

**How would your life be different if you viewed every  
action as an opportunity to worship God?**

This was one of the reflection questions in our journal books that we used on our mission trip this year. Overwhelmingly, our small group responded that our everyday life would be more "positive". We also agreed that it would take some effort to actually accomplish this feat.

This was my 8th mission trip if you count the two Jr. High trips. Some of the Seniors have participated all five years. Deacon Ed has us beat, this was his 17<sup>th</sup>. Crazy right?! The one common thread is that you can always count on St. Julie students to represent our parish community to the highest standards. They work extremely hard. They are the first to volunteer when asked. They are respectful of each other, the chaperones and most importantly the people we are serving.

My work group spent its days working with the children from Logan, West Virginia and visiting two different Nursing Homes. We also unloaded a large truck filled with sheetrock. Needless to say, they worked very hard. Where four or more were gathered, they were handed the next piece of sheetrock and so it went.. They were so soaked with sweat that they all looked as if they had been swimming when the job was completed. A job very well done indeed. We did almost lose Mrs. O'Donnell off the truck but she recovered nicely and didn't miss a beat. (It really was an accident.)

The teens spent a lot of time planning out the activities for the children. Games, skits, Bible stories, songs, etc. were all part of each day.

They played countless games of 4-Square even though the Logan natives seem to have the upper hand. They played

during every moment of free time until the kids had to leave. The same scene could be found out on the basketball court where the younger Logan kids displayed their natural abilities while our teens did their best to keep up. The older teens befriended the older girls and became instant role models. Even for week it would make a lasting difference.

Our teens without a doubt used opportunity after opportunity to worship God every day.

Going to a Nursing Home, you never know what that experience will be like until it unfolds. Much depends on the good people who work there. Much more depends on the residents and their desire for the company of dozens of teens all at once.

At each of the Nursing Homes that we visited, the teens sang songs for the residents and then spent some quality time in conversation with as many of them as they could get to.

After we finished our entertainment portion at the first Nursing Home, a gentleman of about 80+ years, gifted us by playing the harmonica. He was amazing! He then played an encore much to everyone's delight.

The routine was the same for the second Home. We entertained with our songs first. However, a woman who was 94 years old sang a folk song for us. She had the most beautiful and stunningly strong voice. There were many tear filled eyes in the room.

The opportunities we are given are endless. It doesn't matter if we are a teen, middle-aged, 80 years old or 94, we can find opportunities to worship God each day!

What will you do today?

Mrs. Sheila Pluchar

# Mission Trip Reflection

Shannan Callaghan 7.5.12

My mission trip experience for the first time help me realize that you can have an connection with God. Helping others in need brought me closer to Him. Not only did I have have a connection with God, but while I was working and helping others I grew long-lasting friendships.

During the trip on and off the worksites I developed friendships with people all over. Everyone was encouraging you and supporting you throughout the trip. I have made a strong connection with all the other teens, but more importantly I have made a stronger connection with God.

On the mission trip God helped me through all the challenges I had to face. Not only does he help me with challenges on the mission trip, but he also helps me with challenges throughout life. Helping others in need was a way I felt a connection with God. Feeling a connection with God was a remarkable feeling.

I feel that everything happens  
for a reason that's why God  
wanted me to go on the mission  
trip to help others and grow as  
a person. On the trip I felt a  
connection with God, but it is still  
going. On the mission trip it just  
showed me how strong it was and  
how I can share that connections  
with others back at home. I really  
enjoyed going on the mission trip  
this year for the first time. I  
am hoping that I am going to be  
able to go on another one and to  
experience this feeling again.

## Mission Trip Reflection

After attending the mission trip to Tallulah, Louisiana, I was absolutely astonished in how I gained an even closer connection with God on my second mission trip in Logan, West Virginia. My trip to Logan was an excellent experience that allowed me to gain an amazing insight into my religion and an even closer bond with God.

One way in which I was enlightened by my trip to Logan, West Virginia was seeing what amazing things I could do through the power God has given me. After four days of hard work in building a wheelchair ramp, I was amazed at the results of our project. I never would have imagined we could create something that incredible, and the reaction of the homeowner, Miss Connie, was so rewarding!

