

2007 New Orleans Mission Trip Report

God has once again blessed us with a highly successful mission trip for continuing Hurricane Katrina relief work. It was wonderful to once again eat, sleep, and worship in our sister church, First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans (FPCNO), and to reconnect with our friends, Pastor Cliff Nunn and his wife Nieta, and the Kleinfeldts – Henry, his wife Diane, and his sister Joyce. The bulletin for worship that Sunday morning stated that there was “a mission group of 60 *people* here last week,” and also that “our *friends* from South Boston have returned.” We truly felt the “First Church Connection” was continuing.

Although a lot of people (the mission team included) thought we were crazy to be going to work in New Orleans in the heat of the summer, God apparently intervened on our behalf and sent plenty of rain and cooler temperatures. We only had a couple of really hot days, and even then it wasn't as humid as it could have been, so we didn't suffer too much.

Our plan for work was to replace 13 windows in the first floor of Henry's house, the same house in which we rebuilt floors and walls on last year's trip. We also planned to replace the chancel floor in the church. We accomplished both those goals well within our budget, and our money, time, and human resources allowed us to also complete the following projects:

At Henry's – completed bathroom tiling that we started last year; installed shelves in the bathroom closet; trimmed out a door that another group had installed; spruced up the yard by trimming trees, mowing grass, and cleaning and replanting the front flowerbed; completed the painting of the porch corner posts that a previous group had left half done; and cleaned and painted the front entrance stairwell to the second floor.

At the church – refinished the woodwork on the wall between the narthex and the sanctuary; refinished the base of the pulpit, the lectern, the guest book table, and an organ bench dating back to the original church (circa late 1800's); refurbished the sanctuary bathroom which included tearing out unsightly plumbing, installing a new pedestal sink, painting, and hanging an antique full length mirror; repaired leaks in the bell tower and the cement around the stained glass windows; and reinstalled the handrail on the steps to the organ loft.

The windows and the chancel floor were the two main projects, and the appreciation for accomplishing those tasks was truly heartfelt. However, the painting of Henry's stairway and the refinishing of the woodwork in the church brought exclamations of delight and tears of joy. Completing the structural repairs was necessary, but it was so fulfilling to restore some beauty to each of those buildings that we now think of as our own. It is mind-boggling to consider what these people have lived through during the past two years, and the struggle to rebuild is nowhere near over. It was a blessing to us to be able to help the Kleinfeldt's and FPCNO take the next step from simply surviving to enjoying their surroundings. They all send their sincere thanks and gratitude to all of our members who helped to make this mission trip a reality.

We were supposed to return home on Saturday, July 21, but due to a cancelled flight we didn't make it back to South Boston until Sunday, July 22, some at 2:00am and some at 2:00pm. What might have been God's purpose in our travel delays? We had been given “Presbyterian Disaster Assistance” t-shirts, which we all wore for the trip home, and we had quite a few comments from strangers asking where we had been and what we had done, and telling us what a great thing it was that we were doing. How many more saw our shirts and considered our mission because of the extra time we spent trying to get home? The Upper Room devotion for that day, Sunday, July 22, summed it all up:

The Thought for the Day – “The light of each Christian helps to show God to the world.”

The scripture – “Jesus spoke to [the people], saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’ --John 8:12”

The prayer – “Heavenly Father, we thank you for light that enables us to see. Help us to share your light with others. Amen.”