

“God’s Work, Our Hands.”

Nowhere is this statement (our ELCA slogan) more relevant and blatant in meaning than when on a mission trip. During the week of July 25-31, 280 high school youth and adult leaders converged on the city of Pittsburgh to work on 38 different homes throughout the city. These youth groups came from eight states and encompassed several different denominations and faith walks of the Christian faith.

One of the very unique things about The Pittsburgh Project is that we had the opportunity to work with people from across the spectrum of states and denominations. As our group was divided into two and sent out into the city to work, it was evident that this was the Church at work. In particular, the group I was responsible for was made up of four Lutherans, three Presbyterians, and two Methodists. Praise God for the work the Church can do when it comes together!

Throughout the week, each group works with a homeowner who is experiencing some form of financial despair in fixing up their home to meet city and state standards. Many of these people are either elderly or disabled individuals. In working with these homeowners, we not only serve them, but we grow to have a deeply spiritual relationship and friendship. These relationships we formed with new friends and homeowners, certainly made it difficult to leave.

Jesus, in describing his God-hood and the nature by which He did so come to humanity said to his disciples, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). *Gods Work, Our Hands* was evident in this, as each youth and adult leader in Pittsburgh was called to set aside their own burdens—burdens of growing up, burdens of sick family members left behind, burdens of family issues, burdens of lost friends, and burdens of grief—and pick up the burdens of a vulnerable homeowner, working to make that person’s life better. This is the work of the Kingdom!

I have been a leader on many mission trips, both internationally and abroad, but never have I been more proud than I am of those six that accompanied me on this mission journey. These five youth and our adult chaperone, for whose presence I am very thankful, were able to set aside their own lives—their own burdens—to pick up the burdens of another, and live out God’s calling to be his hands in the Kingdom that is and is yet to come. Thank you Kristin, Riane, Breanna, Kali, Kurt, and Abney. Thank you for your love, your compassion, and your hard work.

And thank you to the entire congregation of St. John’s for helping to make this trip—this amazing experience—a possibility. Thank you for your help in fundraising, for your thoughtful words of encouragement, and for your continued support through prayer and the uplifting of youth ministry in this church. Thank you!

God’s peace! --Aaron Shoppa, Director of Youth and Children’s Ministries