

“Work Trip Reflections”

Galatians 5: 13-14

June 22, 2008

Matt O’Neill

First Presbyterian Church

Lake Forest, Illinois

“I don’t want to go, it isn’t even our church,” I said to my sister as we got in the car and headed to my first youth group meeting four years ago at First Presbyterian Church. We walked in the door and my attitude changed completely as I was introduced to Kristie Finley, the fearless leader and organizer of nearly a hundred rowdy teenagers.

Kristie makes everyone at youth group feel comfortable regardless of your background or affiliation with the church or any church at all for that matter, and I was no exception. Kristie and all of the advisors bring this same receptive and friendly attitude with them on worktrip, which helps to make it such an amazing experience.

On worktrip, the kids are given the freedom and responsibility to do things that we would probably never have the opportunity to do, such as use a chainsaw and build a roof, all with the blessings and trust of the advisors. The advisors encourage every worktripper, regardless of size, age, or skill to try new things. They do not belittle anyone or get angry when a mistake is made, but instead work with you and encourage you to fix it.

Worktrip is a learning experience. You learn how to do new things and you learn about yourself, others, and God. Worktrip pushes you to the limit physically and mentally every day and it tests and shows you how much you can accomplish if you give it your all and put your mind to it.

After witnessing families living in dilapidated trailers and elderly loners who have no visitors and are just as thankful for our company as they are for the new siding that we put on their house, you realize how much God has blessed you and how fortunate you are to have material necessities, friends, and family. This year’s worktrip taught all of us who participated, to appreciate the blessing of being able to function on our own after we saw the handicapped and disabled campers at Wonderland Camp.

These campers, though they may need assistance just to eat a meal, were able to show all of us how to find joy and happiness from things such as dancing a simple dance or taking a boat ride. The Wonderland counselors exhibited amazing degrees of patience while assisting campers all day and night. This incredible week taught us how remarkable people really are when you actually take the time to get to know them, and how much you can learn from someone you least expect to teach you.

Most importantly on worktrip, you can learn more about the Lord and witness His goodness and beauty in our imperfect world. Everything from the magnificence of the Missouri landscape to the beaming grin on a camper's face after performing in the talent show, displayed God's work. The satisfaction of aiding those less fortunate renews our spirits and faith in the Lord.

Linda Martinet has taught us to see God's love and kindness in a simple feather and Reverend Patrick Day has inspired us all with his powerful words and sermons. We all know that God is present in our everyday lives, Worktrip just allows anybody willing, the opportunity to stop and realize it.

I feel truly blessed to have been able to have participated in such a wonderful project. The acts of kindness exchanged during Worktrip should be recognized as life changing and magnificent. The people I befriended: advisors, local residents, campers, and other kids, all taught me something different about life and the way of the Lord. The memories and messages of Worktrip will continue with me through the way I live my life as I enter young adulthood and prepare for what lies ahead. Worktrip is not a one-time experience, but rather a lesson that will aid us and continue to guide us down our individual spiritual journey.

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Stephanie Long  
First Presbyterian Church  
Lake Forest, Illinois

Good morning everyone. To describe what a typical day at Wonderland Camp was like is difficult for me. There are so many things that go on in just one day. From shingling roofs, pounding nails, playing with campers, and making covert trips to Sonic or Walmart, there was never a dull moment on work trip.

We were to begin our mornings at 6:30, allowing us a half hour to get ready for breakfast. In the junior girls cabin, most of us usually woke up at 6:50 (sometimes 6:55) even through Norah Johnson's blaring alarm clock and the sight of Mrs. Telander's lime green flamingo pajamas walking by our bunks. At 7:00 we would run over to the dining hall for breakfast—usually for the highly demanded Coco Krispies and Fruit Swirls.

There were 8 different work sites and we switched sites daily. Each site varied in task and difficulty so we all had a chance to work at each. We met at our designated vans at 7:45 or 8:00 to embark on our project for the day.

Site four, Judy's house, was my favorite site. She had two kids and also ran a day care center out of her house. Her home was in such bad shape she needed all the help she could get. The roof was very unstable and we were all worried about falling through, which eventually happened creating a beautiful new "skylight" in her bathroom. But no need to worry - it was eventually fixed. The day I was on that site we tore off her original roof exposing more layers of shingles, trillions of ants, and rotting wood. The next group had the difficult job of re-shingling it. We also helped Judy repair her screened-in porch that was falling apart and serving no purpose being there. At the end of the day we had accomplished a lot. Judy was so appreciative and kept thanking us for helping fix her home.

Work would finish at four in order to get back to dinner on time. We would have free time to go on quick Walmart or outlawed Sonic runs. Dinner was at 5:30 each day. After dinner we would have about an hour until the nightly camper activity. Each night was a different event. We attended Kareoke night, the talent show, the carnival and the dance. Each event was special and you could truly see the campers enjoyed every minute they spent with us. One camper in specific, Jennifer, truly came to adore some of us and she loved to hang around with the girls.

After the activity each night we would have worship. We would go through each site and what had been accomplished in the day's work. Worship was led by a different class each night so everyone had a chance to contribute. After worship we would find out our sites for the next day and would hear stories that had inspired us to keep working.

In the end of the day all the hard work and heat was well worth it. The people that we helped were so thankful and you could see that we truly did make an impact in their lives. The life stories of some of the residents touched our hearts and we knew we were helping them get back on track with their lives. The most evident and apparent gratitude came from the campers and the counselors. I cannot tell you how many times the counselors thanked us for helping them make their job just a little bit easier that week. They told us that you could tell we meant something to the campers because they were so happy when we were around. You could see instantly how you brightened a campers' day just with a high five or a hug.

Our senior class had been to Wonderland Camp several years ago and I had heard what a great experience it had been. I was so happy that we went there because it helped me make connections with those around me—other work-trippers, Wonderland campers, and people in the community. I loved every minute of the trip and look forward to next year!!