

**OAKLAND, MARYLAND MISSION TRIP, JULY**  
**2009**

This past July, 27 members and friends of Harlingen Church headed to Oakland, Maryland to perform minor home repairs for the elderly and ailing. Oakland is a small town, similar in size to some of our towns, but very different from us economically and socially. Many of the residents have never been farther than 50 miles from home. They have lived and worked there all their lives. They are very comfortable with that. They are a fiercely independent and self-sufficient people. I would guess that most of them have productive gardens and that they preserve a lot of food for the winter. They have cool, breezy summers and get 140” of snow in the winter.

This year’s theme was “Reveal”. The concept is taken from Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.” (NLT)

In this passage, Jesus *revealed* who he was and what his mission was all about—both for the world and for each individual. We looked at five different areas that Jesus revealed in verses 18 and 19—areas that have powerful applications both to a world in desperate physical need and to people who desperately need a relationship with Jesus.

**DAILY THEMES**

Sunday: Reveal

Monday: Hope for the Poor

Tuesday: Release for the Captives

Wednesday: Sight for the Blind

Thursday: Freedom for the Oppressed

Friday: The Lord’s Favor

You will notice several references saying that Machias, Maine was a better camp. I think many of us felt that. The theme last summer was “Love Outloud”. I think it is a theme that cannot be topped, and as a consequence, any other theme seems inadequate. Also, this summer there was one exceedingly large group of 160 from one church. This meant that with 65 work crews, each crew had at least 2 people from this large group. This changed the dynamic of the work crews, as well as the camp, as they seemed to stay together, and not reach out to meet or include others. Previous camps have had groups as large as 40-50, which work well. At the Machias camp, everyone mingled and included everyone else.

But, every camp is different, and every camp is good.

During all our preparations for camp, we asked the Lord to reveal himself to us and to our residents through us. Despite the references in the individual write-ups to few God Sightings, I believe that God was definitely there, and that He revealed himself to us through our residents. We might not have been looking for Him there.

Wednesday is a half day of work, with the rest of the day spent ‘experiencing the area’. Our activity was to raft the Narrows section of the Cheat River. Most of us opted to ride in “rubber duckies”, which are like inflatable kayaks. Despite the fact that for part of the afternoon it poured so hard you could not see the boat in front of you, we had a good time. The group really bonded during this event. We followed the boat trip with a good meal at a local café.

Having Joe McLean, our youth leader, on the trip was wonderful. We divided the evening devotions into youth devotions and adult devotions. Each group had a different take on the daily topic, due to our ages and our experiences, and we were able to relate well.

The following comments are from the trip participants. Everyone had a different experience, as well as a different perspective—for some this was the first trip, for some the fourth; our ages ranged from 13-73; some of us are seekers, some have been walking with Christ for a long time. We were very different individuals growing together. One thing we had in common was that we all had a good time. Every year we relearn the lesson that serving others, serving the Lord, is very uplifting.

These are in no particular order.

**Victoria Coram, youth**

This year my peers at Harlingen Reformed Church and I ventured out to Oakland, Maryland. This year was my fourth year attending a mission trip and like previous years, it was amazing. Not only did I make new friends, but my pre-existing ones evolved. The first day you get to camp you are randomly assigned into “crews”. This is by far the most nerve-racking part of the week. You are completely thrown out of your comfort zone and forced to meet people who you have never met before. After about 2 minutes of complete and utter terror, your crew becomes your family. I had two boys, and four girls in my crew, including myself.

Our adult leaders' name was Rosemary, a faithful Christian from upstate New York. She guided and motivated us the entire week to stay on task. The oldest kid in our crew was Mike and he was the Work Director. He really pushed us to get things done and yet motivated us to do them carefully and with respect. The other boy in my crew was named Doug. He, along with one other person in my crew, came with a youth group with over 160 people in it. He was our quartermaster and did an awesome job at getting us any tools that we lacked during the week. Next is Ally, who like me, is from New Jersey. She and I got along the best because of our upbringing and sense of humor. Ally was the breakmaker and did an amazing job at getting us food and water for the day. Finally, there is Ellen. She, along with Doug, was from the overwhelming youth group from Virginia. Ellen was the organizer and she got lucky. It is the ideal job. You don't do anything except carry around a first aid kit. Everyone is always so nervous to get "stuck" with the job of Devotion Leader, but I love it. This was my second year as Devotion Leader and I find it really helps me get closer to God, as well as my crew. I love the lessons that the camp has and I love sharing them with my crew.

This year my job was all about painting. Our first resident, Grace Rush, was an elderly woman who was living with one of her grandchildren. At first, I felt really useless because we were painting the interior of her home. We had to go over white walls with white paint. After a day or two I realized that the real reward was the appreciation Grace had and the comfort she felt with us there. My next resident's name was Rachel Wolf. We had to paint the outside of her mobile home and weed around her property. Rachel was really an outstanding person. She had just lost her husband who she married 60 years prior and yet she always had a smile on her face. She appreciated our work so much that she always did devotions with us and always wanted to chat. In all, it wasn't the work that was so rewarding, it was the appreciation and support we could give to the residents. Every year that I have gone on the mission trip, I have made so many new friendships but the thing that amazes me the most is how close our youth group gets. I absolutely encourage anyone who wants to join the youth group but doesn't know anyone to attend a mission trip. This year there were a lot of new kids who went but by the end I didn't want to leave them! We all became really close and the laughter never stopped. In conclusion, I find the mission trips incredibly rewarding both spiritually and emotionally and even though I am going off to college I will continue to attend them for as long as I can.

