

On July 9, 32 youth and 6 adult chaperones started the journey down to Bayou La Batre, Alabama to serve the local community. The journey was not simply to a geographical destination, but a psychological and spiritual destination. Before the trip, I was maybe *too* aware of this fact, having been on three previous mission trips through Saint Lawrence Youth Ministry.

In the weeks leading up to the trip, I had been worrying about how the dynamic of a 38 person group would play out, and I prayed for guidance to lead the group well. I felt I was called to be a leader in the group based on the experience I had. I basically focused all my efforts on this aspect of the trip. I wanted everyone else on the trip to have the kinds of experiences I had encountered in my previous three trips. Especially this year, as there were 12 graduating seniors that will be gone to college in the fall, I prayed that the events of the week would touch the younger kids on the trip and inspire them to stay involved with Youth Ministry in general but especially the mission trips.

As the week progressed, I realized that my worrying had been pointless. As we had our individual church group time one night, I realized that God was working on our trip to bring all 38 of us together. Some people said that was too many people, but the trip would not have been the same without each and every one of them. Through the faith that we shared, the worship we did and the various service activities we performed, the 38 of us grew to become a family rooted in the love of the Lord that we all share.

I should have known that God would provide, as He always does. As I think back on the entire trip, I recognize that God touched me so much on the trip. Many things on the trip were reminders of things I already was aware of, but were referenced in different ways. This was great for me as I head off to college and will be more independent than I ever have been, including in my faith. We went to a nondenominational church one night for their midweek service. There was a speaker whose message was simple, but powerful. God likes us. God not only loves you, but likes each of us as a person and likes how we choose to live our life. I also saw God all week through the service my group did. I saw God in the neighborhood where we were painting a house. The community was so close, partially because most of the neighbors were literally related. But they were so friendly and would sit and have a conversation at any time during the day. That was a nice change of pace from the busyness and hustle and bustle that often consumes my life. Then at Kids' Club, it was impossible not to see God in the little kids who were so full of joy and even energy in the hot, humid weather we encountered. These things all touched me and opened my eyes to God.

Before the trip, I didn't know how it or *if* it would affect me. I realized through the trip that it was not for me to worry about or decide. It was, and always is, up to God how he reveals himself to us. We just have to be open to be transformed by His grace.

“For the pagans run after all these earthly things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:32-34

