

Day 1

Monday, July 22, 2024

Though it was an early morning start yesterday as we met at the church at 5:30am for our trip to the airport, all went well. The flight left at 8:30am and we were in San Juan shortly after noon. It took a little while to claim all our luggage and get to the van rental place but soon we were underway on our first stop to have lunch and explore the historic downtown area. Though it was warm down here, according to my weather app on my phone it was warmer in Frederick, however the humidity was much higher here!

We found the church where we will be staying all week. It is air conditioned which is a blessing and we are praying for minimal power outages (though they have a generator should we need it.) They blessed us with a taco dinner (we will get Puerto Rican meals this week!) And then we had orientations and review of rules and safety precautions and even a fire drill. There was a time for learning about our theme for the week which coincides with my sermon this Sunday about being rooted and grounded in God's love. There was a worship service and group time before ending a very long day with lights out at 10:30pm.

P.S. So far, I have found no postcards to send home, but one of the leaders who is a local resident suggested Walgreens. We will check that out today.

Have a blessed day,
Pastor Jeff

Day 2

Tuesday, July 23, 2024

Yesterday we began our mission work. Our day began at 7am with breakfast and making a sack lunch to take with us for lunch. After clean-up we went to the sanctuary for a devotional time where we each received a journal booklet to help guide us through the theme of being "Rooted" each day of the week. We were divided up into 3 teams. Each team had 4 adults – 2 van drivers and 2 other adults, 9 or 10 youth, and a local translator. The team Michele and I were with included Gabe and Isaac from our group with other leaders and youth from both the Texas and Florida groups. We went in the morning to help clean and move storage items at a local community center and weed a little garden area. The team broke up into smaller groups doing specific tasks as the translator helped us understand what was needed. In a little over an hour we had it done. And then to show us their appreciation and hospitality they offered us a delicious hot meal.

On our way back to the church we stopped at a Walgreen's, where the program director thought I might find some postcards, maybe years ago, but not today! I will keep looking. When we got back there was another task to help scrape an outside wall of the church building to prep for a mural in one section. A slight shower was refreshing in the heat and humidity of working outside but it was enough for us to take a break and come inside to the air conditioning for awhile before going back out and finishing the wall when it was over. Andrea's team went to a family home and did some work there

and then returned to the church as well and set out to clean up trash around the neighborhood. They too were brought inside by the rain and joined us in scraping the wall after that. Scott's team went to a local school to paint classrooms and a hallway. The old paint was not good but was what they had to start with until the Youthworks leader could procure a new bucket of paint. A couple of the other adults commented how, as teachers themselves, they were saddened to see the poor condition of the school building (no A/C) and the educational materials in the classrooms in this poor neighborhood.

We were done working for the day by 3pm and had a little free time for rest and relaxation before a group Salsa dancing lesson. My left knee allowed me to stay with the group for a very short time and Scott joined me on the sidelines a little later. The lesson lasted for an hour going over some of the history behind the various dances. (Perhaps you will see a video of the dancing or a demonstration on Sunday morning!)

After that we had dinner and then our first shower times. Everyone was given only 5 minutes due to the lack of water. And the water was more or less a trickle and maybe more "lukecold" than lukewarm. But it was a shower!

The day finished with a large gathering with singing and I was given an opportunity to share this hymn I wrote during my devotion time.

As We Begin This Glorious Week
(tune: Amazing Grace UMH 378)

Jeffrey B. Childs 7/22/2024

As we begin this glorious week,
We seek to see God's face.
God's glory in each day we seek,
And God's amazing grace.

As we serve as God's hands and feet,
Faithfully we will leap.
As we share Christ with all we meet,
God, let our faith grow deep.

O Lord, help us to do your will,
All this we humbly pray.
May your commission we fulfill,
As we serve you each day.

In Jesus we are connected,
In God's kin-dom so grand.
To people feeling neglected,
May we extend our hand.

Then we separated into our individual groups and had time to reflect on the day and our experiences of God. Then we were given a snack and soon it was time for lights out.

