the students’ perspectives, what difference did their efforts make?

They knew and believed that they gave people across the world hope and a brighter future.

Yaw said, “At St. James, we are changing the world; we just have to do it one village at a time!”

“At St. James, we are changing the world; we just have to do it one village at a time!”
-- Yaw, 8th grader

Are there any ways you haven’t yet mentioned in which the project benefited your students? Your school? The community/world and those you were trying to help?

Our project has been an inspiration to those who have heard our suc-

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cess story. It set the bar for future service-learning at *St. James*. It made our parish aware of the great things our kids were doing at the school. Without our help, this man and his family would still be struggling to make a living and to shake off his depression from losing his wife, son, and livelihood. As an added bonus, we were able to help children have a safe place to stay while their single parents worked to make a better life for them, instead of roaming the streets without supervision. ▶

Other Insights . . . Reflections of the Teacher

We always reflect on what worked and what needed improvement. We decided (in the future) we needed to incorporate the entire school in the service-learning project. ▶

“ (This service-learning project) excited me and allowed me to change up my teaching and explore another creative outlet. ”

— Colleen Gomez, *St. James the Less School*

“ I can't describe how incredible it was when I read Mr. Kulfhouse's letter and saw the pictures. It made such an impact on the students when we shared it with them. This really was an example to all of our students about how service-learning can be so successful. ”

— Vicki Petrella, *St. James the Less School*

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