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Serving Refugee Populations in the USA

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Last year, 11 Cedarville University students traveled to Clarkston, Georgia, over spring break to serve the most diverse city in the country. This year, the group has doubled, with 22 Cedarville students, from freshmen to third-year professional pharmacy students, traveling to Clarkston to serve at a local school and clinic from March 3-9.

The students, accompanied by Dr. Brenda Pahl, assistant professor of pharmacy practice, will invest in the lives of the hundreds of refugees from all over the world. Since their last visit, a new clinic has opened, closer to the homes of the refugees. Some Cedarville students will serve at the new clinic while others will minister at a local school. Many teachers struggle with language barriers and the Cedarville students will assist them as they teach children from a variety of backgrounds.

Along with their service opportunities, the Cedarville group will visit several places of worship including a Buddhist temple, a Hindu temple and a mosque. They will also experience the refugees' cultures through local ethnic restaurants and home visits.

"It is so important to be aware of different cultures and how to minister to them," said Pahl, who is excited to return to Georgia after leading the group last year. "This is an opportunity for students to see multiple cultures without leaving the U.S. They are being exposed to new opportunities and can learn how to be the hands and feet of Jesus to anybody, no matter where they're from."

Mikaila O'Keefe, a junior social work major from Twinsburg, Ohio, traveled to Clarkston last year and will return this year. She will co-lead the group, focusing on team building and leading debriefing sessions.

"Last year was different than I expected," said O'Keefe. "It was more educationally focused, whereas this year will be more service-focused. Last year I learned so much about various cultures and about my own prejudices and stereotypes. We got to visit their worship services, too, and I saw how other cultures worship my God and how God uses their traditions for his praise and glory."

O'Keefe did not originally plan on returning this year, but was asked to join the team and accepted after she prayed and felt God's leading.

"I know there are many medical students on this trip who have a desire to go into missions, and I hope this trip will give them direction and experience for future opportunities," she said. "My social work classes prepared me for this trip by discussing cultural diversity, and the whole community at Cedarville is on fire for missions. Students are excited to go and serve, and so am I."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.