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96-62

February 28, 1996

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **(Photos available)**

EIU CONGREGATION LENDING A HELPING HAND

CHARLESTON -- About three weeks from now, more than 100 Eastern Illinois University students, faculty and staff will leave Charleston on a week-long journey to various parts of the country to work in soup kitchens, help AIDS patients, rehabilitate homes and assist runaway teens.

The EIU group, joined by several community leaders and high school students, is participating in the fourth annual Alternative Spring Break Program sponsored by the Newman Catholic Center's Student Volunteer Center at Eastern.

They will spend spring break, March 15-23, at 14 sites in 13 states and the District of Columbia volunteering their time and energies to helping those less fortunate.

Holly Walters, volunteer coordinator, said this year's response to the Alternative Spring Break program has been "tremendous."

"Eight of the 14 sites are already filled and the others are filling fast. Every year, the number of participating sites and volunteers grows. We have gone from

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ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK PROGRAM

three sites and 17 participants in the program's first year, to 14 sites and 115 participants this year," Walters said. "Many of the student volunteers in previous years keep coming back because they found their experiences to be so worthwhile."

Worthwhile is the key word, according to Tony Cenkar. The senior finance and sociology major said helping the less fortunate is the least students can do.

"Some people aren't lucky enough to go to college or have the life we lead," said Cenkar, who will be going on his second trip. "I have some spare time on my hands, so I'd like to put it to good use."

Walters said a send-off dinner is planned for March 15, with four groups leaving that evening and the remainder on Saturday morning.

They will depart from Charleston in rented vans to sites in Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and West Virginia.

The cost to volunteers is \$100, which covers food, housing and transportation. Some students choose their sites, while others are assigned them. Walters noted that most sites provide on-site accommodations, but that can mean volunteers using sleeping bags.

"This is not a vacation, but rather an opportunity for students and others, regardless of their religious affiliation, to participate in meaningful volunteer projects. It's an opportunity for students to view other cultures right here in our own country and to deal firsthand with the issues plaguing our country," Walters said.

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ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK PROGRAM

Acknowledging current issues, however, is not the only reason students have for participating in the Alternative Spring Break Program. Bobbi Jo Staley, a junior elementary education major, said her experiences in the program will help determine her career plans.

"A lot of people living in the Appalachians are poor," said Staley, who will be going on her first trip. "I want to go there to see what I can do to help them. I'm also thinking about teaching there some day and I want to see what life is like there."

Walters explained that Eastern's Alternative Spring Break Program is unique not only because of its affordability and diversity of sites, but because volunteers are not required to raise money for the trips -- a common practice at other universities. Eastern's missions are funded in part by the Newman Catholic Center and through private donations.

Walters said the Covenant House in New Orleans has been the most requested site by volunteers, who will assist with maintenance projects and activities at this shelter housing 80 to 100 16- to 21-year-old runaway youth. EIU journalism professor Mary Durkin Wohlrabe will lead that trip.

Another popular site has been God's Love, We Deliver in New York City. Volunteers, including EIU alumnae Angie Glick of Charleston, will help prepare and distribute 1,500 meals daily to homebound HIV/AIDS patients. One day will be spent sightseeing.

Although both of these sites are filled, there are still openings for volunteers at

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ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK PROGRAM

six other sites, including Habitat for Humanity in Battle Creek, Mich., where there is a critical need to rehabilitate homes; the Christian Appalachian Project in Lexington, Ky., where EIU students will join more than 100 college students from around the country to help repair homes; and Nazareth Farm in Salem, W.Va., where volunteers will spend the week working on home repair projects and meeting community members.

Other openings are at the Edmundite Mission Corps in Selma, Ala., where participants, including Craig Eckert, associate professor of sociology, will help this disadvantaged African American community with construction and social service projects; the Anthony Family Shelter in Wichita, Kan., where students will spend the week cleaning rooms, painting and doing yard work at a temporary shelter for families; and at the Jonah House in Baltimore, Md., where volunteers and site leader Roy Lanham, director of the Newman Catholic Center, will work on an abandoned house, attend seminars on non-violence, resistance, war and peace, and participate in a vigil at the Pentagon, White House and Department of Energy.

Eleven volunteers will travel to Meadow Creek in Fox, Ark., where they will spend the week learning about and working with the environment. Another group of 11 will visit the Sioux YMCA in Dupree, S.D., where they will experience the lifestyle of Native Americans on a reservation and assist with various work projects. In Minneapolis, Minn., eight EIU volunteers will participate in several Catholic Charities activities, including working in a soup kitchen and helping at an AIDS hospice.

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ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK PROGRAM

Eight students, led by Al Joyner, associate professor of management/marketing, will stay at the St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia, Pa., preparing meals in a soup kitchen and working in a thrift store.

Father Joe Ring of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Charleston, will escort 10 Eastern students to ASB 2111 in Tahlequah, Okla., to work with the Christian Children's Fund, assembling playground equipment; Habitat for Humanity, rehabing a home; Boys Ranch, working on a ranch with boys with behavior problems; and visiting and working with the Cherokee Nation.

Shelly White, Eastern's acting director of orientation, will accompany seven student volunteers to Sojourners in Washington, D.C., to spend the week learning about the Sojourner community, while working with their Neighborhood Center's after school and food programs and other social ministry projects.

An important aspect of the Alternative Spring Break Program is the time spent by volunteers reflecting on their experiences. "We need to ask ourselves what it is we can continue doing to help others after our week's work is over. While we give it our best effort, we can't solve the world's problems in a week; the work must be ongoing," Walters recounted.

On the lighter side, Walters said volunteers are treated to a slide show of the week's activities.