Another way in which I was enlightened by my trip to Logan, West Virginia was seeing how the people opened up over time. The first day we arrived to our work site at Miss Connie's house, she was very kind but seemed to be reserved. By the final day of our work site, she was standing outside and telling our group stories about her life. I was aware of the leaders informing us of how they eventually open up, but experiencing it was incredible.

My trip to Logan, West Virginia has made a huge impact on my life. I have gained an even closer connection with God than I did on my first mission trip. It has amazed me at what challenges I can overcome through the hands of god.

## Mission Reflection 2012

Benjamin Helton

I have never been very open about my faith. I do not go around touting the fact that I am a Catholic. In fact, most of the time I say that I was "raised Catholic." I feel this way because due to my experiences with my faith, I have found that words are meaningless and those with faith that speak the most do the least. If a person has faith in God or any god is meaningless if there are no acts to accompany it. Otherwise it is all just words.

There was reluctance in me to accompany the TNT kids on this mission trip. I still owed about 20 hours of community service in accordance with my plea bargain for my DUI. This trip would put me scores ahead of the service number and it ate into almost a week of my summer vacation where I should have been preparing for my Fall 2012 semester at Northern Illinois University. But then I got to thinking about the nature of religion and faith and acting as Christ would act. Religion is not just about saying the right things to score points for the afterlife, it is about unifying a community. Too often, a community of Christians gets negative attention from society. Westboro Baptist Church springs to mind since they prefer to tear down instead of build by protesting soldiers' funerals with their infamous "God Hates Fags" signs. What TNT and St. Julie's does, though, is improve their own community as well as other, more impoverished communities. TNT puts the youth to work as Christ would work by involving them in programs that benefit the less fortunate. For this reason, I wanted to accompany the teens to West Virginia.

The Youthworks program instills a love of Christ in community action. From what I can tell, they seek out communities in need of and willing to accept assistance. It is comforting to know that more organizations the spread the actions of Christ exist. I do not currently attend church but the Church was a big part of my upbringing and will always be part of who I am. This mission trip was rehabilitating in my faith in the Church. It showed me a long forgotten side of it: the side that acts as Christ.

I am genuinely grateful and satisfied that I was given the opportunity to go on the mission trip to the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia. My visit to this poverty-stricken region was not just a simple trip; it was my own personal journey, a spiritual adventure that I will forever cherish. This touching expedition has provided me with memories that will assist me in solving future hardships and struggles throughout the remainder of my life. Upon first setting eyes on scenic West Virginia, my breath was taken away. I wondered how such a gorgeous state could be thrust into such an arduous situation; poverty dictated the ways of the people. I had numerous experiences that caused me to feel blessed for the basic needs that the many West Virginians were stripped of. For example, I was touched by all the children desperate for someone to love, something I take for granted each day. While entertaining the elderly folk at the nursing home, I was filled with great pride, for I created immense delight among the senior citizens due to the lovely songs I sang. In addition to that, some families were deprived of suitable shelters and living environments. Being part of a mission trip sent to reconstruct and paint these decimated homes made me feel as if I was positively contributing to and influencing our world. Not only did I help people in need, but I also learned more about myself and my life. I realized how blessed I am by God and how He wants me to assist those less fortunate than I. The elderly I entertained, the children I played with, and so much more has led me to believe that this trip not only allowed me to help those in West Virginia, but also influences me to volunteer when anyone in anyplace is calling for assistance. After all, every single one of God's creations is of equal importance.

Casey Decaro  
Mission Trip  
July 24, 2012



## Logan West Virginia Mission Trip Reflection

Dennis Bresingham

St. Julie's

This being my first mission trip ever, I had mixed feelings going into the trip. I didn't know what to expect, and I had only two real friends going with me. Also I am not a member at St. Julie's; therefore it was very unlikely that I would know anybody there. Before this trip I felt like it would be just a week of me waking up early, chipping paint, going back and sleeping, but it was much more. I became close with nearly every person on the trip. Also I thought that the worship time every day would be just a regular mass; however the singing and connecting with God that we took part in was a much deeper experience.

