

Katrina Mission Trip Journal

Jim Guimond

Sunday 2/24/2008 8:20 a.m.

We left Charlotte at 7:45 a.m. Saturday 2/23/08. We had 5 vehicles with 21 participants. We made very good time stopping to eat just past Atlanta. We stopped several more times for gas and bathroom breaks. We stayed together well and arrived in Mississippi at about 7:00 p.m. Once we settled in at Camp St Paul, we gathered everyone together and head down to the SHED for some BBQ. We had to wait a little while as it was very busy. The food was worth the wait. The SHED tradition lives. After all that driving we all went to sleep around 10:00 p.m. Being here brings back the memories of our last trip, seeing some familiar faces of the relief team was wonderful. They are still here and very much committed to God's work. I look forward to getting right to it. We are supposed to building some handicap ramps and put down some flooring. But you never know until it happens what we will do. We hope to be able to visit with the families helped last year to see how they are doing. Got to go now to Sunday service at St. Paul Methodist Church who is the host church for this site. IT is so great to be with this group of God's workers, we get to be the hands of GOD this week. What better way to spend a week?

Thank you to all at home that helped make this trip happen.

"Those who would lead let them serve."

Sunday 2/24/08 9:23 a.m.

Today we had a day to ourselves today. We got up early showered and went to St. Paul Methodist Church service at 8:30 a.m. The service was about praising our Lord and Savior Jesus. After service we drove down route 90 through Gulfport. We went back down the coast to see how much recovery has occurred since we were here last year. We stopped in Gulfport and walked around to show the team members some of the effect of the storm 2.5 years ago. It was amazing that there is still much work to be done 2 and half years since the storm. Some businesses are coming back, mostly resorts and Casinos. Not very many homes along what used to be a tourist spot have been rebuilt. Signs of the devastation are still evident everywhere you look. There have been some signs of recovery like restaurants and other businesses in Ocean Springs, which is great. It is really the individual families that bear the greatest brunt of what needs to still be done. We drove into New Orleans to see the city one year later. New Orleans is bustling and making great strides in the city center. Driving into the city on I-10 you can still see many neighborhoods that still remain in disrepair. We spent the day around Jackson Park, and had lunch. Many very different characters inhabit this city. Arts and street performers abound, God's children come in all shapes and sizes. New Orleans could sure use some of Jesus' grace. Some of us left NO around 4:00 p.m. to get back and check out one of the job sites we will be working on starting Monday. The rest of the team spent a beautiful sunny afternoon in NO. Jim, Mark, Cliff and Jim Bird drove back early to visit one site that we will be building a handicap

ramp and set of stairs for a rebuilt home. Going to be quite an undertaking considering all new construction has to be built 7 feet up on piles to prevent water damage in the future. Thank God for Cliff and his talents he has really been a blessing and has taken charge and gained the confidence of the whole team. After a quick dinner we had our team orientation with Dee the camp director. There are 44 volunteers at "Camp Swampy", some from NY, Tennessee, the United Kingdom and others. We huddled around the table in the common room to make our plans for tomorrow.

As I sit here writing this journal and I cannot help thinking how grateful I am for my family, Church family, friends, and that I have a home to go back to. I can't imagine not being able to have my home to go to every day, living in a trailer for 2.5 years. I am so encouraged by all the acts that I know are inspired by God that would never happen without the guiding hand of our Lord. I a world where all we hear about is the negative it so wonderful to be with a group of people witnessing for Jesus. The bonds that have been made by our previous mission and the new ones that will be made as a result of this mission trip will serve the Lord for years to come. The fellowship is the one thing that really makes these trips so powerful in our faith journeys. It's about 10 and time to get some sleep. I can't wait for tomorrow, tomorrow we get to be God's hands, what more can we all ask for. At service today I kept thinking this is what God intends for us to find that all the great gifts he has for us are the ones we give away.

Mathew 25:40 "And the King will say, "I tell you the truth, when you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you were doing it for me.""