Have a blessed day,
Pastor Jeff

Day 3

Wednesday, July 24, 2024

Yesterday seemed to be the best day so far. Each group had fulfilling experiences at the job sites. The groups I was with went to a mission hub we had just heard about on Monday when our translator heard a prayer request from a friend in need of volunteers as there was a lot to do, and she only had four volunteers to help do it. With two vans of 10 youth and 4 adults we began by hearing their story of starting this mission hub just a few years ago after being missionaries serving God at other locations. Now they gather donations at a building the city donated to them to then share with the community and elsewhere in the world. One of our tasks was to sort through boxes and boxes of donated medicines, first by expiration dates and then by types of medicines. Things that were outdated for more than 4 months had to be thrown away. Things that had expired from March through June this year were separated into boxes to be donated to Cuba and Guatemala, where they still could be used. Then those that had not expired were put in large bins to be distributed to medical missions on the island. Part of our group went outside and painted the walls and roof of the building. With a couple of water breaks and lunch breaks, we worked a full 5-hour day from 9-2. At the end, we were blessed with tins of cookies (I'll bring one back for snack time on Sunday and T-shirts. Scott's group went back to the school and finished up the painting of 5 classrooms plus stairways. They finished up a little earlier as they finished their job and ran out of paint to do anymore. Andrea's group went back to help the couple where they were working on Monday and scraped and painted their front fence and gate. (Throughout much of what I have seen here, most buildings and houses have heavy metal fences, gates, and bars over the windows.) Then they returned to the church where we are staying and started to repaint the exterior wall, which had been scraped the day before.) One section was prepped to have a mural painted on it. Then they helped move old chairs from a storage area that were to go to a new church being developed in the city.

After we were all done working, we all met up for an afternoon time down at the beach. I had hoped for a little more sun and a tan, but it was pleasantly overcast. Being in the ocean was definitely one of the highlights of the day and of the trip.

We are at the halfway point of this mission and the team is doing very well. They showed signs of exhaustion as the day wore on and we got to evening worship time. In our closing group, the task was to make friendship bracelets and talk about the strength of cords being bound together (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Some got right into making the bracelets, others needed a little help to get started which gave an opportunity to talk about helping each other. We talked of our prayer partners back home praying for us as well as how Jesus helps us as we grow in our faith. Then we were more than ready for lights out, and a good night's sleep to help us prepare for what the next day will bring.

Have a blessed day,
Pastor Jeff

Day 4

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Yesterday was a long day, but also an exhilarating one! All of us went to a smaller community 20 minutes away where the mission project coordinator's grandfather pastors a downtown community church. He greeted us into the open area/worship space in a converted storefront. He shared a bit of their history as a part of the Jesus Revolution in the US back in 1969/70 when young hippies were turning their lives over to Jesus. He had been in a rock band and began to sing praise songs and became a leader of this church and active in reaching the fringe community not being reached by the traditional churches, for Jesus.

We broke up into our 3 work groups and two of our groups went out to work on painting individual houses for elderly people. My group travelled out a bit further into the hills and what seemed to be the edge of the rain forest and a small village in this beautiful landscape. One group stayed at the church and helped with painting some rooms up on the third floor.

Again we worked for about 5 hours with water and lunch breaks, and then headed back to the same church for some free time and showers. To accommodate the mission groups, they set up 3 showers for the guys using blue tarps up on the third story balcony overlooking the mountains. The water was cool but with more pressure and an ability to stay in the shower longer than the quick 5 minutes back at the other church was a blessing!

We had the opportunity to walk down to a couple souvenir shops a block away and I found postcards at one of the shops!!! I also found a traditional straw hat to keep the sun off my ears and neck for the rest of the week. Dinner was delivered and we ate in the open area at the church and once things were cleaned up we had free time to go check out a mall a few minutes away. While some did some shopping I got to get the rest of my 10,000 steps by walking through the mall. There were several stores like we would see in malls on the mainland. It felt like home and it was airconditioned!

When we returned we were blessed with the praise band leading us in a time of worship. The local mission team leader Natalie, who has been guiding us all week, is a pastor of the church and singer in the band. Words were in Spanish and English and people sang along in either language. At one point people began to dance and jump to the music – it was a Spirit-led revival movement! After that youth were invited to come forward to share their testimonies. I had asked if any of our youth wanted to do that (in prep for sharing at our church this Sunday) but none of them were ready, though some others from the other churches did and the young woman who has been coordinating the mission work who had been translating the testimonies into Spanish, shared her story and her grandfather, the pastor, translated for her. It was all in all a very holy time of sharing.

