



Mission Trip a Profound Experience

Have you ever had such a transformational and meaningful experience that you could not put into words what you were feeling? Or you knew that an experience had shaped and impacted you deeply but you couldn't quite articulate how?



Jennifer Fouse observes the day-to-day activities in Guatemala

This is how I feel upon returning from our mission experience during Spring Break in Guatemala. Although I had been to Guatemala twice before, the sounds, sights, stories shared, quality time with the Vanderbilt students on the frequent bus rides and daily challenges found while digging foundations for four houses destroyed by the mudslides, there was something stirred deep within me that I am unable to articulate.

During our closing devotion, I commented to the sixteen others that the world and Vanderbilt define success by what we do instead of who and whose we are. Yet, God doesn't define our worth in the same way. Even though our lives are dominated by superlatives: the best grade in Chemistry, the best jeans from the right store, the perfect body, the most athletic, the best musician, etc., we don't have to define our worth that way. In short, we aren't worthwhile because of our successes. We are worthwhile

because God calls us into a Christian life lived "in" the world without being "of" it. It is being "in" but not "of" the world that encompassed the Guatemala experience where we had the freedom to grow more in our faith and to see a part of the world through different eyes.

This was best expressed by a student who participated. When asked if his Spring Break was "fun," he said, "Yes, it was 'fun,' but I wouldn't really use that word. This experience was 'profound.'" Thanks be to God for transformative and profound experiences that deepen our relationship with God and God's children all over the world, despite our differences, and that enable us to cross boundaries and to see the face of Christ in the most unlikely places.



Grace and Peace of Christ,
Jennifer Fouse
Rev. Jennifer E. Fouse
Presbyterian Campus Minister at Vanderbilt

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PSF HIGHLIGHTS

Spring Break Mission Trip to Guatemala

Thank you to all of our contributors!

Pictures!



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Journal Reflections on Guatemala

Several students who participated in the Guatemala mission trip offer insight into this transformational experience through journal entries. The authors are: **Lauren Miramontes, Senior Irvine, CA; Meghan Backes, Sophomore, Cedarburg, WI; and Christoph Pross, German Exchange Volunteer at Martha O'Bryan Center.**

Saturday, March 4, 2006

Our group left for the airport at 4:30 this morning . . . We had smooth flights to Atlanta and Guatemala City, went through customs and exchanged our dollars into quetzales (G's national currency). . . We crisscrossed town to see a gated community of million-dollar homes and it was so odd to be there after driving through slums fifteen minutes earlier. I've felt very conspicuous here - it seems as if there are no tourists here (at least where we are) and we've all been stared at. We had a short devotional and Jennifer challenged us to pray about why we're here this week and what God's called us to do. **L.M.**

Sunday, March 5, 2006

Another fun and exciting day! . . . PSFers had the traditional Guatemalan breakfast of scrambled eggs, black beans and soft white cheese on corn tortillas (which I tasted and were delicious), fried plantains, and hot chocolate (INCREDIBLE) and freshly-squeezed orange juice. . . We reached Chichicastenango, a town with a huge community market. We visited their Catholic church where there were tons of people sitting outside selling beautiful flowers and burning incense. Many of the Mayan religious traditions have been integrated into Catholicism and are still practiced today. . . [We went to} the village of a Mayan woman named Maria. . . she and maybe 10 other women make handi-crafts sold at fair trade value for a project called Ruth and Naomi. Their husbands were killed by the government during the civil war in the 1980s and they do this now to support themselves and their families. It was humbling to hear their stories and how they still have hope despite everything awful that has happened . . . **L.M.**



Monday, March 6, 2006

. . . We met Francisco Parrish, the director of the town hospital, and rode . . . to the site of the horrible mudslides from Hurricane Stan last August. The hospital where we were supposed to have worked was almost completely buried under 15 feet of mud. Francisco told us they had around 80 people who died and another 600 who were missing (and are now presumed dead). We drove the few miles across town to the site that now houses the hospital and saw the six houses we'll be helping to construct over the next few days. All six families have children who are disabled in some way and they all lost their homes in the mudslides. I am nervous about what kind of work to expect tomorrow but I know it will be good for me. **L.M.**

