

First and foremost I would like to thank the congregation for supporting with your prayers during our trip and for your support of Mission Fest each year. Mission Fest helps makes trips such as ours become a possibility. Also “thank you” to Harold Boxberger and Bart Stuckey for successfully organizing and carrying out the trips again this year. I know it is no small endeavor.

This morning I want to share a few things I learned on our trip and a couple of quick stories. First, a few things I learned on our trip to the Gulf Coast:

I learned a new phrase: Semper Gumby, or “always flexible.”

I learned Bart Stuckey and Vince Ramirez know a little about everything and can fix almost anything.

I learned if you listen to the Vicar’s sermons you can use his own words during “discussions” during a really long trip together.

I learned I do not like towing a trailer in a snowstorm in March.

Next, a quick story. We arrived in Slidell, Louisiana, mid-afternoon on Sunday. We checked in and, as planned previously, headed to New Orleans. A few people in our group had not been to the city and it was about a 30-minute drive.

We had a late lunch and decided to look for Cathy Peper’s house. For those who don’t know, Cathy is the woman whose house Advent members worked on during the initial trip to New Orleans for Katrina relief. We knew it was on 39th street, but finding it could be difficult. You see, during the first trip to New Orleans, there was nothing. There were no street signs or landmarks to remember – things had definitely changed in five years. After driving around (in circles?) for a number of minutes Pastor Roger stopped his van and got out to talk to me about our dilemma. As fate would have it, we had parked in front of the house of a woman who had overheard our conversation at lunch. She pulled up behind us, ready to go into her house and asked if we were the people she had seen at the restaurant looking for 39th street. She got out her GPS and showed us the map of how to find our destination. Three minutes later we were at Cathy’s.

When we arrived at Cathy’s house , we saw that it had become a vacant lot. I looked at the dismay on the faces of our team that given their all to save that house. They walked around that lot as if they were walking around a cemetery. I thought, why are we wasting our time with all of this? All of that work wasted – the house lost and the owner never to return.

Fast-forward three days... I’m walking across the street from one of our job sites in Mississippi with three girls from our mission team. A woman drove by, turned around and drove back. She rolled down her window and asked “are ya’ll here on spring break working on houses?” When we replied yes, she held out a ten-dollar bill and said “go buy yourself a Coke. Ya’ll came down and rebuilt my house so I could move back in it.”

Later that day I realized Cathy’s house served a bigger purpose than we ever knew. Working there was the event that launched Mission Fest and our renewed energy toward mission work. I realized it’s not about the houses and the work. Our mission was about hope and the people – the people in the region and the people on our trip. We will share bonds with both for the rest of our lives. It is God’s work and our hands. Don’t miss the chance to experience a life memory – join the next mission team.

--- Wayne Hemphill