

Mission Trips Offer New Summer Vacation Options

Several Florida-Georgia District members opted for unconventional vacation locations and activities this summer, including a group from Mt. Calvary-Warner Robins, GA, some teens from Faith-New Port Richey, FL, and teens from all over Florida-Georgia who trekked to Fort Pierce, FL, for a District Advisory Council for Youth Ministry-sponsored Hurricane Rebuilding Servant Event.

Mt. Calvary-Warner Robins

Debbie Fingles was one of 15 Mt. Calvary members who participated in a mission trip to Nicaragua June 17-25. They participated with MOST (Mission Opportunities Short Term) ministries affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod based in Ann Arbor, MI.

The team flew to Managua, Nicaragua's capital, then took a four-hour bus ride to Chinandega. Accommodations were in a clean air-conditioned hotel a block from Emmanuel Iglesia Evan-

giles. "They waited patiently in the 95+ degree humid weather without complaint. Dressed in their best, with smiles and appreciation gestures, they came in hopes of leaving with improved eyesight. The majority of the time they left with both a pair of glasses for distance and a pair for reading."

According to Fingles, the team saw "many people with severe cataracts and pterygium — a fleshy growth that covers the eye caused by over-exposure to dust, wind and sunlight. Unfortunately, this was not a medical mission and we could not perform the necessary surgery. Another disheartening experience was being unable to help several people who were nearly blind or had a very strong prescription."

In all, the team saw more than 950 people and dispensed 1800-plus pairs of glasses in the four-and-one-half days of clinic. They worked with Pastor Sandor Arguello and Pastor Luis Turcios with the help of five Nicaraguan interpreters.

Members of the Mount Calvary team were: Megan Adsit, Shannon Bachman, Emily Brighton, Deb and Jenny Fingles, Bill and Alex Leipprandt, Doris Lopez-Evans, Barbara Mabee, Linda O'Donnell, Candi and Roger Shaw, Amanda and Vicar Marty Strohschein and Duane Winter.



gelica Luterana (Evangelical Lutheran Church).

The main purpose of the trip was to conduct eyeglass clinics in Chinandega and the small rural village of Villa Salvadorita. Team members, who were trained in vision testing before the trip and were capable of testing near and far vision, took 18 military duffle bags filled with more than 3,000 pairs of glasses donated by people from all over the United States for the mission.

Clinics were held from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. One of the eight clinic stations was devoted to witnessing. Here, Nicaraguan pastors, deacons and deaconesses shared the Gospel message with every person who attended.

"People of all ages came to the clinics, some arriving at 5 a.m.," said

Faith-New Port Richey

Twelve teens from Faith joined more than 40 of their peers from Nebraska, Kansas and Indiana to witness their faith through service to Habitat for Humanity at the "Greater Gainesville (FL) Gator Gathering," June 24-July 1.

During their eight-day trip, the teenagers worked on four homes. They built exterior and interior walls; roofed and painted; installed cabinets; tile and flooring. They also helped to ready more than 5,000 pairs of eyeglasses to Nicaragua for that mission trip.

"It was a week filled with work, worship, sweating, singing, fun, fellowship, prayer and praise," said Faith Pastor Roy Lidbom. "And maybe a little sleep!"

He continued, "Although these faithful teenagers helped to bless those less

fortunate than themselves, most would agree that they were the ones truly blessed."



Faith-New Port Richey teens get ready for their trip to Gainesville for a summer servant event.

The Faith teens described their summer experience as "awesome" and "great." They "made new friends," "grew in faith" and "had so much fun." One participant summed it up: "I can't wait until next year's Servant Event!"

Hurricane Rebuilding Servant Event

Megan Reardon, a junior at Sandalwood High School and a member of Grace Lutheran-Jacksonville, FL, was one of 60-plus teenagers and adults from five LCMS congregations to participate in the servant event designed to help residents of the Fort Pierce area continue to rebuild after last summer's hurricanes.

The July 17-23 event was coordinated by Pastor Jon Thomas of Holy Cross Lutheran-Lake Mary.

Reardon described the week as "an awesome trip . . . An event where youth signed up and paid to serve and gather together to help people. We definitely saw the hand of God at work as He placed many challenges in our path, some that were solved by a quick trip to the emergency room and others that involved talking, understanding, prayer and a whole lot of listening."

During their week in Fort Pierce, the volunteers were busy with such activities as building roofs, replacing dry wall, — and restoring running water for a woman who had gone months without it.

Said Reardon, "Pastor Jon Thomas thought of everything, including how to get 60 teenagers out of bed in the middle of the summer at 6:30 in the morning. On a typical day, wake up call was at 6:30. However there was nothing typical about the wake up call, it was either pots and pans, a chain saw or music that drove us out of bed."

After the shock of the first morning, the group held morning devotions with a Scripture-based talk from Thomas and a few songs. Then it was time for breakfast and off to the work sites, where they labored until about 4 p.m. — "when we

got to take cold showers in a dark high school locker room," Reardon said.

After dinner and some free time, "we

were off to games and activities, where we had the pleasure of eating baby food, having water balloon fights, and relay races. At the end of the night we were off to the worship center where we were led by Pastor Jon in a very inspiring and emotionally touching worship service, much different than the ones we were used to. Then it was

bed time, which for most of us came all too late. I would have to admit that is the first time that I have ever said that. God definitely works in mysterious ways."

Reardon continued, "One of the most memorable experiences for me was the foot washing. On Wednesday night during worship we were asked to separate into our different color groups. Then we got to wash each others feet. Yes, I said got to, not had to. We first were able to humble ourselves and wash the feet of a fellow youth or adult leader.

"We were given the chance to kneel where Christ had knelt and had humbled Himself when He washed the feet of the disciples. We really were able to be Jesus with skin on just as we had prayed at the beginning of the



week. After we washed their feet we were then invited to change roles and sit in the seat the disciples had many years before us. It was the seat Christ had knelt in front of, and washed the disciples' feet allowing them to partake in his wonderful love."

Summarizing the experience, Reardon said, "God's love definitely moved and changed us in many ways. We each had gone into the experience with different hopes, fears and expectations, but we all came out of it with the same fire in our hearts. It is very easy to get all fired up and excited about the Lord while on an event such as this, but then you go home, please join us in praying that the fire will never die, and will continue to grow and spark new fires, as we are given the chance to share God's love again and again." □

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Another story of a special summer vacation is on page 12. Here you'll read how three educators from the Florida-Georgia District traveled to Cambodia to see the result of the 2005 Hearts for Jesus project.