Overall I can honestly say that the experience was life changing. I think about life differently, and appreciate all that I have more because of this. The woman who owned the house that I was working on, Anita, was such a respectable person in the sense that she was extremely optimistic about us fixing her house in the allotted time we were given. Even though it was only four days, we chipped off all of the old paint, and added three layers to 4 of the walls of her house. I felt like in doing this we showed the strength of God in our work and gave hope to Anita.

In conclusion, this trip was a life changing experience, and I am strongly considering taking part in upcoming mission trips in the future. I thank St. Julie's for welcoming me into their group as quickly and as politely as they did and look forward to spending time with them in the near future.

What I look forward to the most out of each year's mission trip is what each new destination has to offer. Following such a great mission trip as Cairo, I honestly believed there was no way this trip was going to have any significant impact on me. And no, it wasn't the same impact I had from previous mission trips, but this time around, I saw God work in different ways than I have in the past.

As opposed to the other mission trips I participated in, I dedicated my entire four days in Logan to a single worksite; no kids club, no change of scenery. All I was given was just one group of people working together to accomplish a single task for the betterment of one individual household. Although I loved being able to see how much our same group could accomplish one task in a given amount of time, I feel like I missed out on certain aspects of the experience simply because I never had the opportunity to meet the community. Rather than meet all the children and play with them consistently for two days, the only person I met and held a conversation with was one woman living in the home we were working on.

As different as an experience as that was, I actually did really enjoy seeing how much we were able to accomplish in our four days there. Every single person worked as hard as they could consistently which made our bond grow even stronger. However my favorite moment/strongest impact didn't come from something that specifically happened while we were in Logan, but rather something that happened when I returned back home. The week following our trip, I was sent a picture of the finished product of the wheelchair ramp we had

#### MISSION TRIP REFLECTION: LOGAN, WV

David Engler

built. The feeling of pride and accomplishment was overwhelming to me, something I hadn't really felt that strongly about in a long while.

So luckily for me, this trip was exactly what I had hoped it would be: a completely different experience for me to go through compared to my previous mission trips. There were certainly both positives and negatives to compliment these changes, but my overall experience in Logan, West Virginia certainly will never be forgotten.

## Logan, West Virginia 2012 Mission Trip Reflection

I knew, for the most part, what to expect for the teens headed on the mission trip.

However, I did not know how it would be or feel for me to go to Logan. It would be my

first mission trip as a chaperone and only having known a few of the other leaders, I

was nervous on how I would fit in with the group of teens and leaders. I was curious

how I would relate to other chaperones and teens while on the trip. As I packed for the

trip a few days before hand, I found myself all jittery and full of anxiety and excitement

for the mission trip ahead. I thought of all the previous trips I have been on with TNT,

and the excitement and nervousness was all too familiar. I wondered how the teens

would react to my presence and how their presence would affect me. I did not know

what I was getting myself into, but I was excited and ready for the challenge. Although, I

have led plenty of Plano retreats for the teens, I knew this trip would be different. I knew

that as much as the teens needed time to reconnect with their faith and live out God's

work through service, I too needed all of the same things.

My team consisted of two churches coming together as one serving a specific

community of Logan. The home and family we served were generous, kind, loving, and

received us with no hesitation or judgment. I found I could not resist the love and

compassion the mother of the household shared with my group. She told us about her

life as a widow, the alienation and judgment she has suffered from her neighbors, and

her struggle with finding a job and friends. Throughout the week we worked on the

family's home by scraping off paint that had been chipping away for at least a decade

or more. As the days went on, I could sense from the teens and myself how exhausted

we were at working on the same project for several hours a day and not feeling any

sense of accomplishment. There were so many times I just wanted to give up and head back to our base where we slept and were fed, but I had a team that looked up to me to keep myself and them going. Their commitment, community, and faith helped all of us to plow through the task at hand. I appreciated that our specific team was able to work at the same work site, because it gave us the opportunity to get to know each other better, develop a friendship with the family we were working to serve, and to see the difference we made as a team within a few days at our work site.

My goal attending the mission trip was to serve others and to help teens grow in their faith...I now only felt I accomplished that in just one week, but I came back from the mission trip rejuvenated and with a new sense of purpose. I went on the trip hoping to help others open up about their faith and instead the teens and other chaperones helped me to grow in my own faith. I look forward to many more TNT mission trips in the future, and as I speak with other young adults and parents of teens, I too encourage them to take just one week to make a huge difference in the lives of the communities we serve, but the teens and their own faith.

