

Drew Pollick

Newark Benedictine Volunteers - Newark, NJ

After living in Newark, NJ for two and a half years and now in the South Bronx, one thing becomes clearer to me on every subway ride – I was meant to live and work with the poor and oppressed. The label of “poor and oppressed” does not seem to fit into my idyllic view of the people with whom I have worked, however.

After graduating in January 1999, I worked some odd jobs, lived with my folks, and economically traveled all over the U.S. backpacking and mountaineering. In May of that same year, I started my one-year term of volunteer service with the Newark Benedictine Volunteers. The Benedictine Monks of Newark Abbey sponsor this program, under the guidance of Fr. Albert Holtz. The monks “offer others an opportunity to share our spiritual vision, to reflect more deeply about Gospel values and the Christian meaning of life, and at the same time incarnate those values in works of Christian justice and charity.”

(www.newarkabbey.org)

My first assignment was to the abbey school St. Benedict’s Preparatory School on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. My job with the school was to supervise students and assist other teachers in the 170-student Freshmen Backpacking project. Later, my skills as a Wilderness First Responder and seasoned mountaineer were put to use as we hiked in teams of eight to ten down 50 miles of the Appalachian Trail. This was one of the rewarding highlights that had drawn me to Newark Abbey.

Following the project, I served many different roles around the school and the abbey. Specifically, I taught chemistry and algebra, revitalized a school sponsored residence program for 12 boys, and helped organize other events in the community like Monkfest. In my volunteer position, I was also afforded the unique opportunity to experience Benedictine monastic life through table readings at meals, daily prayers, and close contact with monks of varied talents and experiences in a host of other settings.

I cherish the days I spent in the residence program at St. Benedict’s Prep. The kids I lived with and worked so hard for have forever earned a place in my heart. The warm, caring, and insightful memories and experiences will be with me the rest of my life. I am forever changed. This new path, one that was obscured from my view, is leading me to experiences I thought never before possible.

In June of 2001, I remained at St. Benedict’s as a teacher but moved out of Newark to a school owned Appalachian Mountain property. My job there was to refurbish the property and its cabins. In August, I accepted a position with the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Teachers College, Columbia University where I am both an employee and graduate student. I now reside as a volunteer in the Christ House in the South Bronx where I work with men who have sought political asylum in the United States as they are victims of torture.