

Mary Kate Enright

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Cairo

The mission trip to Cairo, IL was absolutely amazing. It really brought me closer to my faith and God in that one week.

This was the first mission trip I have ever been on and it was the first time I met all of these new faces. I was also very nervous because it was also the first time I was ever away from my parents. But, when I got in the van and we left I was fine. Everybody in my car was very nice and we had so much fun playing Mafia.

The work sites were so much fun!! I did the kids club first and the kids there were so much fun. They always wanted you to play with them. Playing tag with them, walking to the park, and coloring were such a blast! Then, on our last day at kids club, we took pictures of them and they were so excited to meet the other group. At the other work site our group had to scrape paint off a house. And to tell you the truth, it was the best four hours of the day. I got to know people better and I got to serve God all at the same time. I think the best part of this work site was getting to know Sam Hayes and Kate Myroup. Kate was one the nicest people here. On our last day at the work sites we talked about music and other stuff and she invited me to go to a Rascal Flats concert with her and some other people. She always makes me laugh even at her cheesy jokes. I love her to death and she is like the older sister I always wanted! Sam was the funniest guy on my work site. ‘‘He chizzled his nizzle.’’ He is one of coolest guys I know!

Wednesday night and Thursday night were the best nights there! On Wednesday night, we had a prayer group all in a circle and Liv said something special about each person in the St.Julies group. I was afraid she didn't even know my name but she told me

how much I mean to the group and a lot of other stuff that really filled my heart and made me so happy. To this day I can remember what she said to me. It was like I belonged there with all of these amazing people. On Thursday night, it was the feet washing. When my group leader, Trisha, washed my feet and told me that I was a great, new part to the group, I was moved! That really made me a better person and a better Catholic. I got to meet and get to know amazing people that really made me the person I am today. I love you all so much!!!

Gabrielle Wydra
Cairo Reflection

Cairo changed my life. Every second I was there I saw God in every step of the way, through the run-down houses and abandoned businesses to the bright smiles and shouts of laughter of the Kids Club. It is sickening to think that a place going through such a struggle to survive is in our very own state, about 6 hours away from our luxurious homes, beautiful cars, and abundant lifestyles. Cairo, Illinois provided me with such a profound outlook on life and world God meant for us to have.

This mission trip was one of the biggest challenges in my life both physically and mentally. I stretched my abilities and my talents to great lengths and to my surprise I discovered that I had the power to do even more and give even more of myself to these people who had nothing. I saw myself open up to total strangers on my work sites, with little care as to how I look or smell. To God, I was a beautiful servant and to the people of Cairo I was a true gift of God.

Mentally, I don't think I was prepared to see the things I saw in the city of Cairo. I saw endless destruction and sadness. I saw girls my age carrying 2 or more babies and I knew instantly that they will never get that part of their life back. I listened to the kids of Cairo tell me how they were unable to eat breakfast that morning or how they had not been able to see their father in years, after minutes of just meeting them. I saw the look of complete happiness on their faces when they found an opened bag of pretzels in the van, and even due to the fact that they had not eaten a good meal in quite some time, they shared their newly found treat with everyone in the car. What I felt was such a heartache knowing that there is a generation of people stuck in this place that can't even come close to satisfying their dreams.

A moment in the trip that has been stuck in my mind ever since, was a journey we took through downtown Cairo. I felt as if I had been walking through a ghost town the entire time, words can't even describe the bleakness and eeriness of a town that was such a thriving part of Illinois that quickly turned into a place lacking the funds to even destroy the devastation of falling buildings and abandoned homes and business. Buildings had trees and vines growing inside of them, glass shards and debris were scattered through out the sidewalk. As I walked on I found an apartment with the door busted open, as I looked inside I saw a house turned upside down, beds, chairs, sinks, and garbage covering every inch of the floor. I looked further and I saw disheveled but normal home with suitcases under the bed, a skate board in the doorway, a tiny baby doll lying on the unmade bed. Adjacent to the apartment was a store with a sign in the window proclaiming they were open and I peeked inside the window I saw a Pepsi can sitting in the counter and shelves stacked with purses and knick knacks. I still cannot figure out the circumstances of how someone can leave their homes or businesses in that manner and never return back. There is absolutely so much more going on in Cairo than just a poor town struggling to make a living, it is a complete devastation that is clearly not getting enough help or attention.