Kasia Stachon

Logan, WV Mission Trip Reflection  
Jacob Moreno

Over my life, I believe I've been a good and loyal Catholic. I believed I was a member of the Church. This membership has now grown as a result of TNT's mission trip, in which I was honored to be asked to join. When I was asked, my parents said I would see the world rather than myself, and that's exactly what

happened.

On the way, I was a bit nervous to be honest, but I guess we all were a little at that point. What were my duties? Will the residents like me? Will I be accepted by the members of TNT? In the "Party Van" the guys taught me how they respected each other and the respected me. I made myself some new friends that week and increased my relationship with the friends I already knew. As we pulled up into the church, another group from Iowa was there. Everyone got along well and we help out one another. Once the first day started, the kids were a bit rough but not too tough to handle. They liked to push your buttons and test you to see how long you'll last. Throughout the week with them, we played 4-square, basketball, skits, and Frisbee. These little games and activities increased trust in everyone, making the week more enjoyable. The many friendships that emerged from the youth members and the kids were incredible.

Meanwhile, the other half of the group worked with some of the older residents. This job involved scraping paint and other unwanted materials. Even though I did not take part in these jobs (of scraping paint), I still felt connected to those doing that work because at the end of each day, we all got together to share our day and our thoughts about them. Usually they had a few "oh yea's" and "yay God's." With each little evening prayer service we all grew closer to one another, and the God.

With this mission trip, my eyes have been opened. Devoting myself for the benefit of others truly shows you know how powerful a helping hand can be. We are all His servants, and by serving others is serving Him. If this is what God wants, he'll know that some of his loyal servants are here in TNT. Thank you to St. Julie's for this great opportunity to serve God and serve others more than I expected. Thank you God, for opening my eyes.

Mission Trip Reflection

Mission Trip, it feels like just yesterday I was packing my bag getting ready to leave the next morning. It's hard to believe it's already over.

Mission trips are a once in a lifetime chance. It's a way to experience different cultures

and lifestyles. This year it was different, we didn't switch half-way through the week. We stayed with our worksite the entire week. I was on kids club the whole week. There was a little girl named Nya. She was the cutest little girl. She would meet you and automatically fall in love with you. She would cling to you and hang out with you. She loved to play sports and have fun. She loved to smile. When you think about it, some of these kids have been abused and starved and yet they still find a way to smile. It amazes me how their smile can make your day and you can make theirs.

You meet new people and connect with them, even people you have known for years you learn more about them. I have known one girl for two years now, talked to her a few times. She is always a happy person and funny. It wasn't until this mission trip that I really connected with her. We ended up hanging out a few days after mission trip. You learn about the kids from the other church groups. You also learn about the locals. There was this lady named Lisa. She was one of the sweetest people you could ever meet. She is so helpful. She collects clothes and shoes and school supplies and puts them in a room so that when she sees someone who needs something or someone asks her for something, she can give it to them. She would help with the driving of the routes for kids club. She would drive this specific route with the rowdiest kids. She always gave them candy and cared for them. She knew the kids really well and took care of them



as if they were her own. She could walk up to anyone and talk to them as if she has known them for years.

Mission Trip 2012 is a trip I will never forget.

Unfortunately this will be my last time writing a reflection as a participant on the mission trip. Even though my reflections were never turned in on time, it was purely because I needed more time to REFLECT. I can tell you, this mission trip was by far the most different, out of all the trips I've been on. Some differences included different meals, not having snack every night only being able to be on worksite or kids club for the whole week, and also not connecting with the staff as well. I will say I made new friends and had an amazing time learning how to build a wheelchair ramp. Once we got accustomed to the changes more, we learned to deal with them. I had called the home owner if I could use her washroom. I knew their way going to be different but their

Was no door. It was a sheet covering the door.

We have different ways of life and I wasn't used to it. There dog needless to say watched me use the bathroom. I was very

happy we were able to help

her. I built her a rock garden and ~~did~~<sup>fixed</sup> her landscaping.

I think it's the little things that counts, especially when there were things I wasn't quite great at. Im glad I got to experience this for the last time and I will definitely be an adult reader.

Ashley O'Donnell