Good Night

Monday 2/25/08

Today we got started. Our job today was to begin building a handicap ramp for a lady. The house because of the building codes has to be 7 feet off the ground on columns. Going to be quite a job. Today we built four platforms (landings) for the ramp. Because it is so high up we had to make a ramp 75 feet long. The owner wants it to be on the back of the house and with the setback requirements we have to build it with 5 different ramps so it is not too steep. We had a good day today and got a good part of the stair in the front of the house started. There was a team from Ohio completing the siding they did a great job and got it all done. God is great! Most of all the relief work is being completed by church groups. Working with the church family is great as we really get to know each other in a way that cannot happen any other way. Rob Button did the devotion at breakfast this morning. He has been the first one to volunteer for everything; we are so blessed to have him here with us. He talked about being present for God and lead us in song it was great. He is playing his guitar as I write; what a blessing. Cliff has been a great blessing as well with all his knowledge and leadership. Mark Franza is the pillar we all lean on for leadership and guidance. I could say something about all the team members but would be writing all night. The fellowship has been wonderful, to be with others who love Jesus enough to give themselves for this week is so inspiring. The other teams have been great to be around as well. The atmosphere here at the camp is one of joy and wish I could put it in a bottle

and send it to you. I miss my family, but know that this is important work to bring people to Christ by being an example. "Be the change in the world the you want to see." Gandhi said it and watching it happen is a blessing. It warms my heart to see people who are all about bringing God's kingdom to this world. With all the craziness that happens every day, it is refreshing to see God at work in a world that has seemed to have lost its way. As the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert, it is like the many souls lost in greed, selfishness. To see people with a heart for God at work gives me hope that we really can make a difference. I know we are making a difference for these few families. Some of the other team members have worked on sanding sheetrock and have gotten it ready to paint tomorrow. It is supposed to rain tomorrow so I am not sure what we will do since we are working outside. Pray the rain will pass quickly so we can get back to the work of the Lord.

I will sleep well tonight. Some team members are hanging out in the common room, others are in the bunk rooms reading or sleeping. It is a pretty relaxed place. I thing we are all tired after a hard day of work. After going to New Orleans yesterday, I am glad to be among followers of Jesus, instead of the seamier side that is in New Orleans.

Well I guess that will do for now. More tomorrow.

Jesus asks us to step out of our own needs sometimes and serve others. Now I know why, in the service of others we find that is us who benefit from it. The gift of service makes me feel better about myself knowing I am helping someone who may not be able to help themselves. When we step back from our own selfish needs we realize that they really are not that important. What is really important is connection with others of God's creation and that bond you create with others in service is a strong one. And the blessing of having done something to make the world better gives purpose to what otherwise seems so meaningless and petty. I am grateful to be chosen by God to service and receive his blessings. I am so blessed in my life so many ways; this helps me to put that all into perspective. Thank you Lord for your wisdom.

Tuesday 2/26/08

This morning started with a great breakfast. What made it great was the devotion given by the team from Ohio. The pastor from the church there talked about being the light for others. Jesus was the light of the world while he was in the world. Now it is up to us to be that light by witnessing God's love with our actions. I was honored today by being asked to lead the team prayer before we left for our work sites. God grant us the wisdom and grace to truly be a witness.

We made a lot of progress today; we built four platforms for the handicap ramp we are building for the homeowner of our worksite. It was a hard day, digging holes and mixing cement, nailing and other tasks. Everyone worked hard in their own way. Cliff has been an amazing leader; his God given talent to figure things out has been a great blessing. Mark our team leader as always keeps us focused and safe. Deborah Brawley was amazing drilling holes and cutting boards and all she does was so fun to watch. Jim Bird leading the team building the front stairs gets much

done today. We had some rain in the morning so we had to wait under the house for it to pass so we could go back to work. Rob Button brought his guitar and we sang songs while we waited for our chance to go back to work. It got a colder after the rain stopped and a little windy. We finished about 5:15 p.m., and headed back for dinner. Tonight we had an opportunity to share a little about our job site with the other teams and how we saw Jesus in our day. It was really neat to hear from the other teams. After dinner we had a young lady from the area who had written and produced her own CD of songs to help raise money for a center for the homeless that was washed away in the storm. She was an amazing singer and an inspiring witness for Christ. At 17 years old she has taken on this charity as something she is committed to helping with her beautiful gift she has been blessed with. Afterward we cleaned the kitchen and now at 9:00 p.m. I sit and write this journal.

