

Mary Kohles

Mission Trip 2005  
Cairo, IL

This was my very first mission trip. Every time someone would ask me what I was expecting of this trip, I would answer by truthfully saying "I have no idea." Many people would say "Well, there has to be something that you're expecting!" All I really knew is that I would be working hard.

Going into this trip I was hoping to meet new people, and to form closer bonds with the people I knew. The trip started with about an eight hour van ride. I really think my van was the best. Everyone had a unique and awesome personality. The "Vandango" was a great chance to meet new people.

One night we went to a Baptist service. It was great! Unlike at our mass, there was music playing the entire time, and dancing was encouraged. Although the mass was not like anything I've ever seen, I felt comfortable, and I liked their way of celebrating Jesus.

Kid's Club was unlike anything I have ever experienced. All that these kids really wanted was to have someone to play with and to give them "neck rides". You would not think that you would get so tired and sore taking care of kids, but you do, and it is worth it to see them happy.

My group got the opportunity to go on a prayer walk. We walked around Cairo and prayed for things and people around town. On the way back we had the chance to stop by a soup kitchen, the women working there were so nice and caring. One of the sisters, many years ago, met Mother Theresa and had a big framed picture hanging on the

wall. Those people give up everyday to keep other people alive, and that is one great way to live.

This trip to Cairo was unbelievable. I formed closer bonds with the people there. I worked hard, but I had so much fun.

## Cairo Reflection

I'm not sure how I can even begin to describe such an amazing experience. My work group was assigned to Kid's Club for the first two days. Kid's Club is when all of the kids from the community come to the Youth works site to play games, do arts and crafts, sing songs, and just have fun. Kid's Club is always my favorite part of mission trips because the kid's are always so full of life and energetic. I never dreamed, though, that so many kids would show up to Kid's Club. There were about 50 kids with more energy and attitude than I have ever seen. There was not a point in time in those two days that I did not have a kid on my shoulders and a circle of kids waiting for their turn to get a "neck ride". There was one boy especially though that brought extreme joy to me on my trip to Cairo. His name was Jayland and he was 5 years old. Jayland colored me pictures and was rarely out of my sight. I was really sad to have to say goodbye to him but there was more to be done in Cairo. The next day my work crew was assigned to visit a nursing home in the morning and then paint a house in the afternoon. At the nursing home I met a wonderful group of women that I talked to for about an hour. Then it was off to our worksite. For two days we painted a house and the satisfaction I felt at the end of those days was incredible. We were slowly helping to put Cairo back together, house by house, paint stroke by paint stroke, and friendship by friendship. I went to Cairo hoping to change it and I left knowing that it changed me.

Ali Hayes

What would you think about a vacation that involved an 8 hour car ride with 11 other people crammed into one van, and two other vans following behind? A vacation in which you had to scrape paint off of houses at hours at a time and then repaint it all over? On this vacation, you would have to babysit and probably go a few days without a shower. I went on a 'vacation' like this and the truth is, it was one of the best vacations I have ever had. Actually, this vacation was really a mission trip but it could be considered a vacation because it was just as fun and memorable. The long car ride was hilarious and for everyone's information, the VanDango's rule. Once we got there, we were able to get to know Cairo and the people who lived there. It was awesome to have the opportunity to help someone and actually make a difference in someone else's life. The painting was very fun. There was roof stradling, water bottle fights and surprise water balloon attacks. How can that not be memorable? When we weren't working on houses, we were with the children of Cairo. Rowdy as they were, it was something I enjoyed very much. I think the kids learned how to work together and got a better idea of including everyone in their games. It made me smile when a little girl or boy asked to sit on my lap or give them a piggy back ride. To know that someone looks up to you is a wonderful feeling. On the last day of Kids Club, the firefighters opened one of the fire hydrants and let the kids run through it. I had never seen this happen except in the movies and it was so great to see the kids as well as the youth workers having so much fun together. I had not been planning to get wet but someone had other plans for my dry clothes. We had endless games of knockout in which even the worst basketball players, including me, were included in, bible readings and sing-a-longs and so much more. Everyone was included in everything, making one big family of God.

