

Read a reflection from this year's team!

Alexander Sullivan - July 22, 2013

For about twelve years, I thought I lived in a terrible location next to railroad tracks with a loud train going by in a town no one has even heard of. That was until I went to help build a house that was a few miles away from the closest sight of civilization. The house was for a woman that had been waiting a while for it to be built. The house neither had electricity, plumbing, nor was it planning on having any. The area of the dirt floor was almost the size of the wooden floor in my room. Day one made me thankful for where I lived, and the luxuries of what I had to live in.

Days two and four made me thankful for the choices of foods I have to eat. On the way to the worksites, we would stop for gas along for snacks in the mini marts. The first thing Father Chris from Peabody noticed was the mini marts and the small grocery stores offered mostly junk food. That was why Kenworth Jones created a relatively large garden at the community pantry to offer those who came in everyday healthy vegetables.

On the third day, I was helping paint a school wishing how I could be doing something more like helping build something there like the first day. The science teacher there, who spent his summer improving the school, told us that painting was going to have a huge psychological effect on the children because the children feel like they are nothing and as a result, they commit suicide. He said that when the kids see the new white paint in the upcoming school year, they will be filled with hope knowing that they are something because there were people to come and do something for the school, even if it was something small because in harmony, small things grow.

Peter Bowling - July 23 2013

This trip took the missionaries out of our comfort zones, not only mentally, but physically. We left the green and humid climate of New England and went to a place where it was hot, dry, and definitely less green. In this new place, we also got a chance to see the incredible poverty that the Navajo Indians live in. What I learned by talking to these people is that they are not even close to giving up. Despite their poverty, they still have hope, and a vision for a better future for their people. We all hit hard times in our lives. But if the Navajo Indians, who have had to deal with so much hardship in their lives, can still find hope and faith in the future, then so can we. That is what I learned from my time helping the Navajo Indians.

Daniel Peters - Assistant Team Leader - July 26, 2013

My experience with YOCAMA was probably one of the best of my life. First I made lots of friends. Lots of Orthodox Christian friends. This helped me to relate to people through our faith and to put God first everyday. Second I did the work of god by

helping people who need it most. Even though these people don't have much they are still some of the nicest kindest people I have ever met. Finally third this experience gave me a whole new outlook on life. The biggest thing I learned is do not worry about mindless things put everything in Gods hands and everything will all be ok. God never gives us more then we can handle.

Christina Marino - July 28, 2013

You never realize how rough people have it until you experience the lifestyle yourself. From Boston to Chicago, a big city to a big city, nothing had changed; big buildings, designer shops, the typical road rage and traffic, and people everywhere. I saw people of all ages grasping onto their iPhones like it was the last piece of bread on earth. From Chicago to New Mexico on Amtrak, we all saw how that ride went from city to "nowhere" within hours. One arm went up and then all arms went up, all holding cell phones up high saying "I have a bar!" "I lost it" "no service". So we lost that last piece of bread. But it wasn't just us; we entered a place where that "bread" was hardly found. On this trip we built, painted, sanded porches and hogans, we packed and delivered food, we weeded and built green houses, we dug out a woman's house after a fire. We all worked out of our comfort zones and lived a week in the life of a Navajo Indian. Just after our workday was done, We all went back to secure buildings, full meals, unlimited water, ect. It was hard to think we spend the day helping others and feeling bad for them yet we go back to our normal lives. After this trip I know I will be coming back! My experience was out of this world also bringing me closer to my religion.

Alexander Camp - July 28, 2013

On my last day working in New Mexico, I managed to break off from my group at the senior center and squeeze into another van that was heading to help rebuild a Hogan, a traditional octagon-shaped Navajo home. As great of an experience I had enjoyed at the senior center, putting smiles on the faces of the poor elderly people, tasting traditional dishes, and learning firsthand the rich and intriguing Navajo culture, I was looking for more. After shingling a roof one day and painting a school the other, some manual labor that would produce immediate results was exactly what I was looking for. And so I seized the opportunity and hopped in the van, my sights pointed out the window at the breathtaking landscape around me. Growing up in the suburbs my entire life, I had never been surrounded by so much empty space.

Outside of the town of Gallup, the landscape was a never-ending stretch of sand, with majestic peaks serving as an intermediate between the earth and the heavens above, their soft red hues meeting the sky's pure blues. But as we pulled into the property where we were building, it became clear that this beauty all around us was purely aesthetic. In sweltering heat and a waterless expanse of sand, the Navajo people are forced to somehow make their livings, in the land that our forefathers deemed unlivable for themselves.

These were truly third world conditions. The Hogan we were rebuilding had burnt down in a fire, from a new stove the owner had purchased to heat and cook for her large family, which lived together without electricity in this small space no larger than my living room. These people already lived with nothing, in a junkyard littered with trash and unusable cars in the middle of a desert wasteland, and now somehow were left with even less. This thought astonished me, yet motivated me at the same time. And so when the project's director told us that digging out and fixing the home's foundation would take at least two days, I decided that we could not settle for not finishing it that day.

We got to work, shoveling out the concrete base from under rubble and dirt, and swinging pickaxes and hammers to bring down what was left of the walls. The hard work in the blistering sun was brutal, but thinking of what these people deal with on a daily basis put any thoughts of a break to shame. Pressing on, we began to find personal items mixed in with the ruins, everyday things such as toys, dishes, and clothes, or at least what was left of them. Each discovery saddened us more than the last, as we thought of what this family had lost. Then we came across something amazing. At first glance it seemed like nothing, another decaying relic, this time some sort of torn up sign. But upon further inspection, we realized that it was much more. While most of the sign was destroyed, perfectly intact were the words "Jesus will be." Most people might have moved on with no thought, or raised an eyebrow at the irony of this discovery, but being an Orthodox Christian I know that I and others saw a miracle.