Through out my week on mission trip, I was pushed beyond my limit; often I was frustrated, depressed, tired, and sore. I became accustomed to the fact that I will, without a doubt, be out of my comfort zone at various moments in my day. Yet, it is through those times where I wanted to quickly escape the emotionally stressful situation that I feel it brought me the most strength and joy in the long run to be able to ignore that warning signal in my mind and keep venturing further.

The most refreshing aspect of working in Cairo was knowing that I was there because God had so many wonderful plans for me. He made me the person I am, even with all my faults and misfortunes, and he knows more than anyone my capabilities. Through all the sadness that I experienced I felt so much hope for Cairo in the future because of the hard work of Youthworks, the selfless people of the town, and the wonderful people I spent the most amazing week of my life with. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to see Him in so many ways and for allowing me to open up my mind and my heart. Through Cairo, I experienced an inspiring chapter of my life where I am moved and entirely transformed by the wonderful yet plagued world we live in.

FREDDY IZGUERRA
REFLECTION: CAIRO 2008

This summer, I've had the privilege to go to Cairo Illinois. This is my second mission trip with TNT, and like my last experience, I was able to find that God exists in places where you would have never imagined Him to. While on the trip, I've spent my time at kids club, and at a work cite for a house. At kids club, you find that no matter how poor a person can be, they stay content with what they have. That's important because it makes you realize that an iPod isn't the most important thing in the world, or being able to go to sox games on a regular basis. I've seen God in these children, and feel blessed to have been a part of that experience. I also spent my time fixing up houses that were not in real good shape. So while scraping the house, and then painting it, I've realized that it's my duty to help people regardless of whether or not i was forced to. Even though it was a pain sometimes, I felt like I was becoming closer to God by doing his work out in the heat of the sun. So where does that leave me? The answer is simple, stay true to God, and the REAL important things like family and faith...and also to occasionally go to Sox games.

For this being my first mission trip ever, the ride to Cairo, Illinois was an experience that I will never forget. After arriving at church at seven am and going to mass we loaded up the vans and were on our way to Mission Trip 2008. There were a few thoughts that ran through my mind about this trip but I really didn't have any expectations. After attending the Mission Trip Lock-In I became much more familiar about the culture and community of community. I was very shocked to find out the small population, little income, and the living conditions everyone in the community has to deal with on an everyday basis. This was my experience!

After a long seven-hour ride to Cairo we finally arrived in the town. My first reaction was at I couldn't believe what I was looking at. Most of the houses had boarded up windows from families either abandoning their houses or from fires that the community cannot afford to clean up after. I also noticed that there was not a hospital within thirty miles of this community so this means if someone was in need of immediate care they would either have to drive to the hospital or try to take care of it themselves. This was very different from what I was used to. Just driving through this community made me realize how grateful I am to live the life I have and appreciate everything no matter what.

Sunday night was pretty much an orientation to the Mission Trip and getting to know the town of Cairo and how difficult of the lives the people have to deal with. It really touched my heart to just realize that not everyone lives the types of lives we live here in Tinley Park. I never knew about Cairo until I went on the Mission Trip. A few facts that really stood out to me were that 100% of students that attend public schools live below the poverty level. That was very shocking for me to find out. Its not

that they don't try to find jobs and make money, there are not many jobs that are needed to be filled. Another interesting fact that I found out was that over 50% of preschool students have one or more teenage parents. That is very different to what I am used to and very shocking to find out. I realized to be grateful for my belongings and be willing to accept others because you never know what they have been through.

It was finally Monday it started off with breakfast, devotion time, and orientation. During orientation we were told if we had kids club the first two days or worksite. I found out that I had kids club. I was so excited for kids club since I love to work with kids and love to meet new people. I didn't really have any expectations since this was my first time going to kids club and if I had something to expect it wouldn't be as exciting if I don't accomplish what I expected.

