



Reflections on a Saint Luke's Summer

AIR Guatemala



Rob Price, Les Woodsides, Les's niece, Grace Vermeulen, and Anne Hallum worked hard during a week in June in cool Guatemala: We built 3 stoves that will prevent lung disease and conserve precious firewood; participated in a school program, and planted over 600 trees. The experience was Rob's first and he pronounced it, "officially amazing!" Working alongside the Guatemalan people, including the AIR staff, is always an honor. Anne hosted for four more weeks with AIR-Guatemala-- including small groups from Roswell Presbyterian, Pace Academy and Central Florida.

Massanetta Springs Middle School Conference Recap

This year I went to Massanetta Springs for my third and last year, and I strengthened my relationship with God more than I ever had before in the past. The theme this year was All Together Now, and for the four days we were there, God helped me to see how we can be a community as Christians whether we know each other or not. Throughout the week I saw God in all of the keynotes. The speaker spoke about many things that helped me see how much God is involved in my life and helps me to see that the Lord is there always, and as a community we can show each other that Jesus Christ is always there through our actions. The most meaningful thing at Massanetta for me was the last service we had, called the Vespers service. It is a candle lit service outside on a big field. The fact that the entire community is there together for one last worship is something that will forever be in my memory of my experience at Massanetta. After my experience at Massanetta, I've looked at everyone as children of God who He loves no matter what. This experience helped show me that God wants all of us to be together in community no matter how different we are. We are all different in many ways, but God made us with all of those differences, and we should celebrate the difference and celebrate them together.



Massanetta and Thornwell

This summer I went on two trips with the church and I loved both of them so much. One was an actual mission trip and the other one was more fun and team building.

~Grace Strickland



The first trip I went on was Massanetta. This camp is like my second home; I love it so much. You get to meet new people from all over the US. This camp is in Virginia so we have to leave at 5 in the morning to get there by 3 even though every year we have been fashionably late. We pick workshops we want to do over the next 4 days and that's how they pick our small groups. Twice a day we have this thing called keynote and it is basically service for an hour and a half. In the beginning we do energizers and songs which is the best part. After that we go to our small groups which is about 10-15 people from all the other churches. They have a leader called an enabler and they make us do fun team building activities that are really fun. Before and after our meals we can go outside and play a game called gaga ball. It's the best game ever beside soccer and I love it so much, plus in my not so humble opinion, I'm really good and win a lot of the games. Since it is a middle school conference I can't go back until I'm an enabler and to be qualified I have to be finished with my sophomore year; even with that, I have to be picked to go and usually only one per church can go.



The second trip I went on was Thornwell. It is an orphanage in South Carolina and this year I was working on repairing the classrooms. It was a lot of fun and we got to meet some of the kids and see how they lived and they seemed really happy. My job was to sand and scrape the walls and baseboards the first day. The second day I was painting the baseboards and the trim around the doors in 4 different rooms. The third day we moved furniture out of the rooms so they could have them re-tiled. I definitely will be going back next year if I can.

~Bonnie Ruggiero

Mexico

Going into this mission trip, I had no idea how (or if) my perspective on life would change. Before experiencing this journey, I had this pre-conceived notion that I had my whole life figured out, that I knew the path I would travel. I could not have been more wrong.

By being afforded the opportunity to help build something significant to another's culture, I was fortunate to become engulfed in their lives and learned the backstories of many individuals who had lived lives drastically different than mine. Pastor Filo, who reminded us this was his name because Filo means sharp in Spanish, just like he is, is completely dedicated to the expansion of his church, and hoping to touch the lives of as many people as he can. His perception of the world around him made me realize how insignificant my "plan" actually was, and how I can't force how my life turns out. What I take away from this trip is this: life isn't about how one lives his own life, it's how he touches the lives of others.



~Jack Schifino

Mommy and Me



Working with the Mommy and Me program to expand its capacity through the renovation of classrooms at Memorial Dr. Presbyterian Church has been an amazing, although short journey. I feel really good about Saint Luke's pitching in to help make it possible for Jennifer Green to say yes to the refugee mothers, who in the past were turned away because there was not enough room for them in the original facility. Yes, you can enroll because we have additional space. The refugee families have made their way to the US

to escape from dire circumstances. It is hard to imagine what they have had to endure along the way as they seek a new life. They know no one. They don't know English.