After starting at 6:00 a.m. it has been a long day. I think about all the things that we hear and see in our daily lives that make me think the world is in a tailspin. Sometimes I feel really helpless about being able to change that. Being here this week has changed how I feel about that. Seeing these individuals committed to making a difference in the world. A positive difference that helps others, that changes one family's life, one person's life. We can't change the world all at once, but one person, one family, one community can make a difference. The ripple that comes from what we do here can go on and effect people we may never meet. Big changes start with small steps. The stories we hear about the families that have benefited by the thousands of volunteers who have come down here are inspiring. The community here is so grateful for the help they have received, the help that would not have happen if it had not been for the inspiration of God's love.

I have been blessed by this experience; the people of my church have been an amazing group. I am so proud they are my church family. I have always loved my church for its big heart helping others through all the missions we are involved in. But this experience has really truly taught me what being in service for Jesus means. These people have touched my heart, to watch them put aside all the daily petty things we get stuck in sometimes to come together, drive halfway across the country to help others in need that they have never met, and do it with a joyous heart. It has been a lesson learned, in the bible, and put in action. Thank you Lord for this valuable life lesson. I could write all night and not be able express the joy in heart of being part of this special group of people called to service by Jesus and standing up and answering the call. Thanks to the love and support of our families, who sacrifice for us not being at home, thanks to the church family who support us with prayer, and money, and love who make this all possible. And Thanks to God for the skills, commitment, and compassion he has gifted us all to make this mission possible. Lord bless us with your wisdom and grace to witness for you. For if one is brought to you it all would have been worth it.

The devotion this morning said: "the gospel is spread by the people gossiping about the gospel" when we witness for Christ and people see it, they speak of it and the Lord becomes real in the world. It brings me great joy to my heart that this happens. My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are more real in my life today than at any other time in my life. Praise the Lord!

Wednesday 2/27/08

Today is our third work day at Camp St Paul. Started early at 6:00 a.m. wake up, breakfast at 6:30 a.m. We had omelets that we made up in plastic bags last night, and then boiled in water this morning. Neat idea and tasted good too. Rob gave the devotion this morning and we played a neat game where we got to meet team members by sharing about each other. I was able to close in breakfast in prayer. We got to the job site early, and began with a pray lead by Rob. We have done a lot of singing having Rob with the team this year, and it has been wonderful. Bill Brawley sharing in his articulate way that he does always makes us think and is always giving praise and support to all of us. Thank you Lord for his gift of the spoken word. I wish I had time to tell about all the team members and their gifts they add to our mission, but it would take all night and I will need to rest for tomorrow.

We were able to build the ramps from the platforms we built yesterday and added most of the decking. Jim Bird and his group have made great progress on the front staircase. Tomorrow we will try and get the railings and the remaining decking. It will be tight but I think we will be able to finish by Friday. Rain is forecast for Friday afternoon so the team wants to work late tomorrow to make sure we can complete before we have to leave. What a committed group of workers. My body is tired and sore as we have been working hard.

The other team with Sandra, Leslie, Julie, Stacy, and Clark, as well as Sybil has done a great job painting. They have been working hard and should finish by Friday as well. I hope they do so they can come and work with us on Friday.