On the ride home we talked in the vans about the testimonies and worship experience as well as what we had experienced this day and this week. We spent a few moments in the sanctuary when we got back sharing some of the pictures we had taken and what they meant to each of us. I believe we have been making deeper connections with one another and with God this week -and memories to last a lifetime! Thank you all for

your prayers as we will finish up the work today and will pack and prepare to head home tomorrow.

Have a blessed day,
Pastor Jeff

Day 5

Friday, July 26, 2024

For this final day of work, we talked the leaders into letting us stay in our own youth groups and go to the mission projects. We went back to the other church building, where a few of us helped sort some of the medications we had separated a couple of days earlier at the mission hub and then packed them into suitcases that would soon be headed to Cuba with a medical mission team. The rest of us headed upstairs to the third floor to do more painting on the classroom walls. Another team packed up grocery bags of canned and dried food and also bags with milk, yogurt and fresh fruit to be hand delivered that afternoon. A few of us also worked on scraping the old paint off the floor in the large room with paint scrapers and a power washer. We wrapped up at noon getting some of it done and leaving the rest for one more team of youth that they have scheduled to come next week. I heard from the leader of the other team I had been working on that they finished painting the house we had worked on the day before. It looked totally different than it did before! It was like one of those home makeover TV shows!

After lunch, we loaded the grocery bags in a van, and then we walked about 5 blocks to a poorer neighborhood (barrio). With an interpreter for every 6-8 people, we walked up the street, pausing at each gate (each house here has a metal fence or iron bars protecting them). So, from the street, we would shout at the door, "Buenos tardes!" (Good afternoon). At several homes, people came out, and the interpreter told them we were missionaries from the USA, and we had brought food for them and asked if they would like one of us to pray for them. Every one of them said yes, and we handed the food over or through the gate, and one of our youth or leaders would pray, and the interpreter would interpret the prayer into Spanish.

I was blessed to be a witness to the powerful prayers shared by our youth! This week we helped answer prayers for those who prayed for help painting their homes, or prayed for food, or prayed for help sorting medicine and packing up suitcases full of medication to answer prayers of people in Cuba praying for medicines. Thank you for all of your prayers. No one got sick while we were here. No one got hurt – okay one girl from the Texas group stubbed her toe at the beach, but I was blessed to be there and offer my first aid kit to help with a few band aids.

By midafternoon we returned to the church for rest, showers, and pizza for dinner. In the evening we had our final gathering time and after a time of sharing, singing, and scripture reading about Jesus washing the disciple's feet at the Last Supper, the Youthworks leaders set up chairs across the front of the room and invited each of us

adult leaders to come up and be seated and then they set out plastic dish pans and towels and washed each of our feet and pray for each of us individually. Then they gave us the opportunity to go and wash the feet and pray for each of our youth. This was a very holy and meaningful time. I was concerned that my knee would not allow me to get on the floor and do it and was pleased that the other leaders who had close connections with the youth did the majority of the youth, but I was blessed to share the experience with one of our youth – and my knee survived kneeling on the hard floor.

Michele Stine led the group time to reflect on the day and upon the foot-washing experience. She also invited the group to continue to process it all and even to write of the experience and tuck it away to be read some years in the future to remind their future selves of this trip and what it had meant to them. (It is my hope you will hear some of these testimonies from our missionaries as they come back this weekend and share at the 11am service at Mt. Carmel. (They will also be going to New Market UMC on August 4th to do likewise.)

This will be my last mission trip correspondence as we will be packing up and leaving after breakfast. We will be traveling to the central area of the island to walk through part of the rainforest. I also want to stop at a grocery store and see what foods they have that are similar and different than what we have in Frederick (and to pick up some more Puerto Rican foods for Sunday!) and then we will head to the airport to fly out this evening around 5:30pm. Lord willing, we will be in Maryland by 10pm and back in our own beds by midnight. Your prayers for safe travel will be much appreciated, and your attendance on Sunday morning to show your support during coffee time and/or the 11am service will be greatly appreciated!

Had a wonderful time, thanks for your prayers.
Have a blessed day,

Pastor Jeff