### **Lisarenee Benz, adult**

This was my second workcamp. I was assigned to paint the inside of the Hoyes Methodist Church in Friendsville, MD. It was located about 20 minutes from Oakland. We had a double work crew assigned to the site. The 5 students on my crew were from Pennsylvania, Virginia and No. Carolina. The Minister met us at the church on Monday and welcomed us. He mentioned that the next day would be his last, since he would be retiring. The new minister, Minister Amy, came by later that day. She was very excited about us painting the church; it would be a new beginning for her and the congregation of 54.

The church was located in a rural area and there was "school farm" across the street from the church. It had a bison, miniature ponies, llamas, donkeys and alpacas. It was a source of amusement for all. Many of the church elders stopped by to meet us and they all cooked a wonderful lunch for us on Wednesday. We sat and ate lunch together and even did our devotions with them. There were about 20 people in all. It provided us an opportunity to hear everyone's thoughts about the topic of the day.

We finished our work on Thursday morning and were re-assigned to help a mother and daughter. The daughter is in late stages of lymphedema and is bed-ridden. Her mother cares for her round the clock. Their life has been difficult in the last few years. Feral Stickley's husband (and Karen's) father died from lung cancer about 1 ½ year ago at about the same time Karen was diagnosed. We helped paint their foundation, shutters and decking and I was able to spend a lot of time talking with both women. Their spirits were amazing and infectious. They also had a positive attitude and accepted openly what God has given them to deal with.

Although I enjoyed working at the Methodist Church, my reassignment provided me with more emotionally. Feral and Karen have clearly shown me that God is with us every step of the way; good and bad.

### **Patty Hendrickson, adult**

This was my 3rd trip through this organization but it was the first time that I was the driver and adult leader of a crew. My crew consisted of 5 high school students: 3 from Virginia, 1 from New Jersey, and 1 from upstate New York. Our work assignment was to do some interior and exterior painting at the home of an elderly woman named Evelyn who lived only about 10 minutes from where we were staying.

Evelyn seemed shy and somewhat standoffish at the start of the week. Frankly, I thought she was uncomfortable with us there and anxious to have us finish and leave. But as the week wore on, she seemed to warm up to us. By the end of Wednesday, she actually hugged one of our crewmembers, Amanda, whom she seemed to warm up to the most. By our departure on Friday, she was grinning and saying how happy she was with our work, and she gave each of us a hug as we said goodbye. I think that would be our God sighting for the week. This trip gave me much more confidence about leading a group of teens and getting a project done, and done right. For any adult who is considering going on the trip next year but feeling intimidated about their lack of “handyman skills”, don’t worry. Group WorkCamps has site coaches who will help you with anything you don’t know. (Carl Arguell was my site coach this year and he was great ). The kids in your crew may even have picked up the needed skills at prior work camps. Believe me, with this and some prayer, you, too, can handle it. Admittedly, the Oakland trip did not have the same impact on my faith as the Machias trip, which had a program that deeply affected me. Still, the MD trip was worthwhile, and sometimes lessons learned are not apparent until after you’ve traveled home.

### **Jack Hunt, adult**

Our crew’s job site was located approximately 3000ft above sea level on a dirt lane, accessible only with 4-wheel drive, and had nightly bear visits to our trash bags, according to our resident, Fred Plough. Fred is 58 yrs old and has lived all his life on this farm. He was widowed three years ago and has many medical problems including being blind in one eye. He lives alone in his 12’x70’ trailer. His three bedrooms were filled with junk and he sleeps on a couch in the living room.

Our job was to remove the front porch and replace it with a 6’x8’ free standing porch with railing and balusters around it. Since we had additional time we also built him a bench across one end and removed the rear porch steps and deck, rebuilding them. Next we installed a new 4’x6’ gutter over each door, front and rear. All this kept Crew 52 busy.

Our crew consisted of 3 guys and 3 girls, four of them highschool students and one middle aged lady. They were ambitious and most helpful throughout the week. Four of them were from Virginia and two of us from New Jersey.

The inclement weather was the largest obstacle to overcome each day, since ours was an outdoor work site.

My God sighting was in Fred, our resident. He wanted to help in many ways, but physically he could not. Each day he would watch and be outdoors with us, and would thank the crew several times in appreciation of jobs completed, with tears in his eyes.

This mission trip made me appreciate all the things I have in my life, love of others, friendship and comradeship.

The high point of the trip was the last evening. We were together for our 7:30pm meeting. Fred was picked up by one of our crew and our entire crew sat with him for the evening program. We presented him with a green lap quilt, a collage of photos and signatures in a frame, which emotionally touched all our hearts with the love of Christ and giving.

The low point of the trip was the weather, a week of scattered showers in the high country.

