



September 2016 - by Kristi Duensing, Youth Director

This summer, on our Youthworks mission trip, Peace Youth enjoyed their time with the people of Kansas City, KS. We learned so much. Here are some of the stories and activities we encountered. One of our job sites was the beautiful St. Paul's Episcopal Church, which was built in 1313. It is a poor community, so this church feeds 300+ people every Saturday morning for breakfast. Sadly, only 35 families now attend this beautiful church, because many people moved to Spanish-speaking congregations. The Church also has a food pantry. The Federal government gives some commodities to this church's food pantry every other week, but most food comes from local grocery stores excess. They have 18 volunteers each Saturday. We spent 2 days in the food pantry, organizing food and

bagging up sacks of groceries, cleaning floors, and scrubbing walls.

We toured the Mexican Consulate in Kansas City. We learned how many immigrants have moved to Kansas City, KS, wanting to find a place where their families can be safe. Try to put yourself in this scenario: Imagine having to quickly leave your home unexpectedly, pick up your family and go, carrying only a few items with you, not knowing where you will sleep, or how to find your next meal. The Hispanic people we met were very hard-working, wanted to help each other, very respectful, and were simply trying to make a new start. Imagine working on a low pay scale, only for cash, and having no benefits. They are often poor and afraid, even though they are living in the United States.

Many of us, in this country, are frustrated with immigrants entering in. But through the week, we studied how great our God is; remembering just how much he FIRST loves ALL people. Why shouldn't we help them? Why should we have a better life than they do? Our Youthworks leaders showed us the four different U.S. Visa forms the immigrants could apply for to become a U.S. citizen. Most immigrants do not fit under the Visa rules, and so most do not qualify to become citizens. They cannot get student loans or opportunities for education, so most are poor. They feel stuck. Imagine being displaced, having nothing to rely on. I just can't imagine what they have to go through. Since our whole focus on this trip was on God's first love to us, and how he loves ALL people, we are to love our neighbor, no matter what they look like, how they talk, or what country they are from.

Another point was how we perceive people with our first impressions. We all are guilty of this, and God wants us to love ALL people, no matter what they seem to be, from our first impression. We should not "label" people, but be kind to them, and share God's great love with them too. We need to be compassionate, and listen first, and not we judge them. Just be aware of it yourself...try it. When you meet someone on the street, or wherever, listen to what your brain immediately says. This is a bad habit, whether it is a good or bad thought. We all need to listen to their story and not judge them. We toured some murals painted on garage doors in the city's alleys, by the people who live next to these alleys. Kansas City calls these beautiful murals a Community Alley Renovation Engagement to distract gang members from hanging out in the alleys.

All through the week, Peace Youth were eager to help in any way. Meghan, and 3 other youth, from another group, kept on working in the heat. Meghan may be short, but she is mighty! She helped by hauling hundreds!!! of dirty chairs outside, through 2 flights of stairs, so they could be cleaned up, and put back inside for the community breakfast. The people of St. Paul's church were amazing, how they fed and helped the poor, and also organized a huge food pantry, showing kindness to the people living here. Since the area has become mostly Spanish, this church has been losing their members, as families have moved away to Spanish speaking churches. We also helped paint a house, where the mother made us dinner twice in a week! Pastor was helping paint Laura's house most of the week, and we all enjoyed making their tasks lighter. She was so thankful to us. Many houses are in need of repair, and yards are weedy with tall grass. Laura, the mom could not speak English, but her kids were able to talk with us. They all helped us paint. Such a nice family, and very respectful. That was one thing we were impressed with on this trip, the kind attitude of ALL the Hispanic children.

Anthony, Tyra, Chandra, and Anita had an exhausting job keeping up with these active 35+ Hispanic kids from this community. The church opens up their doors to keep these kids busy and out of trouble with active games and activities. The youth also helped the preschool Kids Club making crafts, singing songs, playing with them in the gym, and playing soccer outside in the 100+ degree heat. Pastor was helping paint Laura's house most of the week, and enjoyed helping them. During the week at Youthworks, all youth help with meals, food prep and cleanup. Kids came from three different states, and were a part of our group: Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska. On Friday, it was still HOT, and we are drinking lots of water. Praise and worship in the evening was AWESOME, and family time (our Peace kids) every evening when we have our devotions, was my favorite part of the trip. The Youth really have a heart for serving others, and wanting to learn more about God's first love for us. We watched a video show how His love is more vast, wide, and deep as the ocean. Awesome!

We did have some free time, so we went miniature golfing at Great Wolf Lodge, and rode the roller coasters at World's of Fun. It was hot, but fun. The trip home was mostly zzzz's, as these youth poured their hearts, and energy, into this community. I'm very proud of them, and am thankful for Anita, Pastor, and Chandra's desire to lead these kids on this mission trip. Last but not least, I want to thank the people of Peace, who graciously support our Youth program. God bless you! We all had to make a love statement at the end of our trip. Mine was...."Because God deeply loves me, I do not want to be afraid, or be rushed, because I want to stop, and praise Him first!" You can ask the kids to tell their stories. We all learned a lot, about God's first love for us, and how we want to serve others. I hope you ask the kids about the trip. It was an eye-opening experience for all of us.