

Youth Mission Trip
Introductory Remarks by Carmen Lawler
July 30, 2023

Well, here we are, back from the “Go and Do” Mission Trip to Nashville with the Faith Lutheran youth group. And it was aptly titled with lots of going and lots of doing. But also every night, ample time for discussing and reflecting. “Where did you see God today?” The big newly combined group of youth pondered and shared freely and discussed and listened to each other. If only you could have been there, but you’ll hear in just a moment from the girls and hopefully get a glimpse. And that question “Where did you see God?” has me marveling and recognizing that surely God was in it all: Yes, in the people we encountered whose lives were so very different from our own, in those we saw helping in sustained extraordinary ways, in those who were compelled to find and provide sources of help in new and innovative ways, but also in the invitation to go, youth saying yes, your support, the expert planning and the inevitable adjusting “on the fly” when circumstances changed, the welcome and inclusion so freely extended to all of us “newbies” on the trip, and the experiences had that will have impacts we can’t begin to know.

The girls started working on what they would say to all of you in the car, the “Presmobile” , as we began our journey home. They went so quickly from “We all have to do this?” and “How long does this have to be?” to having things to share and then wanting to share with all of you that this driver had a bit of whiplash. They all talked at once, vying for the floor, “Listen to this” I heard. And they edited each others work, and they made suggestions, and they supported each other, and they let each other know when they’d had enough feedback and constructive criticism. They discussed how many sentences a paragraph should have and commas, delighting an English teacher somewhere, but mostly they talked about what they experienced and what they wanted to share with all of you and who would get to share what. I was so caught up in their enthusiasm I forgot I was in a caravan. (But we caught up).

And this shouldn’t have surprised me, because as another leader pointed out our group may have been young and all of us new to mission trips (including this adult leader), and even though most of them may start out quiet, they were always fully present. They didn’t miss anything; they were engaged. They worked at all their service projects, and did with smiles for everyone. They were open to all these new experiences. They listened. They worked. And asked questions and followed instructions. And shared their thoughts. And they didn’t lose sight of why they’d come. They shared God’s love with strangers, each other, and new friends they made on this trip. They attended to small tasks and big tasks. They came ready to serve and have seen how meaningful service can be to others and to themselves.

And although I could talk endlessly about what I witnessed this week, and even my own transformative experiences while on this trip, it is time to hear from our youth.

Mission Trip Report

Addie Wray

July 30, 2023

On this mission trip, to Nashville, Tennessee, one of the places I did service work at is an organization called Soles for Souls. Soles for Souls goes to places across the world to give people struggling the shoes they need. The shoes can be new or used and can be donated by a business, a person, an organization or a group. Shoes may not seem as big of a necessity as other things, but they can change someone's life. It can mean confidence, a job, or even just comfort. Also, along with giving the women shoes they also provide free business classes for them so they can start a business with them and earn money.

Our group that went to Soles for Souls helped rubber band shoes together and organize them into boxes. We did four hours worth of hard but rewarding work and filled many boxes with shoes going towards the struggling communities. It's so fulfilling to know we made such a difference in these peoples lives.

I also want to talk about one of the workers named Shawn. He goes to college for physical therapy while working at Soles for Souls. I thought it was amazing how much of his time and hard work he was putting into Soles for Souls and how grateful he was for us. He said without volunteers like us Soles for Souls would be nothing.

Mission Trip Report

Emma Halle

July 30, 2023

On this specific day it was sprinkling. So I was at this event called people loving Nashville where there is food, clothes and music for the unhomed to come and eat, have a fun time, and get clothes. Our job was to go and talk to the unhomed and to just get to know their story. I was with an adult leader in our group (her name is Patty) and some other kids from our group, and we went up to this lady and started talking to her and she was telling us about her story and her struggles and then the rain stops and a rainbow appeared and the lady gets distracted and she said " I love rainbows" and so we talk to her about rainbows for a little bit and then the topic about what a rainbow means to her came up and she said "well, what a rainbow means to me is that God is here and reminding her that he will fulfill his proficiency's and that he will keep her safe." I thought this was a really cool experience and I learned that God shows up in different things to different people and for this lady she saw God in a rainbow. This was a reminder to me that God lives in everyone.