I feel our mission trip was successful overall, completing 56 projects and donating over 4,100 cans of food to the Garrett County Food Bank.

### **Joe McLean, adult, HRC Youth Leader**

This was my first mission trip and I did not know what to expect at all. I got a number of things out of the trip. The experience of having all the youth group kids out and away from their element for a week, the opportunity to serve my resident and the experience of the modern worship services was awesome.

Having the youth group away from their friends and family and homes was great in the sense that I had a lot of time to play with them in our free times, had their full attention for a number of big and small discussions, and was able to find time to speak with every one of them at different points in time, too. The second night in Maryland I planned a bit of a hike with all of them that started with 'sledding' down a steep grassy hill for prizes and then ended in a playground where we had a discussion about their experiences serving their residents and what it meant to them. This fun night helped the kids feel comfortable with each other and with me so that for the rest of the week we were able to have good in-depth conversations based on the day's lessons.

My resident was a man in his seventies, named Ken, and his wife. Ken was long a servant of others, specifically teenage kids who were made homeless by their parents' addictions, abuse, or imprisonment. Over the years he had taken in twenty kids and given them a loving home

until their situation allowed them to move on. In his declining years diabetes began to limit his physical activities and his home and property began to fall into disrepair. So the job for our Work Crew was to pick up the slack and perform what repairs he was unable to do. I had a double team that was supplemented by another team of 5 later in the week. We had three basic jobs assigned to us. The first was to paint three sheds, but it quickly became apparent that one of the sheds needed a bit of trimming and repairs and another of them could not be effectively painted because the siding was rotting and falling off. We added molding pieces to the one shed and then undertook the task of removing all the siding, and replacing it with fresh siding, painting it and putting new doors and trim on. One of my crew had some artistic ability, and chose to not just paint one of the doors but paint it to resemble an American Flag! The overall effect was great! The Second job we did was to paint the walls and floor of a wraparound porch, which was relatively simple. The third job was to build a small porch. The assigned porch job was relatively useless, and the wood we were given was of all the wrong dimensions. So we redesigned the porch to be more than twice as big and sent back all the wood we were given in exchange for all new materials. The finished porch was more than adequate to serve as a stoop and even had a good deal of room to put chairs out if Ken so desired. It was so great to serve someone who himself had served so many in his life. We did whatever we could to help him and at the end of the week he was reduced to tears in gratitude.

As for the worship services, my participation in those services helped me to change and improve my concept of what a Modern Service could and should be. The fun, casual, and still consequential services were a great education to me.

I look forward to the next time that I can go on one of these trips, it was a great experience for me all around!

### **Christian Benz, youth**

My job on this mission trip was to paint a large Apostolic Church 3 minutes away from the high school. The day we got there the pastor showed us certain areas of the church that needed to be painted including a fence, two entrance ways, and a small building. These jobs were fairly simple and we finished them by Tuesday. However, the church still had plenty of other jobs for us to do and by the end of the week we had 5 crews working together to paint bathrooms, a kitchen, hallways, and a porch. The only resident that my crew really bonded with was the grandson of the pastor, 5 year old Isaiah. He was very fun to be around and we

bought him a new basketball, net, and two jerseys as a present. He definitely enjoyed our company.

This was my second work camp and although it was fun, I think Maine is still my favorite. Other than my adult leader, I was the oldest in my crew along with another 17 year old named Danny. Langely and Kelsey had been on two previous trips while Danny, Emily, and Janice hadn't been on any. At first I thought my crew wasn't going to be too good but as the week progressed we bonded together and by the end of the week were great friends.

Throughout the week there weren't too many God sightings but the most important one we had was meeting Isaiah. On the first day we were there he around the corners looking at us and on the second day he was scraping and painting with us. My crew quickly formed a tight bond with him and became his new best friends; as he said he didn't have many people to play with near him. He brought our crew closer and made our experience a whole lot better, and he was the most important God sighting of my trip.

This trip was different from last year in that I spent a whole lot of time with my youth group when we weren't at the worksites. Most free time was spent playing soccer or relaxing in our rooms. This trip turned out to be much better than I originally thought but Maine still had it beat in every way (housing, music, weather)...except for the Wednesday afternoon rafting trip! My high point for the week was definitely rafting, and being ninjas on the river; it was a great experience.

### **Nicole Benz, youth**

At first this mission trip was just something on the side that didn't really matter and only looked good on college applications. But the moment I arrived, everyone there was happy and caring and you could tell they were all good people. As I started adapting to life waking up at 7 in the morning and waiting in long lines for showers I realized that this was for real and I was going to make a difference in someone's life. My resident was amazing, he gave us drinks and helped us out with our hammering and he even showed up on our last night program. The kids in my group all clicked within ten minutes of meeting each other, we were all friendly and polite and we all loved singing praise songs.

One of my favorite parts of the trip was the band, because they sing the music that I love and having that microphone in front of you makes you feel inferior but powerful. Some of my old friendships grew and some new friendships blossomed. There were repeats on this mission trips but there were also firsts which made it all

worthwhile. I know that I will never forget this and I am so excited to continue on going to these mission trips.