There are some things that happen in your life and you know that you will never forget them. Or, at least, you don't want to. The trip to Cairo was one of these experiences for me. I learned so much about myself and it strengthened my belief and trust in God even more. I learned how to see the good in people and not to judge so much. I learned how to give to other people, even if it is only my love, and forget about my own wants. I learned that it is very easy to make friends if you try and that everyone has at least one thing in common with another person. I learned that having fun comes naturally when you're with awesome youth works people. I learned so much more and it's hard to list everything. The important thing is that this trip changed my life and made me a better person. I know that I am closer to God and I have all intentions of spreading his word day by day. I now have a stronger want to be a faithful and active catholic and become someone who can and will make a difference in this world.



Shane O'Donnell  
9/18/05  
Cairo Paper

My experience was much different from what I thought that the trip was going to be like. When I first heard about the trip from my uncle Pluchar I thought that we were only going to be fixing up houses and spending all day doing that, and I was looking forward to it a lot because I love working with my hands. I never thought that we were going to be doing all of the things that we did on that trip. I found out later that we would be working with the kids of Cairo through the bible school that they do there. We also had evening activities that were very fun. Now here are my thoughts on the work sight and the bible school.

The work sight was very fun. I loved working on those houses. Our group leader was my cousin Eddy Pluchar. The rest of the group was made up of Colleen, Sean, Mary, Courtney, and Melissa. We had an awesome time working there and helping out the people of Cairo. The first house that we worked on belonged to Mrs. Ice. We cleaned her windows and fixed whatever else needed to be fixed in front of her house. She also let us use her bathroom whenever we needed, which was very helpful, the whole work crew for those 2 days ate lunch in front of her house also. It was very nice because it was shaded and cool weather wise. After we worked on Mrs. Ices house we moved on to our next house. I forget the name of the man who lived there but he was very nice. Every day he would

buy us a 12 pack of orange soda. We scraped his whole house of his paint and repainted it a cream color. In the back of his house though was very hard. Eddy and I moved all the junk on his deck so that we could work there. There was also a bee problem where I was working but it wasn't too bad. It was very hot back there though because there was no breeze and the sun was just baking you like you were in an oven. I had a great time at the work sight.

The bible school with the kids was very interesting. I didn't think that I enjoyed this part of the trip as much as I did the work sight part. The kids there were very outgoing and crazy. It was fun though being around a bunch of screaming kids, but it also gave me headaches. We usually had a good turnout of kids each day. They ranged in age from 5 to 8<sup>th</sup> grade I believe. Another thing that you do when you are on the Kids Club part, you go on a trip to a place in the town, our group went on a prayer walk though and picked up trash around the town. We visited a lot of poor places in the town. I thought that the whole kids club part of the trip wasn't exactly for me.

In our free time we did a lot of cool things with each other on the trip. The ride here was very fun in our van they we named "The Van Dango." We did all sorts of things on the way there in our van. Ellie M. Made a Steve Erwin show. It was very interesting. When we got to Cairo there were a couple places that we went to. There was a very cheap ice cream parlor called "The Diary Hut", there

was also the Dollar General. That store had a lot of cool things in it that were very cheap, and at night when we were all in our sleeping bags I would give out my food that I bought from that store.

I thought that the Whole experience of going to Cairo was very spiritual and very fun. Also on that trip I was convinced to go to another retreat called "Breakaway." I am planning on going to Mexico next year I think. Thank you Uncle Ed for introducing me to this mission trip.

Sean Anderson

One word to sum up the entire week at Cairo is amazing. One thing that I have learned from going on many different trips with St. Julies is not to have any expectations. Every trip is unique and special in its own way. Cairo, Illinois was the second mission that I had been on. I went last year to the Smokey Mountains in North Carolina with this group. That was one of the best experiences of my life, and I was hoping that I would feel the same after this trip.