Another place I was at was called dream streets, At dream streets it's like a day care where parents drop off their kids and then the kids are there for most of the day. Our job was to play with the kids and at first the kids were shy but eventually got comfortable being around us and once they got used to us, the kids were constantly asking " can you push me on the swing" "come play Gaga ball" "can you play a game with me". This showed me that a simple " hi what's your name" quickly turns into the kids crying at the end of the day, begging us to not leave, push them one last time on the swing, and not wanting to end hugs. The kids were also asking if we could be there actual sister and come home with them that makes me think that they don't have a lot of family at home to give them the attention that they need or want. This is how impactful a simple "hello" can be to some people.

Mission Trip Report

Carly Schilling

July 30, 2023

“Small things you do can be big to someone else”. People tend to tell me that a lot. I never really understood what it truly meant until I went on this trip. One of the organizations that helped me to realize this was, Grace Works. Grace Works is made up of a thrift store, furniture store, and a food pantry for people struggling with food insecurity. This certain day I ended up organizing books. After we were done one of the workers came over and the smile on her face made the 2 hours worth it. Another organization I worked with was Second Harvest. At Second Harvest they have volunteers come in and package food. That food gets delivered to all over the country for people with little to no food. Volunteers are divided into groups. Box builders, packagers, stackers, refillers, and what I was, a food packer. At the end they talked to us about people that got impacted by these boxes and how it changed their lives. Me just volunteering for 2 hours could impact and change others lives.

Mission Trip Report
Mackenzie Jackan
July 30, 2023

Hello everyone! Today, I stand before you with gratitude and joy. We embarked on this journey to Tennessee as a team of 23 individuals, including four wonderful youth leaders, united in our shared purpose of serving God and spreading His love.

My mission began at Dream Streets, a non-profit daycare. The kids were welcoming and each one of them had so much personality to share. Serving these children opened my eyes to the beauty of selflessness and compassion. Through activities like playing board games and creative art sessions, I discovered that we were not just teaching but learning valuable lessons. The children at Dream Streets were amazing to get to know and spend time with.

From there, we moved onto a thrift store and food pantry called Graceworks. My job was to sort through clothes and put out linen. The act of sorting these donations revealed the essence in giving back. Each donated item held its own unique story and potential to make a difference in someone else's life who really needed it. This humbling experience reminded me that even the smallest acts of kindness can have a ripple effect, touching countless lives in ways we may never fully comprehend.

But our mission did not end there; we were also blessed with another incredible opportunity to serve with "People Loving Nashville." This organization's mission is to support the unhoused population in the city and provide them with meals and resources.. We were eager to learn about their lives, listen to their stories, and share God's light through our interactions.

Through our conversations with the unhoused, I learned about resilience, faith, and the power of human connection. I discovered that being present and offering a listening ear were powerful ways to extend dignity, respect, and love to those who often felt forgotten by society. We became vessels of God's love, witnessing firsthand how even the simplest acts of kindness could bring hope and belonging to those in need.

As I stand here today, I want to thank all of you for your unwavering support and prayers throughout this journey. I feel that this mission trip was just the beginning of my lifelong calling to serve God and humanity. I will forever carry the lessons and memories of our experiences close to my heart, knowing that serving those in need is not just an event but a way of life.

May we all be inspired by the spirit of love, compassion, and unity that we experienced during this mission. Let us embrace every individual as a child of God, showing kindness to all and being a beacon of light in a world that sometimes feels dark and indifferent.

Together, we can make a difference, one compassionate act at a time. Let us continue to serve, love, and share God's light in our community and beyond. Thank you, God bless you all.