

Small Jobs, Great Joys Mission Trip 2011

In middle Tennessee in May of 2010 there was no tornado, no hurricane, no earthquake, no tsunami – just rain. In some areas, more than 18 inches in 24 hours. This resulted in not a 500 year flood, but a *1,000 year flood*. Forty-nine counties were declared eligible for disaster assistance. In Davidson County alone, 10,000 people were displaced from their homes.

Even though FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) has closed its offices in the area, PDA (Presbyterian Disaster Assistance) is still operating out of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville. The Disaster Relief Coordinator for the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee informed us that there were still over 100 families on waiting lists for help – more than a year after the flood they have still not been able to return to their homes. These are the people for whom help did not come easy. They had to fight their way through agency after agency and miles of red tape. When we arrived to help even the smallest job produced great joys.

Wanda lives on Hill Rd. – she said people found it hard to believe she had flood damage on Hill Rd.! But as the torrential runoff flowed down the hill, it undermined the foundation of her house. Wanda tried to help herself, and had her house repaired with her own savings, but her money ran out before she was able to fix the 12 ft. high back deck, whose support posts were unsafe due to the erosion from the water. Even PDA had to turn down her request for help, because their guidelines didn't provide for money being spent on this kind of job. However, a previous work crew had donated extra money, and if we would donate the manpower the job could be done. We put our first crew of 4 men to work at this site, and now Wanda's deck is safe and strong. She was so excited about the work she couldn't do enough for our guys, constantly offering them cold drinks, coffee, and doughnuts.

Pat's home could have been saved, although it would need to be taken down to bare studs, disinfected, and have new walls and floors installed. However, regulations said that the house must be raised to above flood level, so it was determined that it was more feasible to completely remove the existing structure and rebuild anew on the foundation which would now be 8 ft. higher. After 14 months Pat's new home is finally near completion. Our second crew of 3 men were given the task of installing all the cabinetry in the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry. Pat has been renting an apartment, and hopes to move back into her house before she has to pay August rent. As she tried to express her thanks, she cried tears of joy and called our guys her "angels."

In Regina's condo all the interior had to be torn down and replaced. She tried not only to help herself but to help a family member find work by hiring him to rebuild her home. His skills were not up to the task, though, and she eventually had to release him from the job. PDA took over and is correcting mistakes and putting on the finishing touches. As our third crew of 3 ladies looked over the work to be done, Regina clasped her hands, broke into a big smile, and exclaimed, "I'm so glad to have some women in here!" The ladies patched holes in the walls and ceilings, did touch-up painting, installed cabinet hardware, and cleaned bathroom tile.

Regina is fortunate to have a son in the area that she has been living with, but hopes to move back into her condo before she returns to her librarian job when school begins in August.

David and Sheila's home was almost finished. All they lacked was a bathroom door large enough to accommodate their son's wheelchair. Crew #1 was dispatched and accomplished the mission. Even though his son is disabled, and his wife was recently diagnosed with cancer, David was an inspiration to our workers as he constantly expressed, "God is good!"

Crew #2 served two more households during the week, doing interior trim work and installing some doors. At one location they worked under the supervision of J.T., a 200 lb. bull mastiff, who kept tabs on the progress from his spot on the living room sofa!

The ladies crew finished the week at Leon and Ernestine's home. They, too, have been renting an apartment for more than a year, and hope to get back in their home before paying another month's rent. Our women did more touch up painting, installed door stops and outlet covers, and even repaired and painted the mail box. When it was time to go, Ernestine cried, and all she could say was, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

We were able to have Wanda, Pat, and Regina over to "our place" for dinner one evening. (Our place was Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville, where we were housed for the week.) We wanted to get to know them all a little better and hear their stories. But what also happened was that they shared with each other their trials and situations. Immediately upon meeting one another they chattered animatedly about experiences unique only to other Nashville flood victims. Wanda and Pat remembered that they had met before at community meetings seeking assistance. They all exchanged information and vowed to stay in touch to continue to help one another.

Often a mission trip is comprised of one big job. We have rebuilt an entire house from the bare studs, patched roofs and repaired rotten floors, torn off and replaced a porch and a deck, framed up a new house from foundation to roof trusses. We had no such big job waiting for us in Nashville. We hoped our work would be significant, but we were doubting Thomases. Beginning on Friday, the day before we left for Tennessee, hour by hour, day by day, God (through our work coordinators) sent the jobs our way. And as we met these homeowners and knocked out these smaller jobs we knew that what we were doing was significant. Relationships formed, bonds strengthened, God's praises sung, be it hard work or small jobs = Great Joys!