



Hope...in Unexpected Places

by Lisa Hart

This summer I was blessed to have the opportunity to travel to Nassau, Bahamas on a youth mission trip. First Congregational UCC in Appleton invited the Wisconsin Conference to join them to work at the All Saints Camp through Next Step Ministries. This was an opportunity to engage in the typical mission trip construction work, as well as relational ministries with residents at the All Saints Camp. It was also an opportunity to experience hope in the most unexpected places...

- I often hear that there are no young people in our churches. I spent the week with forty-four high school and college age young people, most of whom came from one congregation. Young people ARE in our churches...in many cases, it may be a small number, but they are there! We just need to notice them.



We built a shed



Robert Jr, Erik and AJ

- I also hear concerns that young people are self-centered and have no real direction in their lives. These young people came to the Bahamas to serve others. It didn't matter how hot it was or how dirty they were...it didn't matter how difficult the work...they were always ready to jump in, with smiles on their faces, to get the work done. They were also quick to engage in conversation and build relationships with the residents of All Saints Camp. Yes, they are young and still trying to figure out what direction to head in life, but they are generous and compassionate...and willing to work hard to make this world a better place.

- The site staff for Next Step Ministries consists of college students and young adults who have committed to spend their summer serving others. They have given up the comforts of home (think minimal air-conditioning while living and working in the heat of a Bahamas summer) to serve the people of All Saints Camp, as well as all of the mission groups that travel to Nassau throughout the summer. This is another



Work crew



Roofing Crew

reminder that young people have a heart for serving others and want to contribute to society in meaningful, faith-filled ways.

- All Saints Camp, located in an isolated area on the island, is a community for people with HIV and AIDS, as well as other conditions that cause them to be shunned by society. Once filled with crumbling sidewalks and rundown cabins, it is gradually seeing improvements. Thanks to full-time missionaries, Tim and Felicia Ryan, and the ministry of local churches and Next Step Ministries, sidewalks have been replaced and cabins are also being replaced. They also work to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the residents. On the surface, it may seem that the residents of All Saints Camp have been forgotten by society, but I was reminded that they have not been forgotten by God. God is calling a wide circle of people to surround the residents of All Saints Camp with love and care.

- Perhaps the most unexpected way that I experienced hope was in the joy and faith the residents shared with us. Every day we had the opportunity to hear the stories of the residents. While many experience great hardships on a daily basis, the faith they shared was strong and vibrant. I think I expected more sadness or anger, but instead there were smiles and laughter. I couldn't help but wonder if my faith would be as strong if I were in a similar situation.

All Saints Camp is a place filled with many challenges and hardships, but it is also a place of great hope and joy. It is impossible to experience this without somehow being changed. My prayer is that our hearts would be open to experience God's presence, even in the most difficult situations, and that we discover hope...in unexpected places.



Meal Time



Mixing mortar



Erik and Ben