After splitting off into our two groups Dishon, who was our leader for kids club, explained the rules and the agenda for the next two days. We then loaded up the vans and were off to the local church where kids club was held in the basement. When we first go there we planned out what was going on for the two days such as games, skits, and crafts. After planning we ate lunch then it was time to go pick up the kids. As we arrived at the projects I could not realize how these lifestyles were so different to what I was used to. It was very low class with little to no money. Also, the children are very dependent compared to what I am used to. Some children would walk home from kids club alone and would live blocks away from the church. I found this very remarkable that they were able to find there way home at age five.

It was the end of the second day of kids club. It really has changed my life for the better and having the privilege to spend time with these kids was an unforgettable

experience. One of the first kids I met was Donald but everyone calls him Don Don for short. He had such a great personality and was always happy no matter what. Don Don would always climb up you like a tree and would hide and make you go look for him. I have met so many kids at kids club that I will never forget. I wish we were able to spend more time at kids club, so we can get to know the kids more. Although kids club was over the next two days I spent at worksite.

After we were split off into our groups we were told our worksite assignments, rules, and safety then I was off to repairing a house. When my group arrived at our worksite the house was very old and had parts of the house that was completely scraped of the old paint and parts that needed to be. I found out the next two days will be spent scraping off about three to four layers of old paint. At first I was mad that I was not able to paint at all, but after realizing how grateful the owner of the house Martha was there was no reason to be mad at all. It made me realize how grateful everyone in the community was after we came and helped out for just a week. Helping out Martha was an amazing experience and made me feel so helpful.

After attending my first and only Mission Trip to Cairo not only changed my life but also made me closer to God. It made me realize how different other cultures and communities are, the different lifestyles there are, and made me appreciate all I have. It also made me see life in a different perspective. After Cairo I became closer to God then I ever was before. I know that he is always there for everyone no matter what. Going to Cairo was one of the best decisions I have ever made!!!

This mission trip was my first and it was really, really fun!! I enjoyed helping out. Before the first day even started I said that it felt good knowing that I'm here to help. This trip I know I didn't just go on just because I wanted to, but instead It was a calling from God. I enjoyed helping out with Kids Club and painting the house. Meeting new people from our church and all the other was a really cool experience too. Also growing closer to everyone made me realize that our St. Julies TNT youth group is not just a bunch of teens hanging out but one big family that you can count on and rely on to be there when you're down and to have your back when you're not. This trip also brought me MUCH closer to God, The prayer walk was one of my favorite things. I shared a lot of my beliefs on it , and I'll share some now. One of my beliefs is that we are all put here on this earth for a purpose and when God knows that we know that we fulfilled that purpose then he will call us home to our true home in Heaven. Another thing that I thought about was we hear of our make-believe powers like lasers shooting from our eyes or walking through walls, but God can do anything. He has the powers that we can not ever imagine about and yet he allows us to do his job for him!! I don't know about you but I feel honored to be given this trust. Overall I loved this mission trip with a passion. I'm definitely going on next years' mission trip and remember THE LORD LOVES YOU!!

Adam Marshall

It's hard to reflect on my trip to Cairo and pick out all the things I took away and leaned from it because there is so much that has changed me since I arrived in Cairo. Darien, where I live, is "a nice place to live" according to the welcome sign. It really is a wonderful and promising environment to grow up and live in. However Cairo is very different. It's not such a nice place to live and not nearly as promising as Darien. Although the children in Cairo have so much potential and personality, they just don't have the same resources and opportunities that we do to make our lives wonderful. Even though they may not have all the material things we have, God knows they have the faith and the strength to be happy.

The people of Cairo are amazing in the way that they have so little, but can be so happy and love God so much. On the prayer walk through Cairo I learned a lot about the community and how they're so strong and they are survivors. The church was in the midst of building a home they bought for only \$450. People will come to this home in times of need, to just hang out, or to go when they have nowhere else to sleep and the park doesn't seem so appealing. This home shows that a little love can change the world.

"A little love can change the world", by far one of the biggest things I took away from this trip. A helping hand can encourage someone else to lend a helping hand, and so on. Love is contagious, like a smile. It moves other people to love and help and be happy. Everyone has a lot of love to give, and a lot of room to be loved in return. Every single person I encountered on this trip had so much love to give and wasn't afraid to show their love. This not only inspired me to love while I was in Cairo, but throughout my whole everyday life as well. A little love can change the world, and my experience in Cairo proved that the world is changed every second by those who chose to show and share their love.