We finished working at 4:30 p.m. so we could get back to camp in time for the church meal being given at St Paul's Methodist Church. This church has been incredible in support of the relief effort over the last several years. The camp is on the church property and they allow us to use their kitchen for meals twice a day. They have opened their church to all the thousands of volunteers who have come through the camp since it opened. Truly an amazing witness for Christ. We had a meal and worship service after. The church community has really made us feel welcome. Thank God for their service to us and the community.

The common room was buzzing with game playing and reading and people on their laptops and cell phones. You would think we all have known each other for years instead of days. Fellowship is such an enormous blessing on these mission trips. We will remember this trip for a long time. God is among us here, the joyfulness and friendships could only be created by the grace of Jesus. Who else could bring people together from across the country to work for free for people who they never met them and work all day without complaint? God is so great, and can truly move mountains. All that is good comes from God.

Prayers for our families and church community for their unselfish support while we are away from them in service. Time to get some sleep, tomorrow will be a long day. Praise Jesus for this opportunity to witness for him who is love and compassion!

Thursday 2/28/08

Today opened early as usual, breakfast at 6:30 a.m. I slept well and did not wake up until lights on at 6:00 a.m. Dee and Jack the camp facilitators told their story to the volunteers. How they have sold all their possessions and came down to Mississippi to serve. They have been running this camp for 2 and half years. Truly inspiring story, people in service to others. Not owned by things but committed to being in contribution. They will be moving to Camp Hope in Vancleave in a few months to continue the work here. They have helped so many families get back into their homes here. It is very comforting to see individuals called by God to make his kingdom real in this world. I am in awe for their service.

Got to the job site early as we want to finish out project before we go back on Saturday. We made big progress today. Everyone was focused and committed to finishing giving this family access to their home so they can move in. We were able to get the remainder of the decking on, all the remaining support posts, and bolting of the supports complete. We also installed a majority of the posts for the railing complete. Today was warmer than yesterday and we took advantage by really working hard. Today was one of the most demanding days of work I can remember. Digging holes in the ground for the posts, drilling holes for the bolts, screwing the decking down, filling in the completed and cemented holes and raking the ground level. Everyone on the team gave the best of themselves. It was an honor to work with these individuals motivated by service to others. Jim Bird and his crew got the front staircase almost complete with the railing at the top. I think we will be able to complete tomorrow but it will be an effort. Everyone is very motivated so we stayed until dark to complete as much as possible before we headed back to camp for dinner. I am tired, but I really feel good about it, we really give of ourselves today.

The fellowship continues to be the best part of this trip filled with many blessings. The laughter in the common room, the devotions at breakfast, the joking and razzing on the jobsite, the prayers at meals and on the job site all bring what we are here for into sharp focus. Our home owner came by the site today to see her home taking shape. I could hear her talking about how much she wanted to get back into her home after almost 3 years of living in a 25 foot travel trailer. It is great that we will have played a major part in making that dream come true for her. Thank you Lord for all the inspiration you have created in all the people who have played a role in helping the residents in the Gulf Coast recover from this horrendous tragedy. From the ashes comes Jesus Christ our savior saying I am here and I love you, rally around me and help your brothers and sisters, so that we all can grow in our faith. Having been here before I thought I knew what would happen when we can again. But I am in awe of God and how He can bring out the best in people, to know that the world is not what is on CNN, but that there is a whole army of believers who refuse to let despair, and hopelessness run this world. We stand here followers of Jesus Christ saying we can make a difference and do it in the name of God, and let people know that Jesus loves them and we can give people the hope that in the worst of times can come redemption, and salvation, and that there are people who care and are willing to come to their aid all in the name of Jesus Christ. Thank you Lord for all our good fortune that our lives have been blessed enough that we can do this work. We will come back again, and

again, and again, whatever it takes until all the families here have a chance to have their lives back. To have what we have, the security of our own homes, the blessing of family in friends who love us and can share the comfort of knowing God loves us and died on the cross so we can overcome all our sins and be saved from ourselves.