Everything must seem very strange to them. Yet they are very determined to sort it all out. For me it is personally rewarding to be a part of helping these families find their way in a strange land. It is amazing to think this call to action started with a collaborative sermon prepared and delivered by Beth Eisenmesser and David Lower. From that small beginning sprang this big deal Christian mission. It is good that we are in the mix, doing, it seems, what God has called us to do. How can we not experience joy, knowing we are helping in some small way to make the transition to this new life for the refugee families just a little bit easier?

~Daryl Moore



Mountain Top

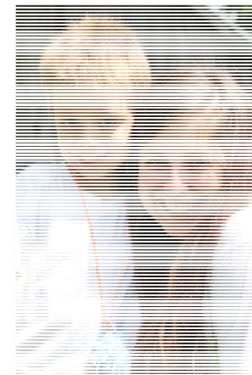
This summer I got to go to Mountain Top and Montreat with the Saint Luke's youth. My experience at Mountain Top it's always the highlight of my year, and this year was no exception. In our day to day lives we think about God a fair amount but when you are out working with the children of Grundy



County you feel God's love so much more. Children will open up to you in ways you would never expect, letting you see a brief glimpse of what other cultures in America are like. One child, Austin, always seemed to be the hyper kid who you couldn't convince to sit and listen or play by the rules and didn't seem very happy to be there, but to my surprise on the last day he looked at me and gave me a hug

saying thank you for being here this week, and ran inside before I could process what happened. All these children want a little love and they show their gratitude in amazing ways. In my life I have gone through a long faith journey and Mountain Top always revolutionizes my views on life and religion, this year while at Mountain Top I found my calling as a youth pastor. Saint Luke's and the Tartan Trot have given me chances I never would have expected out of life.

~Forrest Herrick





Montreat

Over the summer I went to Montreat for the first time. There were numerous moments this week that were about as perfect as it gets, but here are just a couple. Towards the end of one of the worship services, everyone was singing "Lean on Me" by Bill Withers. Everyone in the auditorium had their arms over each other and were belting out the lyrics. As the song ended and the music moved on to something else, all the other people put their arms down, except for us. This simple action really showed how close and connected we had all become. Another moment, was on Saturday morning when most of us hiked up Lookout Mountain. At

the very top of the mountain, we watched the sun rise over the rolling hills in a comfortable silence. It may have been the awesome view, or it may have been the fact that we had all woken up at 6:20am the morning, but it was very peaceful. Looking out from the mountain, you can see Montreat, Black Mountain and of course, the bear conference. Overall, Montreat was more than a great week, it was a week of abundant love and grace.



~Casey Singley

Montreat Music and Worship Conference.

I find it impossible to convey with words how wonderfully meaningful and restorative the Montreat Music and Worship Conference was for me. This past June, I was lucky enough to attend the week-long conference in June along with Mary Martin and Ellen Womack, and I believe it is safe to say that, for all three of us, and the eight of us who attended last year, the Montreat Music and Worship Conference is a place to experience God's movement within us, through us, and among us, as well as a place to experience replenishment of one's soul.

The conference literature states that it is "For everyone committed to the work and worship of the church," which pretty much includes everybody. Among the attendees are pastors, musicians, choir members, worship committee members, Christian education leaders, laypersons, children, and youth. An objective of the conference is to provide opportunities for attendees to explore and experience a variety of vital and meaningful worship experiences throughout the week as we seek to enrich the liturgical life of our churches. To this end, there is a daily schedule of offerings for adults, children, and youth alike, choirs to sing in, bells to ring in, worship to participate in, workshops to learn in, concerts, and hymn festivals to enjoy, all in the beautiful setting of Montreat itself. And, with the inclusion of children and youth in activities and worship, the conference is a wonderful way for families to participate in, and enjoy, the week together as a family. What more could you possibly ask for?!

Continued on the next page

Particularly moving for me are the worship services held each day. The music itself is beyond glorious. The theme for this year was, "Then Sings My Soul," and I can assure you that there were hundreds of souls singing and ringing out to the Lord that week. Try to imagine, if you can, an auditorium full of musically gifted persons, alongside those of us who are not so musically gifted, all of us bonded together in song as we belt out together the wonderful music of our tradition. It is truly a magnificent, wondrous, and soul-filling experience. I invite you to join us next year to experience it for yourselves!

