

Report of 2013 Mission Trip to St. Albans, West Virginia

This year's mission team of 16 First Folks and Friends dodged thunderstorms and poison ivy pesto, but safely completed several big jobs in one St. Albans neighborhood. The West Virginia Ministry for Advocacy and Workcamps (WVMAW) assigned our crew to work with the St. Paul Community and Economic Development Corp (SPCEDC). The SPCEDC, headed up by Pastor Mike Poke, is in its second year of a grassroots ministry to a local neighborhood known as Amandaville, just outside the St. Albans city limits. According to Pastor Poke, the area has not only been "neglected, but rejected." It is their mission to revitalize the approximately four-block area.

We were promised plenty of work, and that is what we got! The first and biggest job was to remove and replace a roof and a roofed porch on the same house. The job actually presented a third component with a flat-roofed area on an addition in the back of the house which was rotten all the way through. Work was steady on that house all week, and at week's end there was a new roofed porch, a newly engineered sloping roof on the back of the house, and most of the shingles!

Different groups of workers went back and forth to Job #2 during the week, which was in sight of the first house, and worked on replacing a deck and ramp, replacing a vanity and toilet, and coating the roof with waterproof sealant. Homeowner Rose said she felt "blessed" to finally have the improvements made to her home.

On Thursday, a small crew finally began work on Job #3, which was to tear out a bathroom and ready it for replacement. This proved to be a bigger job that we bargained for, because for every foot of the 3 layers of flooring we removed, we found more leaking pipes that had to be repaired. On this job we also found the answer to the age-old question, "How many Presbyterians does it take to move a bathtub?" The answer, "Five big strong ones!" This was an old-fashioned cast iron tub! However, by day's end on Friday, we did make the goal of finishing the bathroom demo. It was nice to meet homeowner Jim, and he checked on our progress every so often. He also kept bottled water in his fridge for our workers :)

One thing we always like to do while we are away from home working in the Lord's service is to build relationships with the people we meet. We were hoping to meet the homeowner of Job #1, but his house is in such disrepair inside from the leaking roof that he is living somewhere else until it is fixed. Pastor Poke told us his story. Last summer he was out of work, saw the SPCEDC work crews in the neighborhood, and joined in. He helped work on other folks' houses all last summer, so Pastor Poke was delighted to put him on the list to receive help this summer. Luckily, he has a job now, which is why we didn't meet him, but we were glad to learn of his Good Samaritan attitude.

We also met many folks from area churches. SPCEDC 2nd vice president, Rev. Herk McGraw, made it his mission to find someone to provide dinner for us each night. During the course of the week we ate at five different churches. Between them there were many who spent time and money to provide hospitality to our group, and we were doing nothing for them. It was a bit humbling, but also very interesting to talk to lots of different folks and see their houses of worship.

It was very heartening to get to know Pastor Poke and Herk, and to learn about the SPCEDC and see their enthusiasm for their mission. It was exciting to work with them and experience first-hand how a group of folks who want to help can quickly turn their desires into action. We are grateful to the WVMAW for hooking us up with this opportunity for mission. It was a perfect match for our group!