

Work Trip Reflections 2018
Matthew 10: 6-8, 16, 17-20, 41-42
August 19, 2018

Sean Kelly and Liz Gescheidle
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, Illinois

Sean Kelly:

As I read our NT Lesson this morning, I am going to have the SlideShow of our projects play on the screen. Each day I encouraged the students to recognize ways that the message of scripture played out during the day on the project sites they were working on... And as I read these Words from Scripture this morning, I hope you also will be able to catch a glimpse of the faith of our students being put into action...

Projects Not Shown in slide show:

- Bathroom Remodel
 - o Secured the Floor which was rotting
 - o New Tub/Vanity/Ceiling Fan
 - o Fresh Paint/Trim
- Repaired Leak in a Roof that was Rotted/Mold
- Replaced an Octagon Window
- Installed New Gutters
- Had an AC Unit Repaired
- Fixed Flawed Masonry that was leaking on a Chimney
- Had an Unstable Roof Replaced

Incredible, Incredible Work... Work that I am AMAZED by Each Year that these Students Take On and Never Complain About Completing...

Truly, I think they feel that the more complex the project, the harder the Work is to Complete... The Better!

But there is a powerful part of Work Trip that cannot be captured in pictures... Each year a Group of People from our Church Family, Travel Together, Work

Together and Worship Together... Each Year we 'Go Out Into the World' TOGETHER, to share the Love//Peace//Hope of Christ.

Every Night, we spend time as a Group in 'Worship'... Now this isn't quite like what we experience here in our Sanctuary most Sunday Mornings, but it is a devoted time spent together seeking to learn from the Lord.

Each night, we are led by our students in Song/Prayer/Scripture...

And this Year OUR GOAL was to spend the ENTIRE WEEK in One Chapter of Scripture, in order to internalize and HOPEFULLY experience what the scripture taught us together throughout the week... The Scripture we used throughout the week was our NT Lesson this morning... Matthew Chapter 10!! And Within that Chapter we Highlighted 5 Themes, and looked at One of those Themes EACH DAY...

GO – SEEK - COMMIT- PRIORITIZE – DEMONSTRATE

Each night, an advisor would share a personal story from their own lives that highlighted the theme we were looking at that day... And each night our group received a REAL LIFE Example for how Scripture is Relevant, and how our Faith Can/Should Impact our Every Day Interactions//Thoughts//Life - - Both ON WORK TRIP - - And MORE IMPORTANTLY, When we come back Home...

And each day something incredible happened - - Students and Adults started having CONVERSATIONS around their faith (ways they experienced God; questions they struggle with; thoughts on how to apply what they experience on WT to their lives when they returned home)... Just a great reminder of the relationship we as a church, and as believers, are to have with each other.

Incredible Work was Completed for the Glory of God... But Foundational Relationships were Built in the process...

And I am excited this morning to invite Liz Gescheidle to share with us about the impact she has seen Work Trip have. Liz has a unique perspective in that she has participated in 3 Work Trips, and 2 of those she had her ENTIRE FAMILY alongside of her... Liz literally served alongside her Church Family and her Literal Family, and I am very excited for her to share with you all this morning...

Liz Gescheidle:

Work Trip is very meaningful to me. The church I grew up in did not have a Youth Program to speak of. Our family attended regularly, but I always just felt I was attending a lecture, never felt transformed. We lived next door to the First Presbyterian Church in Battle Creek, MI and I was always a bit envious of their white bus in the parking lot and the mission adventures my friends who were members went on. My cousins were also very active in the Presbyterian Church in nearby Kalamazoo and I loved hearing about their service trips to Alaska and far-away places with their Youth Pastor who is still part of their lives.

Fast forward to John and I sitting in one of these front pews on the right 18 years ago, with a car seat holding our dear one-year old William Thomas and one of the first services we attended was a Work Trip Sunday. In delight, of what I had always yearned for, I knew this was the church we wanted to raise our family in.

Before a wink of the eye – thru First Pres Preschool, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School and Middle School Youth Group we were there, with a high schooler ready to go on his first Work Trip. We let Will go his first year by himself – to give him some space since we had been pretty involved in his Church life. He reluctantly went on that first trip and how thrilled we were to have him come home truly transformed – ready to join the newly formed

Youth Leadership Team and telling me “Mom - you have to go next year – you would love it.” That was all it took, and I told Nick sign me up.