The week before the trip was one of the longest weeks of my life. I was unbelievably excited about going on another trip. As the week went on, I was getting more and more excited. Of course I didn't start packing till the night before. When I was finished with that I went and spent the night at Jake's house. I started the night off by finishing up the gift that I had made for Kerry for her birthday. Later on that night I made my mom's birthday present. We finally went to bed at about 4:30am after some amazingly fun experiences. We woke up and we were almost late for church. After church we were on our way. Van Dino Latina was the best. After 8 hours of fun, we finally reached our destination. The first night was just an introduction, and we didn't start working until the next day. For the first two days my work group was at work site. We scraped and painted the same house for the duration of our time at work group. There were also two other work groups working on different houses on the same street. The next two days we spent at kids club. The kids were very energetic even though it was 90+ degrees outside. It was great to see all of the smiles on their faces. They would come up to you and ask for a neck ride, and of course you would always say yes. On the second and last day of kids club, a fire truck came and the firemen opened up the fire hydrant for all the little kids to play in. Naturally I had to carry the three people from our group that didn't want to get wet (Meredith, Tess, and Colleen). Thursday was Kerry's birthday. We all sang to her and gave her our gifts. During the week we also went on evening activities. During one of them, we went to a giant cross just into Kentucky, I think. It was right around where the Mississippi and Ohio rivers met. We got to stay and watch the sunset over the river. It was beautiful. During another activity we went bowling. This wasn't just normal bowling. We had to dress up as our favorite childhood cartoons or characters. Meredith, Tess, Mary, and I dressed as the Ninja Turtles. It was a lot of fun.

There are some people that I would like to quickly thank. First, to all of the YouthWorks staff. To Tye, Andy, Shay, and Sara; thank you for all the time and effort that was put into this week. Next to Mr. Frizz and my small group. Thanks for being a great small group leader and group. To Eddie Pluchar and my work group. Thank you for being an awesome work group leader and work group. I was really happy to find out that you were going to be one of my leaders again this year. To all the chaperones. You guys were wonderful, thanks for taking a week out and coming with us. Also to Meredith (aka Meal Buddy!!!). This week would not have been the same without you. I am really



glad that I had this opportunity to grow closer to you. I had a ton of fun spending a lot of time with you this week.

I would also like to say thank you to my dad. Thank you for taking an entire week out of work to share this experience with me. I am really glad that you had the chance to come along and do God's work

That week at Cairo taught me a lot about myself and brought me closer to God. It really strengthened my faith. I got a lot closer with my best friends, while strengthening my friendships with others. I also met a lot of new people that I will always remember. I will never forget Cairo '05!

Mike Mannion

Caro was also me I loved how the people there were so nice and cool to hang out with

The kids. The food sucked though o well. But i'm glad I met some of my old friends It's been so school. Their small group my small group was kick ass it was so cool

The group with all the or where we all sat ok I mean I liked it yea it was octet old peoples home where I went was nice but I rely liked the small group that I was in.

The gym was so hot but it was super fun I liked how we played 21 and nock out .THE ACT THAT WE DID ON THE STATGE WAS ALSOME .I LOVED the trip so much.

Meredith Mannion  
Mission Trip Reflection

When I think about Cairo I think about all the friends that I made when I was down there. The 2005 mission trip to Cairo changed my life in so many different ways. I remember the first couple of minutes in Cairo looking around the city didn't look like much except for a lot of run down buildings. The first couple of days were really hard. Our group had the task of scraping all the paint of the first house. The side in the shade had already been done but the group before us so we had to work out in the sun. The think I remember the most was that we took a ton of water breaks and the huge water fight we had. The next couple of days I have to say were probably my favorite. Getting to work with the kids was a lot of fun. I got in really close with the kids and I remember coming home n missing some of the things we did with the kids. I have to say the trip this year was pretty exciting. It was a lot of fun over all and im really looking forward to next years trip. I made a lot of friendships and learned soo much from this trip I cant wait for next year.

*Mary A. Maghri*

Cairo Mission Trip 2005  
Reflection

Good Morning, I am honored to be with you this morning and share my experiences from my 5<sup>th</sup> mission trip. 3 years ago we had gone on a mission trip to Cairo Illinois because that site offered our teens a chance to split their time working with the children as well as “rehabbing” houses. Many of our teens had reacted with displeasure back then, “But it’s Illinois! Can’t we go someplace where they really need our help?”

