

St. Mary School 2025 Senior Class Mission Trip – Giving Back

The St. Mary School senior class just returned from their mission trip. They spent three days at the Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Retreat Center. The Center is located on 760 acres in western Pennsylvania. Villa Maria is the residence of Catholic sisters retired from active ministry. It's a working farm with gardens, wetlands, a bird sanctuary, nature trails, herb gardens, a gift shop, retreat center, and apartments.

The sisters in residence established a viable, productive farm. In keeping with their mission of helping those in need, a large portion of produce from the farm is donated to local food banks, shelters and parishes. The farm serves as a symbol of struggle and sacrifice made by the Sisters of the Humility of Mary; a Roman Catholic religious congregation founded in France in 1855. The site also includes the Magnificat Chapel, the center of spiritual life at Villa Maria.

The students provided some much-needed help. They cleaned up a walking trail, pulled weed tarps, weeded and planted high tunnels, pruned blueberry bushes, raked herb gardens, potted tulips and Easter Lilies, cleaned up the green house, and organized a potting shed. Tears of joy were shared when they departed on the last day. "These kids from St. Mary's, did in two days, what it would have taken us a month to do," said John Moreira, Villa Maria's farm manager.

The Sisters shared some advice with the students. "Sometimes the road not taken can lead you to where you need to be, and in order to have a good relationship with any one else, you first need to know yourself." They also shared with them, "Life is hard and you need an anchor."

After Villa Maria, the students went to the City Rescue Mission in New Castle, Pennsylvania. They learned about the services provided and spent some time sorting clothes and cleaning the facility.

Senior Lizzie Leggett said, "This trip was amazing! It was so good to see how we worked as a team to get so much done to help these people. I loved how we all bonded over helping others." Anthony Grant said, "These Sisters of the Humility of Mary have devoted so much to this community, it was nice for our class to be able to do the same."

The St. Mary Class of 2025 is donating \$500 towards scholarships for a Grow Camp, sponsored by the Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center. The scholarships are used to fund student campers.