### **Liam Bertelsen, youth**

My crew was working on a house for an old couple who needed help because the man, whom we called, “Doc”, had Alzheimer’s disease. They had a big job for us. We had to paint the outside of the house, build a wheel chair ramp, fix up their garden, and paint a small section of the inside of their house. Because this job was so big we had been assigned there with two other crews, a lot of people say it was the first time they’d ever seen a triple crew at one site.

My crew included three girls (Kate, Kaitlyn, and Kerstin) and 2 other boys (Sam and Carl). Carl was the group leader from Connecticut who seemed a lot like Joe McLean. It was Carl’s 8th mission trip and almost everyone else’s 4th. Except for me and Kerstin. It was my 2nd time and her 1st.

My crew didn’t really have any God sightings. None of us were fans of the small “God Sightings” like when you see a pair of nails lying on the floor shaped like a cross. However, at the end of Friday my crew met up with our residents and they said that it was a blessing that we came and that we were her God sightings. That was pretty special.

### **Skyler Bertelsen, youth**

I worked for a couple who have been living in their home for 37 years. They needed our help because they had grown older and the husband had a heart condition. We painted their outside walls and their basement walls. We helped put up some siding on their garage and gave it a fresh coat of paint.

My crew consisted of 3 girls, another boy named Jeremy going into his freshman year, and a youth group leader from Connecticut named Jerry. This was one girl’s fourth year working at a work camp, while it was Jeremy’s first.

We didn’t have too many God sightings. One for example was when Jerry asked for God sightings the rain stopped right at that moment, allowing us to continue our outdoor work. Although I did notice that during the night when our residents came back to the school we were staying at for the evening program, they were both crying because we were leaving.

### **Kim Fielder, youth**

My site was pretty average compared to everyone else’s. It was a mobile home, on top of a hill, with one neighbor next to them. It was about two miles away

from the school and was in the middle of nowhere. Our job was to paint the entire exterior of the house, paint a door inside, and build two porches. Our resident was a married lady with two step- children living with her. Her name was April Friend, and the two kids were Teroy and Tabitha. Her husband was never around, so we didn’t meet him. They had seven pets: two pigs, two dogs, a fish, and a rooster named Nuggets.

Our site needed two crews, and then two of the days we had a triple crew. My actual crew was awesome. We had a high school graduate, a senior, a junior, a sophomore, our adult leader, and me. Our double crew was amazing. The first day, it was really awkward, but by the second day we bonded. By the third day we were all best friends. We even got a little crazy by Thursday. Overall, we all thought that we had the best crew, and we did.

We only had a few God Sightings. Our first one was that Nuggets allowed us to pick him up. Our resident couldn’t even pick him up. He followed us everywhere, and one day he was so curious, he got paint on his wattle and his neck. We thought it was really funny. Our other God Sighting was on our last crew devotions, it was pouring (yes, we did them outside), but when we started our ending prayer, the sun came out and stayed out for the rest of the day.

There were a few lows on the trip. The first one was the rain; it really stunk because all of our jobs were outside, but we got through it. The second low was the food; it was honestly disgusting. The lunches were good, but the meat was kind of slimy. The high was just meeting new people through God. I guess the rafting trip was fun too, even though MoonDog was yelling at us 75% of the time, and that it rained. Another high was at the café! My table made me stop talking for five minutes... it was hard. Overall, I think the entire trip was a high, and meeting everyone in the youth group was great. The trip changed me in many ways. It obviously opened my eyes and showed me how some people live everyday. Not that its disgusting or unsanitary, but I realized that I’m very fortunate to live where I live, and to have a house like I do. It also taught me to not take everything for granted. Some people can only afford necessities, and they get by just fine.

In the end, I had so much fun on the trip. I mean, what’s not to love about meeting new people and eventually becoming friends? I was almost always laughing or smiling, and to me, that’s all that counts, other than revealing God through myself to people who need it, and making them happy as well.

## **Nick Garney, youth**

This was my first workcamp and we had a total of 6 people in my work crew – 5 kids and 1 adult. One other person was there for the first time, the others had all been on 2-3 mission trips.

I worked on a 1-story house that was in need of repair for a grandmother/widow who babysat her 3 grandchildren. Our job was to remove old paint, scrape and repaint the outside of the house, front and back decks, the shutters, foundation, lattice and several indoor rooms.

My God sighting was that 2 of the grandmother's grandkids would always eat lunch with us and helped us with the work.

This trip gave me a better view of how the rest of the world lives and helped me to develop more of a helping attitude towards others.

High & Low points of the trip: When we finished everything was the high point; low point was when we only had the outside painting to do but it was pouring rain.

## **Kristofor Hendrickson, youth**

At my job site, we had to paint a large window on the front of the house, stain the back porch and paint the entire living room. After that we were supposed to use cement to spot repair an outdoor stairway into the basement, but it was in such disrepair that our site coach had us build a brand new wooden stairway over the old one.

My crew consisted of 5 high schoolers, all of about the same age, and 1 adult. 2 of us high schoolers were from New Jersey and the other three along with the adult were from Virginia. Only two of them however were from the giant group. The group had instant chemistry. Rarely was there any disparity, and we all got along extremely well for the entire week. The adult was on his first trip but the rest of us had been on trips before and we were able to use our experience to finish the job.

