

Appalachia Service Project

Micah Davis

About 7 months ago my mom asked me if I wanted to go on the Appalachian Service Project, a mission trip to some part of Appalachia to work on houses that were not in great shape. I had never been on a mission trip before and figured that working on a house for a week couldn't be that bad. I was excited about the opportunity to help a family and felt confident it would be a positive experience.

But about a week before we were set to leave I started to regret my choice, I was in the middle of playing for a team in the Camp Rockmont staff world cup and if I was stuck in Watauga County, where we were staying, how was I supposed to watch the semifinals of the real World Cup. But I had to go anyway.

And I am so glad that I did. ASP was a truly special experience. Although I have never spent as much time digging holes and pulling large rocks out of the ground as I did in the first few days of the week, I wouldn't trade it.

One of the things that was great about it was the intergenerational aspect it had. Our church went with an equal amount of youth and adults and it gave us a great chance to meet some of the people that we haven't taken the time to get to know yet.

It turns out that we have a lot of great adults in our church that all of them have a lot of wisdom to share, both on how to build something like a porch, and on how to navigate the halls of high school.

While at the elementary school where we were staying we were able to keep ourselves entertained. We quickly learned that we had lots of free time between dinner, evening gatherings, and devotions; so we made the most out of it. On the first day alone we played just under three hours of basketball, dodgeball, and foursquare. But as fun as that was, the experiences that I had on the worksite are the ones that will stick with me. That is where I could most clearly see God at work.

The story that stands out the most to me is centered around a three year old that lived in the house, named Eden, but called Bug. Bug is very social, and because we didn't want her running through our obstacle course of saws and shovels, we always had one person watching her.

One day while I was watching her the mail got delivered and Bug ran out to get it. After about 20 seconds she got the mailbox open and pulled out a letter. She looked at it for a second and then started to walk back toward the house, grasping the letter firmly in both hands. But right before she got to the steps leading up to the house she saw a butterfly float over her head, and with no hesitation she dropped the letter on the ground and ran after the butterfly, jumping up and down even though it was far out of her reach.

It is so easy for us to get caught up in the rush of life, having to constantly balance school and sports; work and finding time to go to the grocery store. Wondering when something is due or what you need to prepare for a meeting. Even at ASP, far removed from the routine of normal life; it isn't hard to drift into thoughts of, "How can we possibly finish this project on time."

But in that moment of Bug dropping the letter to leap after a butterfly you could see the complete innocence of a child, not concerned about bills to pay or errands to run, only worried about catching the yellow creature dancing above her head. It was a moment where I could plainly see God at work. And while I can't assure you that you will see a three year old chasing a butterfly, I can promise you that ASP, or any other mission trip, will give you a moment that will make the whole trip worthwhile.

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Betsy Murphy

When I agreed to serve with our church's work group for Appalachian Service Project this summer I had many of the same misgivings as others in our work group:

“Sleep on the floor of an elementary school classroom for a week?! Will I get any sleep at all?”

“Work in the hot sun doing manual labor all day?? I'm not really used to that!”

“How will the youth respond? What will our family be like??”

As we shared in our small groups every evening after work we found out that many of us had had the same concerns. What we all didn't expect was how quickly our work group would bond and become a team. And we didn't expect that we would have as much fun as we did.

And the youth? That was the biggest surprise of all. I think we all expected that our youth would do well and that all of us would do our Presbyterian duty and get the job assigned to us done. The youth, however, were amazing. They were motivated and helpful, did more than we asked them to do, were safety conscious, and adapted well to each of the three unique living situations of the families we served.

The work group that I was in had the added challenge of watching a bright, curious 3-year old girl named “Bug”. While she was adorable, we also had to make sure that she stayed away from table saws, didn't

bang herself with a hammer, and didn't fall into the large holes we had laboriously dug for our deck foundation.

The youth rose to the occasion, playing in the nearby creek with her, finding frogs and crawdads, and taking turns making sure she was safe, too. And the youth kept us laughing with their constant wit and banter, making the job fun for everyone.

What was the biggest challenge?

- Figuring out how best to serve our families with unique needs in a way which respected their privacy but also built relationships with them without being intrusive.

In the end we all got out of it much more than we sacrificed. Every day began and ended with “devos” (ASP speak for devotions)—simple, direct, thoughtful and worshipful. And we learned about different worship styles than our own through the participation of other church groups.

We were amazed that this whole complex program was run by 3-4 college aged women who were knowledgeable about tools, lumber, building techniques, Appalachian culture and group motivation.

We would like to thank the Black Mountain Presbyterian Church for making it possible for all of us to participate in this unique program.