

While most College students are opening gifts with their families on Christmas morning, Assumption College freshman Grace Clark ’19 will be delivering presents, along with much needed food and water, to members of Haiti’s destitute communities.

Clark is one of a dozen individuals traveling to Haiti with the Be Like Brit (BLB) organization for the Christmas break (Dec. 19-27). BLB was founded by Len and Cherylann Gengel to honor the memory of their daughter, Britney, who was killed in a 2010 earthquake that devastated the island nation. The orphanage the organization has established there, which houses 66 Haitian children, provides a safe, nurturing environment where children can grow, learn and thrive.

“I wanted to do more over break,” said Clark. “I love my family and I’m definitely going to miss our big Christmas party and seeing my nieces and nephews excited about Santa. Christmas is the season of giving and my family understands that’s what I will be doing.”

Clark, a Worcester native, first heard about BLB as a senior at St. Peter Marian High School. Feeling the need to help, she worked with both her principal and BLB to organize a trip to Haiti. After graduation last June, the St. Peter Marian students traveled to Haiti to help build a house for a family who had lost theirs in the earthquake. “The family we built the house for was living in a tent on rented property that was really expensive for Haiti standards,” said Clark. “When we visited them, his wife welcomed us with open arms, and handed me her two-month-old baby to hold. They were so open and friendly—they had so little but wanted to show it off to us.”

When Clark returns to Haiti, she’ll be bringing gifts for that baby.

In order to afford her spot on the trip, Clark spent the summer fundraising—in between working two jobs and volunteering at BLB and Why Me?, a non-profit childhood cancer organization that offers care and support for children and families dealing with cancer. In order to raise the $1,950 necessary for the trip (which includes flights, lodging, and Christmas gifts and supplies for the community outreach), Clark held yard sales and sold Haitian bracelets (part of the proceeds of the sales benefited the people of Haiti). “They’re lucky we have to pay our own way, or else I would be going all of the time,” she said.

Clark is attending Assumption on an Adopt-a-Student scholarship, which provides full tuition to a student who would otherwise be unable to attend a Catholic college. She’s a biology/pre-med major hoping to one day become a missionary doctor, a career goal she discovered after her June trip to Haiti. “During the trip, Len told us a story about how they found a little gravesite on the land that would eventually become the orphanage. They found out that it was an infant that had died from mono,” she said. “There are so many deaths in countries like Haiti that could be prevented if they just had the knowledge and the supplies. That’s when I officially decided to change my major to bio.”

Outside of the classroom, Clark serves as a peer minister and a student ambassador, is a member of the Adapt Club, and is participating in a Service Immersion Trip (SEND) this spring to Washington, D.C. While she has always been community service-minded, her time at Assumption has further inspired her mission to give back.

“My Assumption education has definitely broadened my horizons when it comes to helping others,” she said. “There are so many opportunities available for students to go out into the world and assist those in need, like with the variety of SEND trips and Reach Out Center volunteer sites. I feel like it has increased my desire to volunteer because it has shown me all of the different ways in which we can help others.”