~Barbara Douglass

Thornwell

Thornwell Children's Home is an amazing place where children whose parents are incapable of taking care of them can call home. I volunteered at Thornwell this summer with my grandfather, Tom McIntosh, and it was our second year going together. Our team worked on several projects while there. During the first day I was assigned to do construction work within the school classrooms. The next day, I was so blessed to work with the Saint Luke's ladies on the sewing crew, interacting directly with the children at Thornwell. I was able to grow in relationship with these young children as they shared one heartbreaking story after another. With complete innocence and unfailing trust in people, each girl told me the struggles she faces just in her short life. One young girl told me about her father who she has never met. Her mother is not only addicted to drugs but repeatedly cuts herself, and could not provide for the physical and emotional needs of a young child. She is now in Thornwell finally experiencing love, and having someone tell her that she is so valuable, and that God has a plan for her life. Even though she has faced more heartbreak than I could ever understand she still is a happy person with a smile that never broke, and was so grateful for her blessings. This really inspired me to strive to do the work of God, and to not question his plan for me. We should be grateful for all the blessings that we do have, rather than focusing on what we do not have, like the truly incredible children of Thornwell.

~Farrah McIntosh



VBS Fun Factory

Wow, God!

Upon arrival in our main lobby during early June, one might have thought they had stumbled into an interactive kids' play space instead of a church. A two-story ball run, baby pools of building materials, and hand-made robots welcomed our VBS preschool and elementary children to a place where they could exercise their imaginations, minds, and hearts. Our Maker Fun Factory theme immersed each child in the amazing story of God's loving and purposeful creation of people. We experienced exciting Bible stories featuring those who used their unique gifts for God's great purposes – and were inspired to do the same with our unique gifts.



Our fourth and fifth graders used their God-given gifts as they served in meaningful ways throughout the community. Sorting cans at the Atlanta Food Bank, loading book bags in Clarkston, and getting dirty at Global Growers were all ways to experience the power that lies within each of us to help others. In addition, this group helped produce flash cards – along with our elementary students and adult leaders – for the refugee families served by “Mommy & Me” in Clarkston. 160 children and over 100 volunteers helped each other in the production of smiles, relationships, and a deeper understanding of God’s great story.

~Catherine Anne Thomas

Honduras

I went on numerous mission trips as a youth and while they were great character building experiences, this trip to Honduras had more significance to me as an adult. When I told coworkers what I was planning to do I received the same “that really sounds great” and the look of “you are completely crazy”.

Our team of youth and adults were blessed to have been assigned to work in a village that had not previously been visited by HOI. At first, our group and the village residents were both a little cautious, partly due to the language barrier and partly due to some unspoken sense of well-intentioned courteousness. How quickly the communication barriers fell as we worked side by side with the families, local masons and members of the community digging latrinos, building pilas, mixing cement, moving cinderblock and shuttling 40 pound buckets of cement to replace densely packed dirt floors. The conditions/terrain were harsh, but the environment was tranquil with hospitality. With the help of our HOI assigned staff, soon enough, even I felt confident enough to make some crude attempt to use that high school Spanish. The children were plentiful and communication universal, the language of a kicked futbol or “plato de voler” (Frisbee) was well understood. It was not too long before we were the pied pipers of the area. With the sense of community within the village, you could not distinguish the homeowners from family and friends. It was truly unique and special.



Continued on the next page

Each morning we were greeted by the community with smiles of familiar friends. As hard as the work may have been, the benefit of knowing the small part we played in helping these families improve their homes, their lives and their community was a blessing to us as much as it was to those we served. In fact, I owe the people of Honduras a debt of gratitude for the opportunity to work alongside them in the name of Christ. There is no doubt that this experience has helped me reevaluate my faith and my priorities and I will look for ways to serve in the future that I have not in the past. So, upon returning to work when asked if I would do it again the answer came quickly and easily, "Absolutely!" ~Scott Rice



Honduras



I love going to Honduras because of how meaningful the experience has been for me in the past, and this year was no exception! I had a wonderful time meeting the people in the village and working alongside them. One of my favorite parts of the trip every time is spending time with the kids and seeing their faces light up as we play games and have fun. I am definitely looking forward to going on the next Honduras trip! ~Clair Cummiskey

After hearing about Honduras from my family for years, I was able to experience what they all loved about it. Yes, you spend time building latrines, pilas (sinks), but what you are really doing is building relationships with the people of rural Honduras. Our relationship with Jesus Christ has taught us that we should help the least of these and at Saint Luke's we are given many opportunities to do this, not only at home in Atlanta but in other countries. One of the most meaningful things for me was watching another generation of Saint Luke's youths carrying out our mission: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8 ~Betsy King

We are grateful for all those who participated in "Sunset of Summer" and especially those who have shared their experiences here with us. All entries have been submitted as written so as not to alter meaning and intention. Thank you for your grace and understanding.