Renee Murray

Mission Trip 2008
By: Sam Hayes

I felt happy most of the time on the mission trip. I had fun working in Cairo. I met a lot of new people from St. Julie's. They had a prayer circle where everyone prayed for me. I am in renal failure and I have to start dialysis soon. The prayer circle made me feel strong. I feel ready for my surgery in August.

I scraped and chiseled a house. It was hard work and I almost fainted. Father Art made me rest in the van with the air on. This made me feel better and after lunch I returned to working. It felt good to help others because a lot of times people are helping me. I would have liked to see my mom more or some kids my age but I met a lot of different people. We didn't finish the house we were working on because it was in really bad shape so we never painted we just scraped. I would have liked to paint but you have to do what needs to be finished.

The kids really loved me at Kid's Club. I had a camera so all of the kids kept coming by me. I worked with the 9 & 10 year olds. The kids got to paint shirts and make balloon animals. All of the kids seemed to have a great time.

The best thing about the Mission trip was being in Father Artur group. He is funny and he even laughs at my jokes. Plus he is very good at taking care of people. He makes me want to go to church and be a better person.

Cairo, IL. was my second mission trip with T.N.T and I enjoyed the experience a lot. The people in Cairo were very nice and extremely welcoming. The trip to Cairo was different because I have never seen such a poor or deserted town. While we were down there, we scraped and painted houses. Cleaned and mowed lawns and watched over the children of Cairo in kids club, a daytime program for kids ran by youthworks. Although we did all of this work, it didn't seem to change the town very much, it had a huge impact on the people. On this trip I met some interesting people and saw many different things. It made me realize how lucky I truly am for all of the small things in life, and most importantly it brought me closer to God.

- Phil Kawczynski

Even though this was my first mission trip, it certainly was awesome. With all its activities and work sites it really made me think about the way I live and how different it is. I really enjoyed painting and scraping paint off the houses, even though I was in a sling. I also enjoyed spending time with the little kids. I liked the activities and the games that were planned out for the kids. The leaders that were with us for the week were really nice and cool with us. I enjoyed exploring the town and its history because of its interesting landmarks and their story behind it. One of my favorite things about this trip was the ride by the river looking at the sun set. That really topped my trip off. This trip truly was amazing and I hope there are more to come. I ultimately thank God for giving me this opportunity to go on this amazing trip. I didn't even plan on going on this trip until some one told me that there were spots open. I really think there were spots meant to be open because God wanted me to experience such an awesome trip.

Eric Pehr
Mission Trip '08: Cairo, Illinois
Reflection

Being my second mission trip through TNT, Cairo was an amazing experience and had a significant impact in my life and attitude. As much as I tried to go into the trip without any expectations, I still couldn't rid my mind of all expectations. Cairo, however, blew a lot of the things I expected out of the water. I think the attitudes and personalities of the residents of Cairo were much different than that of my last mission trip to Minnesota. Of course we chipped paint and painted houses as usual, but the people that I met through the work projects still had an awesome influence in my life. One of my greatest memories from the work projects this year was when a couple of people driving by my work site stopped and asked about Youthworks and our youth group. It was cool to just share with them what we were doing and why we were doing it. I know that sometimes people in areas such as Cairo don't want groups like ours to help, but it was awesome to see those people be so open to our help and our mission. Kids Club was also much different from Minnesota. One of the most inspiring things at mission trip this year was seeing Dishon work with the kids at kids club. I saw a lot of people in TNT and the other churches form good relationships with the kids, which amazed me since we only had two days with them. In fact, seeing how well the kids responded to Dishon and the group's message was probably one of the best feelings I've ever had. I really knew we were trying our best to place God into their lives, especially because some of the kids might not have many biblical morals placed regularly into their schedules. Even though the other groups that shared the trip with us might have been a lot different, I strived to relate as much as possible with them and I found that I could

form friendships that I never expected would happen. Even today I continue to keep in touch with a few kids from the trip. Overall, I think that mission trip 2008 really showed me that no matter what my expectations are, there's always going to be a surprise. It's given me a really refreshing feeling that I think will enhance my experience for future trips.

