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Winterizing Homes and Warming Hearts

BY ROBERT MONCRIEFF

On Sunday, January 20, a group of 87 volunteers from Andrews University braved 14-degree weather to insulate houses in Benton Harbor against the harsh Michigan elements. The volunteers, which included students, faculty, staff and Pioneer Memorial Church members, winterized a total of 17 homes.

The project began under the direction of New Life Ministries when Timothy Nixon, chaplain, asked Andrews alum Louise Albert to search for opportunities for Andrews students to reach out into the community. A local pastor told Louise of the need to insulate homes in Benton Harbor and, with the help of a local radio DJ, they created a list of residents whose homes were in need of winterization.

Having decided on a project, Louise turned to local hardware store owner Garren Dent to learn the best winterization methods. Together they came up with a plan to staple strips of plastic and cardboard to the inside of windows. Another problem arose in the need for staple guns. This

too, however, was resolved when Ron Whitehead and Vern Byrd, from the Center for Youth Evangelism, and Habitat for Humanity loaned the winterization teams 17 staple guns.

What started out as a New Life initiative ultimately drew volunteers from other campus worship organizations, including Mosaic, Impact, the Basement and Fusion. In fact, a \$400 offering collected at Fusion funded



Students stapled strips of plastic and cardboard to the inside of windows to winterize homes in Benton Harbor, Michigan.

most of the winterization project.

As the volunteers began to work, opportunities developed beyond the original list of houses. At one house, the owners told the workers of another family whose home was in need of winterization. The Andrews team then worked on this second house, where the owners told of yet another family, whom

the volunteers then went to assist. The workers embraced the opportunity. “You should have given us more houses,” said a volunteer named Josh.

“This was a great way to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday,” said Louise.

In temperatures that consistently drop below ten degrees, simple measures like insulating windows with plastic sheets can make a significant difference in the comfort of a house. But not only does it improve the living conditions for residents; it also has a positive economic impact by lowering heating costs. “It was good to know that we could help lower her electric bill,” said a volunteer named Raelynn.

“It was a great way to get into homes and help in a tangible way,” says Louise. “It’s one thing to have people come into your house and pray for you. When they work for you, it opens your heart in different way.”

“I learned today that in the midst of cold weather and poverty, happiness is still able to affect people’s lives,” remarked another participant who was blessed by the experience. “Kindness and love is truly the key—it is how we can easily show Christ to those who usually don’t see Him.”



Volunteers bundled up before heading out in the cold Michigan weather to winterize homes in Benton Harbor.

Robert Moncrieff is a student news writer for University Relations at Andrews University.