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PRESS RELEASE

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VIANNEY SERVICE GROUP RECEIVES COMMENDATION IN NEW ORLEANS FROM MAYOR NAGIN

April 20, 2008—Last spring, a group of St. John Vianney High School students were among the first teenagers to enter New Orleans to help clean up the lingering effects of Hurricane Katrina. This year, they were joined by many other St. Louis teens in the clean-up mission, but the 17 Vianney students traveling and working together received something unique: a framed proclamation from Mayor C. Ray Nagin commending them for aiding the New Orleans restoration efforts.

Their story and commendation deserves mention in area media outlets, given their selfless service and the continued interest in the plight of those living in New Orleans.

Banding together for a Holy Week hiatus to the Big Easy, the 17 Vianney student volunteers drove in two vans (and one car) with five adult chaperones (two teachers and three parents of participating students) to a base of operations at Camp Restore in St. Bernard Parish, run by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is located next door to Vianney, hence the natural collaboration.

Once settled into Camp Restore, a school-like facility in the remote, still largely vacated suburbs, the Vianney group rehabbed homes and buildings. They provided hands-on help with drywalling, taping, door and window hanging and other services. "These kids worked hard--eight hours of manual labor each day--unlike some groups that volunteer a while and call it quits," said Teacher Nate Stein, one of the trip's moderators. At night, they'd explore the French Quarter and savor Cajun cuisine.

Co-moderator Gene Gladstone, the school's technology director, said a city dump truck operator made a point of stopping to commend the hardworking boys for aiding the downtrodden city. "We left staggered by the number of vacant lots and missing homes in the suburban areas. The situation opened up lots of questions,

particularly, why haven't people been able to more quickly fix this problem?" said Gladstone. His sons James and DeMarco are juniors at Vianney High School.

The highlight of the trip occurred early in the week when they visited the home of Vianney Grad Jim Lamping (Class of 1965) and his wife Debby. Long-time residents of New Orleans, they were one of the few residents to avoid flooding altogether, since their home just south of Lake Pontchartrain stood

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several feet above flood level. "Everyone we knew was affected by the flood, some worse than others," said Debby Lamping. The Lampings evacuated for a time but were some of the first to return to a city on life support. A nephew acted as a first responder right after Hurricane Katrina, cruising the city by boat and recording what he saw and heard.

When the Vianney group dined at the Lampings, they got a firsthand account of the flood's devastation, along with shocking visuals in the form of photo albums. Jim Lamping, who'd been out of touch with his alma mater for years, contacted Vianney last fall to request receipt of the alumni publication, "The Black & Gold." In that publication, he read that a Vianney group was headed his way in March. Without hesitation, he and wife Debby treated the group to authentic New Orleans cuisine (shrimp etouffe, red beans and rice, jambalaya), outfitted them with t-shirts sporting the city's symbol of hope (a fleur-di-lis) and lined up an in-home ceremony to pass on the mayoral commendation.

New Orleans City Councilwoman Shelley Midura presented the proclamation to the student volunteers. The framed plaque read, "Be it known that Mayor C. Ray Nagin has this day proclaimed a special day of honor bestowed upon St. John Vianney High School from Kirkwood, Mo., in recognition of the selfless leadership your students have demonstrated by volunteering their time, energy and commitment to rebuild New Orleans, attested to this 24 day of March, Two Thousand and Eight, signed Mayor C. Ray Nagin."

"We were so touched by these kids getting involved. I don't know that we'd be doing this on our spring break," said Debby Lamping.

"We're on for next year," said Trip Moderator Nate Stein. Co-moderator Gene Gladstone smiled his confirmation.

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