Watching Will return after that first trip the things that stood out were – him getting to know and become friends with upper classmen. He talked in detail about the Senior Night and powerful reflections like those of Jack Traynor talking about his younger brother Andrew. His working alongside wonderful adults in our church who taught him skills he would never learn otherwise – like John Johnson (who has been on 35 work trips) who has the patience of Job teaching any construction skill “cut once, measure twice” or Jim Kingsley and Char Muzik that inspired Will’s passion for roofing, to fire fighter Jim Seymour who instilled important ladder safety skills. Such a big deal to call adults by their first names. Small Groups and being able to talk openly with other about faith topics. Affirming note cards from the people he had gotten to know. Also getting to know the local people in need, who he would never have had the opportunity to know and being empowered to make their world a little brighter with his service.

When I went that next year – I felt all those things I’d heard Will express. The Holy Spirit is truly at work during Work Trip. You see it in so many ways you would never imagine. It really is such a unique, intergenerational opportunity for our congregation. I loved getting to know Jim Cocharan and George Fossell who were so very instrumental in laying the solid foundation that Work Trip has been built on. Sharing the time with other advisors away from all the hustle and bustle of our “real world” is an inspiring opportunity to get to know people on a different level all working towards the same goal. And the kids – what a pure joy it is to get to spend time with these amazing individuals that all bring 110% to this week, with open hearts and minds and a willingness to dig in and do things they would never do here in our community. Everyone attending is truly ready to grow their faith and see where God leads them during the week together doing his important work.

A few things I have learned over the past few years is that every job is important when you are doing God's work. My first year Leah Fietsam and I were assigned a painting site, which was very doable. Paint brushes and power washing. Got it. My construction skill is limited, and without Ted Notz jumping into Sally McDonald's and my site this year on the 3rd day with his little known engineering skill, the ramp we promised our homeowner would have never got built. Sometimes painting or washing windows is not as exciting as roofing or installing new windows, but I've learned every task makes a difference. No job is too small. And the great thing is, which I hope all feel, once you have been part of doing something once, you really feel like you could do it next time.

Another thing I have learned is "judge not, that ye not be judged". It is sometimes hard to not judge those we are serving. Wonder if the homeowner is driving a nice car do they really need our help? Cleaning out all the empty beer cans collected in our homeowners garage this year. It is very easy to jump to conclusions about people. It's hard when one site is getting wonderful baked goods and hugs every day and your site you barely see the homeowner and rarely get a thank you. What I try to remind myself is that we are all children of God and we all deserve God's love, and forgiveness. We have not walked in the homeowners we are serving shoes. God had brought us to help them and we must stay focused on our tasks at hand and share God's love unconditionally.

Will's third year was Grace, our daughters first year on work trip and as she was quick to point out, she did not get "any space of going on her own" like her brother did. There was no way I was going to miss the opportunity to go again – in addition my wonderful husband John was jumping on board to, so he work not miss out and we could all experience Work Trip together. Grace was a good sport about it, after about the third day she decided it wasn't so bad to all be together.

We were so blessed for the opportunity to go on Work Trip together as a family the past two years. Although you really don't spend that much time together, besides family daywork site, sharing the experience is really what makes it extra meaningful – from the contemplative worship services every night that make you really think about your faith, to seeing the grateful faces of those you serve or sharing in the beauty of the places we stay or getting to know new people.

This year was Sean Kelly's first year leading the trip and he really knocked it out of the ball park and brought thoughtful worship opportunities and easygoing leadership that resonated over the week. Jim Mayhall jumped in, even recovering from an injury with wearing a medical boot, kept all the projects moving on target. We were also given the gift of having four recent college graduates join us as advisors. They added an incredible spirit, connections to the kids and energy that only added to the week and another layer of intergenerational connection.

The tradition is that on the last day, all the Seniors get to work together on a memorial project remembering the Work Trippers we lost too soon. Ted Johnson, John's son and a (32 year Work Tripper) and Megan Bourne have lead this effort the last few years. Experiencing this tradition, you really feel the spirit of those we are remembering and it is very powerful. Even though I never went on Work Trip with Chris Martinet or Ellie Burns, I feel their presence.

The last night Seniors get to give a reflection of their work trip experience over the years. Knowing all the Seniors so well, I cried as everyone one of them spoke and only wish all the parents could have been mice in the corner hearing their young adult speak, proud parent moments for sure. It is inspiring, highly anticipated cap to a wonderful week. What a great opportunity for underclassmen to see those graduating and the impact this Youth Ministry has had on them.

This year we were given a priceless gift that I am forever grateful for. Having all our family together, listening to Will recognize the adult advisors who have helped shape him, the friends who shared the journey, proclaiming his love for his sister and affirming John and my decision to become so involved in this faith community was a gift from God. Quoting Will from his reflecting that night “Mom and Dad - I sometimes thought your dedication to church was excessive, but I’m so glad you brought me into this community and I would not want it any other way.”

I would say the Work Trip experience not only depends your faith, but the “Work Trip Spirit” that is so often talked about, is truly the holy spirit at work through all those who are lucky enough to participate this transformational First Pres tradition.