



Faith CREW takes Omaha 'Urban Plunge'

By Karma Vander Velde
Staff writer

Rock Valley's Faith Reformed Church sent 19 of their junior high youth group to Omaha on June 6-8 to participate in a ministry called Urban Plunge. The group spent the weekend in Omaha's inner-city visiting nine different faith-based organizations that are working among the poor.

Splitting into two groups, the Rock Valley youth spent time talking and praying with homeless people on the streets, serving at a rescue mission, visiting a jail, and handing out clothes/food to those in need. It has been found that these experiences often help those involved discover what their passions and gifts are and how, in turn, these can be used in life.

"Our vision is to provide an opportunity for groups to leave the comfort of the suburbs and the safety of the small town to enter Omaha's inner city where they discover how they can come alongside an existing social entrepreneur to help meet the needs of the poor, homeless, and destitute," explained Sara Harris. •Continued on Page 8A



Tyler Dolieslager and Beth Westra visit with a man from Omaha during the Urban Plunge experience they took part in last month.

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Development Manager.

The comments from the Rock Valley group about their experiences in Omaha were very positive. Upcoming 8th grader Brendan Harberts said, "God gave me the courage to talk to homeless people and give them encouragement." Jana Vermeer, also a soon-to-be 8th grader, saw God at work, "when the homeless people were so grateful for a place to sleep and hard donuts. My comfort zone has grown and I'm not afraid to do things that other people would consider 'uncool'."

Pat Heemstra, Youth Director at Faith Reformed Church, said the weekend left her appreciating Urban Plunge's perspective. "Their philosophy is more about enabling people to see where God is at work and to join Him rather than to just accomplish a task or good deed," she observed.

The youth group experienced the nine ministries in

46 hours and Heemstra liked the variety of opportunities the youth had to minister to others. They were encouraged to see beyond themselves. This new viewpoint became evident as they sat in a hallway one night while a tornado siren sounded outside. The students began praying first for the homeless people they had met who were out in the storm instead of immediately thinking of only their own safety.

"Our objective is not to provide a 'tour of poverty' but to help participants grasp how they can use their talents and passions to assist a social service agency, or even start something similar in their own towns," stated Harris. "We take participants out of their comfort zones, let them experience first-hand what is happening in the inner-city, discover their passions and talents and challenge them to make a difference!"