The one God sighting that sticks out in my mind is one that happened on Friday night. When everybody had been sent to bed, I was lying on my mattress listening to my iPod and I put it on shuffle. While I was listening to music I was thinking about the songs we sang that week and as I was thinking, Get Down started playing. Immediately after that, Big House played. Out of over

750 songs on my iPod, those two played consecutively while I was thinking about them.

During this trip I learned about the value of surrounding yourself with other people of the same faith. In life, it can often be difficult to make new friends, but when a bunch of us Christians who had never met each other got together as a crew, we became instant friends.

The high points of the trip for me were simply meeting and working with my crew, spending time with the people in my youth group, and of course white water rafting. The low point would be how many cliques seemed to dominate the social scene. One thing I liked about the trip to Maine was the way social boundaries seemed to disappear, but that was not the case this year.

General comments: I think one of the greatest ideas on this trip was to separate the youth and adults for the evening devotions. The youth are much more comfortable opening up when their parents aren't around, and it's important to be able to open up when you're trying to grow spiritually and grow in your relationships with friends.

## **Kevin Hendrickson, youth**

This year I went on my third mission trip, my first was a Week of Hope in Canadagua NY, and last year I went to a Workcamp in Machias Maine, and this year I went to Oakland Maryland. In the past, I have had great experiences on the mission trips, and this year was no different.

My crew was assigned to work on the mobile home of a 78 year old man named Floyd. We were working with another crew at the site to build a couple of 6x8 decks and to paint the inside of the trailer. I spent most of my week working on the deck with 4 other high-schoolers and one adult. Over the week my double crew was able to bond and make good friendships. Our biggest God Sighting was Floyds sons. They were a group of contractors and workers who went into business together, and they were building Floyd a new porch with a roof out front on the other side of the home. Throughout the week my crew found many times that we did not have the tools or supplies needed to complete the job. Every time that we needed something it seemed like Floyd's sons had one and were more than willing to lend it to us.

By The end of the week we had finished the job and made good friends, and it was hard to say goodbye. I encourage anyone and everyone to go on the mission trip if they can next year. I will always remember the fun I had and the friends I made.

## **Jess Karan, youth**

During the mission trip, most of the week I worked at a small Methodist church called Hoyes Chapel. It was about 15 miles from Southern Garret High School. The congregation consisted of only 50 people, who were mostly older members. My double crew worked on painting the foyer and sanctuary of the church. We didn't really have a resident, but there were two ministers who spoke to us on behalf of the congregation. Although, by the time we were done, both ministers' were speechless.

This year was my first workcamp and I thought it was fantastic, mostly because of my crew. All week I worked with a double crew that consisted of eight other high school students and three adults. For three of the eight kids, it was also their first workcamp. By the second day of camp, my crew was already getting along and cracking jokes. All week long we really bonded and grew into one big family. We all shared ideas and greatly enjoyed playing with the llamas at a farm across from our church. Many of the people in my crew also said it was their favorite year so far because of our awesome crew.

After I was done painting the church, my crew was able to move on to an actual resident's house where we found our best God sighting. One of the residents was Karen, who had a chronic disease that had kept her in bed for almost a year. Karen was an astounding painter who the doctor's said should be dead by now, but she has such a strong will to live that it inspires everyone. She cannot be out of bed for more than an hour, but Karen has a dream to go to Europe one day. She believes that God made her ill for a reason, and will help her to one day reach her dream.

The mission trip this year has helped me in so many ways. I have grown closer to God who has revealed to me some of the people in our world that need help the most. I have made several new friends and grown closer to old ones. Some of the best parts of the trip were singing at the evening programs, hanging out with my crew, and spending time with our youth group (especially when we went rafting!). One of the only bad things on the trip was the food, but thankfully my adult took us out for lunch and ice cream on some days. (The showers were also ice-cold on one day) But, overall, this mission trip was outstanding and I can't wait to go next year!

## **Matt Lekh, youth**

During my experience with WorkCamp my team and I worked about half an hour from the school. Our resident was a 60 year old woman who took care of her grandchildren, while her children and her husband worked a 12 hour day. Our group's job was to paint the wall and ceiling of her living room, stain a 5x5 back porch, and build stairs that escalated about 4 feet from the ground and build hand railings for them.

This was my first work camp and the same goes for the other 4 teenagers in the my group. Unfortunately 3 of them had already known each other because they all attended the same church. So that left the group split, the 3, and me and the other teen. In the end we all hung out together, just was as I had thought it would have been meeting people that were all from different places.

At our camp site we noticed a few God sightings such as materials randomly making crosses, our resident fighting off her illness (we were not told the illness), and everyone in the group being unharmed. During this trip I learned a little about myself and realized some changes that I have to make in my own life. I thought it was so much fun to hang with all the kids from HRC on our off time. The basketball tournament with Mushu, Tinkerbell, and Snow White was a blast. The worst thing about the trip was the huge church group that lessened diversification, and my trip down the rapids out of my ducky. All in all I had a great experience and can't wait until next year.