Tomorrow I have the honor of presenting the devotion at breakfast. Lord give me the wisdom to witness in your name in way that brings you closer to all of us. I miss my wife and daughter so much, I can't wait to get home and give them a huge hug. I will be back at my home, back to my comfortable life with all the blessings God has given me. I will not forget these families, and communities who are still hurting, and the longer this recovery goes on the harder it gets for them. We will come back.

Friday 2/29/08

Today was our last day in camp. We were concerned we would not be able to complete our task. It was a big project, even though we had a big team it was the time limit that made it hard. We started early as usual 6:30 a.m. breakfast. I was privileged to provide the devotion this morning. I got asked to do it late last night so I did not have much time to prepare. I read some passages but what kept coming in to my heart was John 3:16. I wanted to talk about why we are down here. With Easter coming it just seemed to make sense that we keep in our heart that we are called to be witnesses for Christ, and what he has sacrificed so we could be forgiven our many frailties. I have felt called to share on this trip and have done so, I hope to the glory of God. For not for Him I would not be here. Rob sang "Holy is the Lord" as part of the devotion. It has been great having all the music in camp this year, thanks to Rob in large part.

We tried to get to the site early because we knew it would be tight to finish up today. We arrived to our site at 8:30 a.m. or so. The team really wanted to complete before we left. The level of commitment was incredible and I am so proud of this team for working so hard. We were able to finish but it took us right to the end. We finally finished nailing the last board at 5:30 p.m. About 2:00 p.m. I looked at what we had left and started to think we might not make it. Everyone really stepped up and did not give up on our goal to complete. We all pitched in and made it happen, no one had to say what needed to be done they just jumped in and did it. It was a great display of teamwork. It got a little tense and the time ticked away, but we all banded together and it was finished.

It is something I have a great feeling of accomplishment about. The whole team contributed in their own way with their individual gifts. Charles Long cut his hand on the saw, and received 8 stitches by luckily was only minor. We had several other minor injuries because we were pushing all week and especially today. Thank God we are all safe. The family can now access their home and we all feel grateful for that.

We arrived late back at camp, and as it turned out dinner was a little late so we showed up just as Clark was delivering the blessing of the food. One thing that has been particularly awesome this week is that we committed to prayer much more than last year. The prayers were genuine,

and Rob delivered many of them. Mark prayed with and for us, and his leadership has caused me to respect him even more if that is possible. The women came back early from their site and cooked dinner for all 44 volunteers. It was so good. After dinner Dee and Jack the camp directors invited one of the Case workers to come and talk with us about what the Methodist Conference is doing here in Mississippi. Pretty amazing what they are doing here. I will tell you more about that when we return. After the case worker was finished with her presentation we had an opportunity to share our experiences of the week and how we saw Jesus during the week. It was powerful to hear the different teams and individuals experiences. God has truly been in this camp this week, and we are all blessed by it.

It had been an experience that I will cherish for years to come. I have had a chance to know people whom I thought I already known well, in way I have never have, or could have any other way. This year was a more difficult because of the challenge of our task. Our church is so blessed to have people who love God so much to give of themselves for the glory of God. Praise the Lord for them.

I would love to write more and will when we return. It is very late and we will get up early to return. I want write about each team member when I get a chance at home. Thank you Lord for your grace and love this week we could have never made it without you. You have raised our own expectations of what we can accomplish with your love and protection to guide us. We have made a difference this week, we have walked with the Lord this week, and we have grown in our faith this week. We have supported each other and learned that we matter as a team and individuals and that God is at work in our lives. There is still so much to be done here and with the government and secular organizations now pulling out, with the exception of the Methodist, we will be back and continue to spread God's word through our works and our faith.

I cannot wait to see my family, I miss them so dearly. But at the same time I am sad to leave. There is so much need here we cannot let the world forget these are God's children and need our help. The lessons learned are many this week, but the one that stands out for me is that our faith cannot grow unless we step out of our comfortable lives and stretch ourselves in our words and action for Jesus Christ our savior.