This past June we revisited Cairo. Our teens jumped at the opportunity. They have learned something that many of us... myself included, need to stay in touch with. The Lord works in many ways, through all people. We can receive as much in blessings from giving in God’s grace...as those receiving. First, let me tell you about Cairo.

The city sits at the southern most tip of IL, where the MS and Ohio rivers meet. At one time a booming shipping center, Cairo has huge mansions and a scenic sprawling landscape. With the emergence of technology and decreased reliance on the waterways, Cairo began a slow decline. Today, in 2005, 65% of all residents live below the poverty line. 100% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty. Yes...every child in the city of Cairo lives below the poverty line.

There is still some “old money” in Cairo. There are beautiful homes, owned by elderly folks, or kept in the family. Because the power company draws from the tax base, electric bills are ridiculously high. By example, \$415/month on a *budget plan* for a small 3 bedroom home. Many residents attempt to move out – but no one wants to move in. As a result, property values have plummeted. The economy has spiraled downward to the point where many homes – magnificent and modest – are abandoned. 2 blocks from our location, 2 beautiful 3 story homes as well as a hospital, sit abandoned. Massive weeds grow through doorways and upper story windows. I.V. poles are visible through the broken out hospital windows. A reminder that this was once a place of healing. At first site, the future looks bleak for Cairo.

What can 42 energetic teens and 8 adults do? We brought hope. Remember 90 + degree heat? Add humidity that you could wring out of the air. Our teens scraped cedar board, climbed ladders, hauled trash, and painted...sweat dripping all the while. They battled giant bees, “I’m tellin’ you, Mrs. Mags...that bee weighed 50 lbs!” They sang songs and joked around...they caught the attention of the neighborhood. Anyone who walked by was pulled into conversation, curious about what “all those kids were doing.” Meanwhile, the other half of our group went to nursing homes and a hospital for the mentally disabled – visits

most of us would avoid. The elderly and infirmed lit up when our teens sat down to talk, sing and pray. Then it was back to our site to prepare lunch. Our teens fed 135 children a free hot lunch, most likely <sup>their</sup> the only meal of the day. No air conditioning, no shiny cafeteria. One of our teens actually volunteered to man the 500° oven to bake pizza. After lunch, it was time to go out in the heat for games. 1 teen for every 4 children. Several times I had to rescue a teen that had 2 or 3 kids climbing on him for a “neck ride.” Children were grabbing for the water bottles like we were handing out \$100 bills. Yet our teens kept on going! They worked and played tirelessly. Their energy was unquenchable! It matched the most rambunctious of children. We acted out bible stories, made crafts, sang and prayed. The dirtiest of Cairo’s little residents found loving hugs and fun-filled hours.

In an environment so overwhelming... profound poverty, children running everywhere... how can St Julie’s teens find the enthusiasm? What is their motivation? They can see the difference they are making. They know they are bringing hope. Be proud. This community is blessed with some incredible young people willing to give up a week of their summer, without cell phones, CD and DVD players...showers...and enthusiastically embrace people that you and I would ignore on the street. They learned that what meets the eye does

NOT define the character of a place or the person. The Lord gives deep and unwavering faith to those in need. Where we see despair, they find peace and love. Our group was reminded, over and over again, that material goods are not what makes a life. The people of Cairo, in their broken down homes and second hand clothes, are joyful. They have found Christ in a passionate way. Thanks to the Cairo community...so have I.

A tradition on our mission trips is to worship with the local community at their church. In Cairo, we filled a tiny non-denominational church. The congregation sang, clapped, yelled and stomped in praise to our Lord. We joined in. I thought the floor boards would collapse! Before I leave this ambo, I ask that you do something very untraditional in our Catholic faith. Make some noise in church. Applaud, yell "praise God," go ahead and stomp your feet. May your applause not be for this speaker, but as praise for the many blessings we have received. A prayer of thanks for our youth, the prayers and support of this community and the powerful work our Lord continues to do not only in Cairo, and in <sup>MS -</sup>New Orleans but all over the world. Lord, we praise and thank you!