## **Katie Lekh, youth**

During my week in Maryland, I worked at a mobile home building a 6 x 8 deck. Also going on at my work site, another crew was painting the exterior of our residents home. Our residents name was Barbara Uphold. Barbara is a very nice lady with 3 great grand children, one of which we played with every day while working. This trip was my first work camp and it was great. I was very lucky in getting a crew that absolutely loved each other. Our crew leader was Billy from New Jersey. He was nice and funny and sadly he had to leave early because of his wife's pregnancy problems. Also in my group there were two seniors, Mitch from California and Rob from Virginia, then there was a junior, Connie from Virginia, and lastly a sophomore Alana from Virginia also. Our whole crew got along very well and our crew and double crew were a family.

Although my crew itself didn't have any God sightings, during devotions our resident frequently told our crew that our coming every day was her God sighting and we were one of the best things that ever happened to her. This trip changed me because I got to witness some of the poor people and their houses while working and living in Maryland for a week. This experience expanded my knowledge of poverty in the United States. I also got to meet many kids from different places that were genuinely good people. All together this trip helped me become a better person.

During the week there were a couple of things that I didn't like, such as the food, sleeping situations, and waiting an hour in line to take a 5 minute shower with lukewarm water. Although these things weren't the best of the week, it was not enough to make me not enjoy the experience. My favorite things about the trip was working with my crew and meeting my resident, and hanging out with our youth group and other kids we met everyday. All together this trip was very memorable and enjoyable and I hope to go next year and years after as well.

### **Amy Wallo, youth**

This was my first mission trip and I couldn't have asked for anything better. My crew was assigned to help an elderly woman who had a long history of stress. She had been completely paralyzed last year and couldn't do anything, not even talk. She was a true fighter and can now walk (with a cane) and can sort of speak. She was an amazing woman and I'm lucky to have had her as my resident.

I don't know what everyone else's crews were like but mine was better than I could have asked for. We bonded from the start and things just got better as time went on. Our job was to paint the ceiling in her trailer home, re-board the deck and stain it, and also stain the front deck as well. We had a double crew, but I didn't get to know them since they were busy on the outside work. We got done so fast that we got sent to another site, and worked with a triple crew, where we helped build a deck/wheelchair ramp from scratch. Over all, I couldn't have asked for anything better from my crew or the worksites in general. My crew had so many inside jokes by the end of the week, and we still keep in touch by Facebook, and I'm glad.

We really didn't have too many God sightings while we were on the work site. One we all agreed on was the fact that our first resident, Nancy, was able to recover and live a great life after being paralyzed for so long. We believed that that was a showing of how powerful God

is. I wish we could have had more God sightings but that's something I can't make happen.

This trip changed me in many ways. For example, I used to be really shy around people who are older than me that I don't know at all, but this trip showed me that if I go out there and talk and make friends it's worth it, and is more fun than just staying quiet the whole week. The one thing that changed me on the trip was the devotions, and moments where I could be one on one with God. There is no doubt that I became a lot closer to God, and I feel the relationship between us is a lot stronger than it was before I left for the mission trip.

There were a lot of high points and there were a few low points during the trip. Some low points were the meals. I really appreciated what the ladies did for us, but it was tough to eat at times, but overall it wasn't bad. Another low was the outdoor showers. They were so cold I couldn't go in them. It was definitely an interesting experience though. Some high points were the down time we had after we got back from our work sites. That was just the right amount of time for everyone to relax and do whatever they needed to do. I did enjoy sleeping in the classroom with all the women from our church. To me I felt like we all bonded better in the same room, and I really enjoyed getting to know everyone in the girl portion of the youth group. Another high was the youth group devotions every night. Those were so much fun and after that there is no doubt I'm going to do youth group when it starts up again. The highlight of my trip was the rafting experience. It was so much fun words can't describe it. That was my first rafting experience and I'm definitely going to do rafting again in the future. That time with our group was great and I'm so glad we were able to do that together. I also enjoyed having a night out with my crew. That was a great way to sum up my week, and enjoy the time I had left with my crew. Overall, this whole mission trip was an eye opener for me, and also showed me things I'd never expected to see on this trip

### **Weezie Huntington, adult**

My work site was a one-story house about 1 mile from the WV border, about 20 minutes from the school. We served Flossie and Ron Roy. Their 2 children lived in houses on either side of them, and Flossie watched her grandchildren while their parents worked. Ron had a huge garden that was immaculate, and I had garden envy. Ron was in charge of the outside of the house, and Flossie was in charge of the inside.

Our jobs were to stain the front deck, and to paint over wood paneling the living room walls and ceiling, the dining room walls, the kitchen walls and ceiling, and the

bathroom walls and ceiling. The whole time we are doing this I am listening to Flossie tell me that her son is a professional painter (!) and how much she loves her dark wood paneling. We, a group of amateurs, were painting it white. It was one of those times when your stomach churns. What I took away from this is that maybe her son does not have time to help his mother. While I know after 4 mission trips that completing the work is not the be-all and end-all of the week, spiritual growth is the important thing, I could not help but see the quality of work my crew was doing, and think about what it would have been if her son had done it. (On the other hand, maybe after he saw our work, he would take time off and redo it for his mother!)