Homily – 6/29/08 Matthew 16:13-19

Theme: We add to the church of Jesus

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.

St. Peter, Apostle, most prominent of the Twelve, listed first in the Gospels, is the first bishop of Rome. His original name was Simon, but Jesus gave him the name Peter. Peter was a native of Bethsaida and the brother of St. Andrew; he was married. He was a devote Jew. He and Andrew, both fishermen, were called by Jesus to be disciples. He was with Jesus during the Transfiguration.

Paul the "Apostle to the Gentiles" was one of the most notable of early Christian missionaries. Unlike Peter, he never met Jesus, His conversion took place as he was traveling the road to Damascus, and experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus. Acts records that Paul was a Roman citizen. He described himself as a Pharisee. According to Acts he worked as a tentmaker. He was a witness to the martyrdom of Stephen and he described himself as a persistent persecutor of the Church before his conversion.

Today we celebrate these 2 diverse individuals coming together on a common ground, that being their faith and dedication of their lives to Jesus.

2 days ago we returned from our Mission to Cairo, IL. It was a trip full of diversity and challenge just as the apostles faced.

Cairo's history is checkered at best; it's a history of segregation and bigotry that to some extent still exists today. Cairo was one of the last towns in America to accept integration, and then only after many painful events. We saw 1st hand a downtown main street completely abandoned, like some old movie set, shut down because white business owner chose to close their business and move rather than hire blacks. We heard of a community pool filled with cement by the National Guard because the town would not allow it to be integrated. We saw a community where almost 98% of its children live below the poverty level.

Yet Cairo is also a community of change, a change we had an opportunity to experience. We worked side by side with members of Two Rivers Ministries who bring prayer, service and reconciliation to the whole community, both black and white.

We met the Pastor of the United Methodist Congregation which throughout its long history had supported segregation until this year when it opened its doors to host a “kids club” for the summer for both black and white children. We were there when the Pastor asked Dishone, a 19 year old counselor with Youth Works, to be the 1st black in their history, to speak at their service today. We were there for the 2nd weekly picnic this summer at St. Mary’s park, open to the community, black and white, to get together to enjoy friendship and food.

We saw diversity in our own group as they interacted with the community. Watching Nicole bond with a young black girl and exhibit such love and compassion was incredible. Watching Jeremy try to outwit a couple of 3rd and 4th graders in a game of “Simon Says” was priceless. We had our lighter moments as well, from the Monday night outing in Kentucky where we found out who could really bowl, (it’s not Fr. Artur) to the daily trips to the Dairy Hut for a ice cream after a hard days work - thanks to your generosity. Grace got a good laugh when she described the “shape” of Pluto as “Blue” and on our last day as we were packing to come home, Dan put his bag into the Colorado van. I offered to pay the other adult leader of their group to take him but no luck.

The group also experienced the powerful strength of community that Jesus teaches us, as they toiled at Ms. Martha's house – scraping for 4 days, to give her a home she would no longer be embarrassed to have friends come visit, or as they scraped and painted at Ms. Grace's house and were prayed over and “invited” into her family.

The group experienced the bonding within it's own community as teens from 4 different groups came together as one with 1 shared purpose – service in Jesus' name, and as it witnessed an incredible testimonial / prayer by one of it's own at our evening “Church time”. If you have an hour or two to spare I'm sure Olivia would love to share that with you.

Finally the group experienced the Church we hear of in today's Gospel, one based on the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, the king to all. We had the moving experience of participating in a “Prayer Walk” through the community praying for those in need, including ourselves. And we found ourselves, Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and United Community congregations gathered in a Baptist church for a prayer service to our God.

Jesus asks us today, “Who do you say that I am?”

This week gave us the opportunity to see that he is the God of all mankind, teens, seniors, black, white, poor, middle class, Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, United Community and Baptist.

He is the God who gave each of us this incredible experience to share.

He is the God who sends each and every one of us out today in a shared faith, to continue to build his Church.