

From the Pastor's Desk

Seven Lessons Learned from Our Mission Trip to Minot, North Dakota

On Friday July 30th, our senior high youth minister Rick Danforth, came into my office and announced his doctor said his health prohibited him from taking our students on this year's mission trip, which was to leave on Sunday. They had planned to go to Joplin, Missouri to assist tornado victims and then on to Chicago to visit the ELCA headquarters.

Lesson number one: Be Flexible

Joan and I had recently returned from Minot, ND, where the largest flood in its history had destroyed 4000 homes and numerous businesses leaving 12,000 people displaced. The devastation was overwhelming and because we both spent a good part of our lives in Minot, the pain was personal. Rick and I made a phone call to the ELCA Disaster Response office. They were desperate for volunteers to come to Minot, happy to hear about our mission trip and begged us to come and assist with cleaning out homes. Within a few minutes, we changed the destination of the trip from Joplin to Minot. Rick covered worship services, I cleared my calendar and left early Sunday morning with students Jarod Stephens, Katie Romano, Sam Brozek, Ali Kelley and Shannon McClure along with our other chaperon, Kristin Threatt. To move with the guidance of the Holy Spirit demanded we be flexible.



Ali, Shannon, Katie, Sam and Jarod



Flooded Downtown Minot



The home when we arrived

Lesson number two: Appreciate ELCA Churchwide Ministries and Ecumenism

In order for us to assist in Minot, a whole infrastructure was needed for us—housing, connection to people with the greatest need, supplies and tools, wisdom about how best to do the job, connection with other volunteers, a place to sleep and food. ELCA Disaster Response provided all of this along with a whole lot of love and encouragement. It gave us a new appreciation for the ELCA and the many ministries it facilitates. Each day, two other people were assigned to work with our team and a comradery was built as we worked together.

We visited Our Lady of Grace Church, the last Catholic Church where I served as pastor before transitioning into the ELCA. We were greeted warmly by the pastor and invited to join him and other relief workers in the Fellowship Hall for supper. About 50 people were bussed up from Bismarck each day to assist with flood relief and OLG allowed them to use their showers and provided supper. We were blessed to have the same hospitality extended to us. Showering each day after working hard in the mud and other toxic muck was greatly appreciated as were their suppers. Food was also available at the Lutheran Disaster Response headquarters. I enjoyed meeting members of the church I knew fifteen years ago. They were very impressed with our mission team and thanked us many times for helping flood victims.

Lesson number three: Solidarity with Another ELCA Congregation

We stayed in Glenburn, ND which is about twenty miles north of Minot, where we were housed in Trinity Lutheran Church. They had cots set up in their Sunday school rooms, served us breakfast each morning and provided snacks to take along for our day's work. Lutheran Disaster Responce asked them to provide a breakfast of cold cereal, breads, coffee, etc., but they went way beyond that by cooking us a hot breakfast each morning, pizza one evening and even washed our stinky clothes. Their lavish love and hospitality was a huge blessing.

Lesson number four: Team Work

Pictures of the flooded home prior to our work:



Kitchen

Living room

Basement

Basement

Bedroom

If you have ever tried to lift carpet, living room couches and chairs, mattresses, boxes of clothes, magazines or newspapers soaked in water and mud, you will learn one thing in a hurry. They are VERY HEAVY!!!! The home we cleaned out was Vicki's and it was filled with all kinds of stuff because she didn't have the assistance needed to evacuate her home before the flood, and even if she did have people to assist, there was little time to do so. When we arrived at the house, it was overwhelming to see all the work that lay before us and we needed to finish in four days.

Our team worked wonderfully together, each person eager and willing to work individually or together, whatever was needed to finish the job. Often things were too heavy for one person to lift and someone else would quickly step in to assist.

Lesson number five: Perseverance

When we arrived at Vicki's home and saw what needed to be done, it seemed impossible to do in four days. But, we went to work, some of us in the garage and others on the main floor. It was not possible to get to the basement because of wood and other household belongings that had washed down the stairway as the flood water subsided first from the main floor and eventually through the drain in the basement. We suspected a foot or two of water was still in the basement and had a sump pump available if that was the case. Eventually, we were able to make our way down into the basement and were happy to find all water gone except for an inch or two in the low lying areas of the floor. Sewers had backed up and all was a toxic mess. But slowly, as we all worked together, the house began to shape up. We learned that life can present us with things that seem overwhelming, but as we work one minute, one hour, and one day at a time, things will improve. It was important not to get discouraged, to focus on the positive and persevere. Having the support, example and encouragement of others on the team was very helpful.

Lesson number six: Keep a Sense of Humor

The students on this team had a great sense of humor and we laughed hard every day. Laughter is a holy thing. I forget who said, "Joy is an infallible sign of the presence of God."

It's true. Laughter and joy make all the difference in having a meaningful life. Keeping a sense of humor in the midst of cleaning up all the muck in the house helped a lot. One of the other volunteers assigned to our team made mention of the high quality students we have and the joy they brought into the workplace.

Lesson number seven: Connect with God

Before going to bed, we talked about where we saw the footprints of Christ during the day. It was moving to hear how each person saw Jesus in big and small ways. When we traveled to the work site, we listened to Christian music and invited God to guide our day.

Pictures of the home when we were finished:



Basement

Basement

Upstairs

Upstairs

Vicki, the owner of the home, was very happy to have our assistance and said many times that she did not know how she could thank us enough. She loved to garden, so when we finished, we gave her a new plant, which symbolized the new life she was going to begin in her home.



← Kristin presenting a plant to Vicki.

Vicki very happy to have her home cleaned out. →



Vicki with the mission team behind our van.

Bottom left to right: Vicki, Ali Kelley, PB, Sam Brozek and Jarod Stevens.

Top left to right: Katie Romano, Shannon McClure and Kristin Threatt.

Mission Accomplished!! It was a great blessing and privilege for me to serve with Kristin and these wonderful students. See the Youth Mission Trip page on our website for more pictures in September. ~ PB