In tragedy and destruction, such as the fire that destroyed this woman's home, all earthly things are washed away. But through it all, Jesus Christ remains, all-powerful and invincible to all earthly trials and tribulations. But while He is unaffected by such tragedies, He is always there for whoever is affected, as the rock on which one must rebuild, physically and otherwise. This was the message I found in the rubble of this home, that no matter what happens, God remains, to guide us and give us strength, to rebuild and to move forward. My trip to New Mexico reminded and reassured me of this, as I experienced it firsthand and will never forget.

Stacie Paganis - July 28, 2013

"Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time... We are all God's children so it is important to share His gifts. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world-just respond to people's needs... We feel what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop." – Mother Teresa

My trip to New Mexico this year was truly self-awakening, as it opened my eyes to the poverty our brothers and sisters are facing, and strengthened my will to serve God in every way possible. I had been eager to and reach out to help those in need, so when I heard about YOCAMA from my friends who participated last year, I knew I had to go. When I got to the airport, I instantly felt connected to our group, and together throughout the week we partook in various projects such as school renovations, building of hogans (homes) and greenhouses, helping at the local food pantry, and delivering food and firewood. When I got to help out with food and firewood delivery on the last day, I noticed that almost every house I delivered to had no bathroom inside and in such an advanced and developed country, it was troubling to see that there are still people living without running water, or even a toilet in their home. As I got to play with some of the native children during delivery, I couldn't help but smile at them enjoying our company and each other. Their faces illuminated when they saw toys and clothes for them. To me, nothing is more rewarding than making others smile. They inspired us with their appreciation of the simple things that God has given us. I did not realize how easy we have it here, as many of the people at the reservation lack basic necessities. The work that we did on a school will probably cause many kids to feel safer and have a good learning experience. Many of the tasks that we completed may not have seemed extremely important, but they were needed more than imagined. Every action has a reaction and sometimes the smallest actions mean the world. I anticipate taking part in a YOCAMA trip next year!

Matthew Gatzunis - August 4, 2013

The YOCAMA mission trip was an experience of a lifetime. I gained a lot of new friendships that I hope will last forever. When I first signed up for the trip I was skeptical about going because I only knew a few people from my church that were going and I wasn't sure if I would have fun on the trip. The day before we left I was telling myself how I wouldn't have fun because I didn't know anyone but to my surprise it was one of the most fantastic experiences of my life. From going to Logan Airport and meeting people there to the dreaded 26 hour train ride a lot of these friendships were just beginning. For most of the train trip I was getting to know people from Massachusetts. Once I had met everyone from Massachusetts, myself and other missionaries wanted to get to know everyone else so we did, and got to make jokes and have fun with them as well. When we arrived at the camp we were able to choose where we slept. The friendships that were made on the train became even stronger because of all the goofing around we did in the cabins. While all of that was fun, the best part was easily helping out the Navajo people and seeing how they lived. We were able to go to the food pantry and see how most of these people provided food for their families. We were also able to build a Hogan, a traditional home of the Navajo people, and see how compact they live. I thought it was a great thing that all of the family members try to stay together and live together but it's upsetting to know that they don't have enough money to get separate homes so the living conditions would be better. We also helped paint a school that was on the reservation. Painting the school was the best in my opinion. I went to the school the

last two days of the trip because it needed to be completed and the groups that were working needed extra help. After two long days of working on the school we had completed the painting and to see the reaction of one of the school teachers, Tex, was so rewarding. He had been around occasionally looking at what we were doing at the school, but when he saw the finished product, you could see how happy he was about the way it looked. While my group was working there, on the last day, we had come up with the motto "For the Kids" because that's who this was all for. It was a way to help get the kids excited about learning again. To come to an environment where they can be safe and happy. Participating in the YOCAMA mission trip was an immensely rewarding experience for me. I hope that I will have the opportunity to attend another mission trip in the future. It was extremely gratifying knowing that no matter how small the task is, it can impact a family greatly. It's an amazing feeling being able to give back. We are blessed in so many ways. I realize that we take so much for granted. I will now try to help anyone when I can, because there is no better feeling than being able to help someone and give back of the many blessings we take for granted.

Natalia Perez - August 8, 2013

This trip has made such an impact on my life that before I came home from New Mexico I was already thinking of ways to raise money for next years trip, thats how excited I am to go again.

There are so many things that I could share with you that still would not explain the wonderful experience I had.

We built many things that had changed peoples lives. Even the smallest things we did changed their lives and mine completely.

One example I can give you, is the day my team and I played bingo with the elderly. I asked the person that I was helping to take a picture with me. She probably had the most extensive smile I've seen. When she got up for the picture she put her arm around me. After the camera flashed, she hugged me and thanked me for asking her. She was also grateful that we spent the day playing bingo with them. I don't even know her name, but her happiness has effected me so much. I wonder if I have effected her by just asking to take a picture with her. Another lady hugged me goodbye and asked if we were coming again tomorrow. All I did that day was play bingo with them and their reaction made me feel like I did so much more!

Through this trip, I met so many amazing people. I really hope I will see them all again next year. I'm looking forward to making more lasting memories.