

MISSISSIPPI WORK CAMP STORY

Donna Brownfield

Our Grace Church Mississippi Work Team left Sunday, May 7, and returned Fri., May 12, from our trip to Pass Christian, Mississippi, near the Gulf coast. Returning to Kokomo was rather like coming back from another world. In that area of Mississippi and in much of the area along the Gulf, we saw lots of destruction--damaged homes, businesses, trees, and landscape. Although many people have been helped and are on their way to normalcy, many displaced persons still need assistance and something to give them hope. Besides thanking us for the physical help we gave, the Mississippi people expressed appreciation that we cared enough to come--and that gave them hope.

We didn't totally know the situation ahead of time, but our group of eight from Grace Church worked and stayed at the same location, a small twelve-pew church, with a group of fourteen people from small United Methodist Churches in New York state. We slept in pews, on air mattresses...everywhere... in the small church sanctuary. The pews had to be unbolted from the floor and moved around to make room for everyone. Thankfully, an earlier work group from Florida had built showers onto the back of the church--two stalls for men and two for women. Those were welcome at the end of the hot, humid work days. There were two restrooms in the church. The kitchen was small, and there was a room large enough for two tables where most of us could sit to eat. It all worked out. The accommodations were reasonably comfortable and do-able. We got to know each other; we worked together; we accomplished some major repairs; and we had new friends when we left. God brought us together and worked out the details.

The projects we did were for two black families who were members of the small church in which we stayed. Most of our Grace Church group, along with about half of the New York group, worked at putting up insulation, drywall, flooring, and doors in the home of a 75-year-old lady. We also cleaned up her yard and planted some flowers. (She loves her flowers.) The New York group also did some siding work. Even though the lady's home was five to six miles from the Gulf, she had six feet of water in it with the storm surge, and she had no flood insurance. This lady has been living in a FEMA trailer, but will be blessed by her restored home and the new additions her son-in-law has helped incorporate. Two things she didn't have in the former home but will have in the new home are air conditioning and a washer and dryer (the laundry area was previously in an outside shed).

Some of the New York group, along with two from our Grace Church group, also worked on another home and made it habitable for a single mother and her 5th-grade son. The back of this home had been severely damaged by a large tree that blew over. That end of the home was sagging and beyond repair, and the remaining roof leaked badly. The work team ended up sawing off the damaged part, replacing some beams and studs, and making a new wall. Also, they put on a new roof. The family now has a reasonable place in which to live.

The families and others in the church were so grateful and gracious. They expressed their thanks many times in words, and some of them prepared supper each night for our twenty-two volunteers.

We went to Mississippi to do repairs and help the people in need. We returned home blessed and moved by the gratitude and generosity of these people. We were uplifted by their courage, faith, determination, and will to continue God's ministry in the midst of the devastation. They have built a larger new church to house their growing congregation, and they are reaching out to the children of the community with summer daycare for one hundred children as their goal.

It will take years to rebuild the homes and lives of the people in the Gulf area. They have so many needs. Think about it. Can we share from our abundance and be a help to them? Whether as part of another work team or by our donations or prayers, we can have a part in helping rebuild their lives. Watch for more information on upcoming trips. God calls us to help our brothers and sisters in need. If we had similar needs, the people of Mississippi would like to be among the first to come to our aid.

(The members of the Mississippi Work Team were Mark Brown, David and Donna Brownfield, Bill Cox, Tim Garner, Chuck Hefley, Bill White, and Paul Zimmerman.)