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

What a day! Our breakfast was the traditional Guatemalan feast and we worked our tushies off . . . We are helping to dig up dirt for houses, and we moved rocks and cement blocks. I have never gotten so dirty or had so much fun getting dirty. . . Devotions tonight were great! . . . we are called and commanded by God to do missions, whether it be on mission trips or in our everyday lives. Jennifer said we have to find our passion and invite people to share it with us, and trust that we have enough to give that people will want to be a part of

it. It's not our work that glorifies God or makes us any better, it's the relationships we build with people that really matter and show them Christ's love. I definitely feel challenged to reach out to people and engage with them more. It's hard when God pulls me out of my comfort zone and I don't know how to react. It's been really odd in some cases. For example, yesterday at lunch a Mayan woman stared at us from outside the window the entire time we ate. She motioned to us and wanted food but what could we do? Of course you want to help, but if you help one person you have to help everyone and you can't. . . . Or the dozens of kids who've come up to us asking for a quetzal. Where do you begin to help? I pray that God will open my heart to welcoming these opportunities and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my actions It's a daily struggle but one I hope and pray that I'm willing to face. **L.M.**



Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Something I was thinking about while we were at service last night was how amazing it is that God is so big, and yet so small. He is small enough to be in me and with me all the time, which I often forget and pray for Him to help me remember. Also, He always hears my prayer, no matter how many other people in the world are praying at that moment. He is small enough to hear my heart. Yet hearing all of the people at the service reminds me that God is big enough to be in all the tiny churches in all the cities of the world. He is everywhere at all times. Sometimes, especially with so many people praying so loudly, I feel like there is no way God will hear me, yet I know He does. Our God, my God, is an awesome God and I know He works in ways far outside of my own understanding. I have truly been reminded that He is incredible. **M.B.**

Saturday, March 11, 2006

Thursday was our last day of work at the site . . . I dug more trenches and shoveled dirt and wheel-barrowed and worked up a good sweat. I really was not looking forward to that part of the trip but I ended up enjoying myself a lot. It was great talking and bonding with people, singing fun songs, enjoying God's creation, and knowing that we were helping to make those families' lives a little bit better. I was humbled by their hard work ethic and commitment to their families. It's neat to see how they make the best of their situation (i.e. making do with whatever they had and fixing whatever was broken, like tools) and are content with very little. It's such a contrast to American society when we always want more and want to show it off to feel better about ourselves. Our evening devotion was really neat. . . We [wrote] down what our passions are and what we can share with people. . . We shared communion and again talked about what touched and impacted us the most. I loved how the group connected and bonded despite our many differences and the passion and energy we had in everything we did. Rock on PSF! . . . I don't want to lose or forget what I've learned on this trip and pray for the strength to keep it with me. What an experience! **L.M.**



Back Home

Guatemala is one of the most beautiful countries with wonderful people and such a loaded history. . . We came to work for God and to show through our work our faith in God, but God was already present. He was in all the children waving and smiling at us, in everybody struggling with every day's hardships and also in all the beautiful nature around us. I felt so privileged being at our work site and being able to work together with the unbelievable folks of our group and also with the Mayan men and women. It was great to be part of such a fantastic team and to pull one of the biggest roots ever out of the earth to make room for the homes of our friends. Everybody felt that as a team we could accomplish a lot more than as individuals. One of the most memorable experiences was going to Maria's town and visiting her and her community. I learned so much about the life of the Mayan women today and also during the long and horrible civil war. Maria explained that life can be very hard and horrendous, but that you always need to concentrate on the good things in life, even in the midst of so much horror. . . God is great, and everybody who goes to Guatemala will come out with the impression that God's love is very real and seizable. I am sure that I will be back in Guatemala! **C.P.**



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From the Chair . . .

The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee recently received a report from its Visioning Task Force that encouraged it to become a community of disciples that trusts that everything that we do is part of God's mission in the world, and that as we allow God's mission to define our own we will learn to live out of God's abundance and grace, rather than out of a sense of scarcity and fear. This concept, known as the *missio Dei* ("mission of God"), is one that we have tried to incorporate in the Vanderbilt Campus Ministry for several years now. And it works.

This past fall we felt called by God to offer the students a mission experience in a very different context from their own – Guatemala. You can read stories about their experiences in this newsletter. The awesome thing is that we had no idea how in the world we were going to fund such an endeavor. In fact, we didn't even ask the question. All we asked ourselves was this – Is it what God is calling us to do? We *knew* that if it was, then God would abundantly provide the means to do it. And God did. Abundantly. Not only did our students experience serving others in a part of the world where they could see God working in new and exciting ways, God provided \$5,000 more than we needed for the trip, which we were then able to donate to our mission partners in Guatemala. In this newsletter you will also read the names of those people whom God used to fulfill his mission in the world and to provide abundantly for the people of Guatemala, and for our students.

God is good, all the time. When we ask, "What can we afford to do?" we are *always* limited by our own resources, because we have made it all about us. But when we ask, "What is God calling us to do?" our opportunities are unlimited because we have made it about the Creator of the Universe, whose resources are limitless. When we live into God's mission, we are able to live out of a sense of God's abundance and grace. Hopefully, that is a lesson that our students will take with them for the rest of their lives...

Grace and Peace... *Tim Reynolds*

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