Every crew this year had at least 2 kids from the mega-church in Virginia, and I found that, on my crew, they were good friends, and therefore did not need to get to know the rest of us. We were divided that way, as well as 3 worked on staining the deck, and 3 worked inside. I can strongly say that my crew never gelled this year. I really enjoyed working with the kids I was with, I just wish I could have gotten the others to blend together.

Flossie spoke to me at length during the week about this being the first time someone had ever come to help them. They have always been fiercely independent and self sufficient, and had always been able to get things done themselves. I felt a great sense that we were an imposition on her, and she couldn't wait to get rid of us. In fact, we finished on Thursday midday, and were told by WorkCamps to offer to help in any other way (they gave us a long list of things to offer). I finally had to call school and say that they had to reassign us because she had kicked us out! She wanted no more help. They were having a huge family reunion on Saturday and she needed to get ready, by herself. I appreciated her need to feel in control. It was a very awkward moment. I didn't think they were happy we had come.

We were reassigned to the church that ended up with 5 crews. There were no materials for us to use that afternoon, but we made quick work of painting a long hallway on Friday.

Our big God sighting was that Flossie and Ron came to the Friday evening program, and were very tearful when they thanked us for all the hard work we had done. The lesson we could take away from this was that sometimes it is very hard to accept help from others—to admit that we need help.

Another God sighting I had involved the fact that we had to rent 3 vehicles this year. I had deliberated tortuously over having to spend money this way. On the second day, Ellen Wallo got sick and had to be taken home by

her mother, who had one of the biggest vehicles we brought-- one that held lots of kids and lots of gear. I was very sorry to see them leave, but I had the V-8 moment God sighting that we still had enough car space to get everyone and all our gear home, because we had rented 3 cars instead of 2!!! God is good....all the time.

### **Megan Arguell, youth**

This year's mission trip to Oakland, Maryland was my fourth mission trip with Harlingen's youth group. Even after three other mission trip experiences under my belt, I still wasn't sure what to expect out of another new location and environment.

After arriving at camp, the crew lists were posted around the school and everyone sprinted to find out which crew they were in. Meeting the crew is always an exhilarating experience. The first night of camp, everyone approaches the auditorium a little bit nervous, knowing that they're going to be placed in a group with five brand new friends. This year, I was curious and anxious to meet my crew. By the end of the night, I had spent two hours talking with my crew and I knew that we were all going to get along just fine.

Every year, each crew receives a packet describing the jobs that they will be completing on their worksites, the location of their worksite, and their resident's name. From the packet we learned that our resident's name was Mrs. Wilt and that we would be staining three decks, painting her shutters, putting up a new gutter, rebuilding her porch and building a patio. On our first day, we drove to our site excited and ready to work. It was a bright yellow house that sat by itself in between woods and lush, green fields. It was a truly beautiful and peaceful place to be working and I had never felt more excited to get started on our jobs. We all went to the front door so that we could meet Mrs. Wilt. She was a sweet, middle aged woman that was clearly thankful for our presence and for the work that we were going to do on her house.

Throughout the week, we kept discovering new projects that we could do for Mrs. Wilt. Chopping wood for her stove, cleaning out the shed, building another patio.. the jobs just kept coming. We came to realize that we weren't going to be able to finish all this work with just our crew. On Wednesday a new crew came to our work site. By the end of the day, we had made six new friends. Even with 12 people on our worksite, we still had a lot of work to do. On Friday, yet another crew joined our worksite and we made six more friends. It was a rather interesting and funny experience trying to fit 18 people on Mrs. Wilt's back porch to share lunch, devotions,

stories and laughs; all while it rained. I came out of that mission trip with 17 new friends. I couldn't possibly think of anything better than that.

Mrs. Wilt was a God sighting in herself. She spoke passionately about her relationship with God and it was moving for all three crews. It was so great having her participate in our daily devotions because I personally have never had a resident that was able to share their faith. Each day that we were working for her she brought out some sort of treat. Cookies, cake.. you name it, she made it for us. It made me so happy knowing how thankful she was for our work and I was very sad to say goodbye. However, I know that we will always have a place in her heart and I am so thankful for that. Oakland, Maryland was a mission trip that was unforgettable. I know that this is true for Mrs. Wilt, my 17 new friends and myself.

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### COMMENTS ABOUT GOD SIGHTINGS, AND SOME INTERESTING RESEARCH ABOUT MISSION TRIPS.

Hope for the Poor; release for the Captives; Sight for the Blind; freedom for the Oppressed; the Lord's Favor.

So who are these people? Who are the poor, the blind, the captives, the oppressed? Not us, but maybe we helped them in Maryland. On the other hand, consider these verses from Psalm 140 –verse 12: my sins have overtaken me and I cannot see; verse 17: Yet I am poor and needy; or Psalm 142:7 set me free from my prison. Oops! Maybe the week was about revealing the Lord to us! But can a mission trip ever be about us? Why do we take kids on a mission trip? Why do we have them serve at the soup kitchen or do a Habitat for Humanity day?

There are probably several reasons—we want to have our youth follow Jesus' example by serving others....Jesus came to set things right and we want our kids to bring justice for those who need help and support....our youth grow up in a certain environment with levels of safety and affluence—it is good to get them out of their comfort zone. Each of these ideas are good, legitimate, Biblical reasons to take them on a mission trip. But something is missing from the list.

How about God using a mission experience to change the course of a youth's life—forever. Is it

OK to do a mission trip because of something that happens to us? Is it OK to go and serve someone else because of what God does in *our* lives—what *we* get out of it? It is ever OK for a mission trip to be about *us*?

There is research that says, at least in some ways, it should be about us.

I have research reports, too long to go into in great detail, that discuss this. I am now quoting from some:

A 2002-2003 study discovered that the vast majority of U.S. teenagers value religion and are exceedingly conventional in their beliefs and practices. At the same time, the researchers found teenagers to be “incredibly inarticulate” about their faith.

They concluded that “very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating their youth” and that “young people should be taught to *practice* their faith. . . in the sense of consistently working on the skills, habits, and virtues of faith, the way musicians and athletes practice their skills”.

Another study found that the more connected a youth was to a church, the more likely he or she was to do non-compulsory community service—in fact, twice as likely as the religiously disengaged. Other studies reinforce the finding that the more important religion is in the lives of adolescents, the more likely they are to be involved in service.

Engagement in community service is related to positive outcomes in the lives of adolescents. Researchers have found that volunteering *through their congregations* as children and youths is linked to volunteering behavior when people reach adulthood. It also showed that young people who are involved in service are much more likely to be firmly bonded to their churches and much less likely to drop out of school. They are less likely to engage in behaviors that put them at risk, such as using drugs and alcohol; they have higher intrinsic motivation toward school work and a future career.

One researcher concluded that the religious setting is not only the most frequent but also the best environment for nurturing the helping impulse in teenagers. Through the right kind of volunteer work, teens can find the role models and moral

incentives that will instill a calling to service that they often carry into adulthood. Some of the key characteristics of service for encouraging the growth of caring in teens include:

1. The experience must expose young people to need and create identification with the person suffering; there must be direct personal contact. Person to person contact with someone in need. Raising money by selling candy, soliciting support for a cause, etc., or providing free labor like stuffing envelopes, typing, etc. do not create and may even detract from the growing sense of caring in young people.

2. Young people develop, remember, and internalize “scripts” that they hear from others, that explain their reasons for wanting to help others. These frameworks of meaning do not need to be explicit or detailed, but they must explain why it is good to be a caring person. Places where stories can be shared powerfully reinforce caring and kindness.

3. Role models are important to teens. When busy adults work with a teenager, it has special meaning and becomes a model for the teen’s own caring. The most significant role models are those who step out of their roles as teachers, coaches, pastors, or volunteers long enough to listen to and share themselves with teens.

4. Kindness often is fundamentally symbolic. What you are doing may be helpful to someone, but it carries deeper meaning beyond the gift itself. Kindness tells us we are not alone and that others are concerned enough about us to care. Young people need experiences that lead to the realization that small actions count, even though they do not solve all the problems or make the world more perfect. Another study went further and collected essays from teenagers who did mandatory service as part of a high school religion course on social justice. They found that the service experience stimulated reflections on the religious meaning of service. Students wrote and talked about Christian duty, seeing God in the lives of persons who are poor and homeless, and fulfilling the teachings of Christ through their service. As adolescents contribute to their communities, researchers have hypothesized that they develop a sense of self transcendence.

Researchers have established that community service is correlated with positive outcomes in the lives of adolescents, and that those young people who are active in their congregations are also significantly more likely to be involved in regular community service. So the next question is “are religious behavior and community service actually related to one another, so that service is actually influencing teens’ spiritual and religious lives?” One study found that volunteering with family members is associated positively with faith development.

So a study was designed to examine how community service is related not only to religious involvement but to the faith maturity and faith practices of adolescents—in other words, does the benefit flow both ways—is there a circle of benefit? It found that the significant connection of community service with faith maturity and engagement in faith practices is powerful.

These findings suggest that those who want to help young people develop a rigorous, meaningful faith life should involve them in meaningful service.

Unfortunately, the earlier study found that only a minority of adolescents - 30% - have ever been involved by their congregation in a missions team or service project, compared to the 50% of U.S. teenagers who have been to a youth retreat or conference. This research indicates that community service should hold a central place in many youth ministry settings. Involving teenagers in authentic service to real needs accompanied by reflection on the connections between service experiences and religious teachings and other practices—perhaps with some pizza and “fun” mixed in—can serve as a fruit-bearing path for ministry. Treating teenagers as partners in ministry rather than objects of ministry is an important and empowering distinction for developing new generations of spiritual leaders.

I believe this is what happens on our trips.  
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A mission trip could be just about repairing homes, or community service or any of the other things you might do. But these mission trips aren't just about what you're doing .

The primary goal of Group Workcamps is to encourage Christian growth in students through

meaningful community service to those in need. It is all about what the research said kids need. And if you read the youth reports carefully, you will see some of these thoughts reflected in their words.

Serving Christ with you,

Weezie Huntington