

AREA YOUTH RETURN FROM MISSION MINISTRY IN COAHOMA, MISSISSIPPI

The First American Lutheran Church Youth League recently organized a week-long mission trip to Coahoma, Mississippi. Twenty-three area youth and six adults participated in the trip which began on July 14, 2006.

Coahoma, a rural town in northwestern Mississippi is a community of approximately 350 residents; this area was not affected by last year's Hurricane Katrina. Coahoma is an economically depressed area with an unemployment rate of approximately 12 %, a household income of \$14,000, in comparison to a national average of \$42,000 and a 51% high school drop out rate. The town faces many obstacles, because of the lack of industry and business opportunities. Coahoma did not have water and sewers until approximately three years ago, due to the lack of business and industry. Even today the water system is unreliable at best.

Once they arrived in Coahoma the First American youth partnered with two other youth groups. One group was from Westminster Presbyterian Church in Snellville, Georgia, and the other was from Christ United Methodist Church in Independence, Missouri. The groups were housed in the original Coahoma two room school. This building has not been used since the late 1960s and has since been renamed the Coahoma Inn. In the 1980s the Coahoma Inn was converted into a housing site for the first Collegiate Habitat for Humanity Challenge Build. In all, 41 houses were built in Coahoma and Jonestown, as part of the Challenge Build. During the week of July 16th, 70 people worked and worshipped together at the site.

The weather at the site was HOT. The average daytime high was in the mid 90s, with heat indexes around 120. Water was a valuable commodity; the group consumed approximately 7 cases of water a day. However, the heat didn't stop our youth from getting involved with the communities, and discussing the weather with the locals.

While at the site, the mission participants were divided into small groups, and had the opportunity to serve by painting homes and operating a Kids Club. In addition, the youth from the ministry site worked with the literacy program that was held at the Community Development Resource and Activity Center, located at 312 Main Street in Jonestown, Mississippi. The Community Development Center is a 100% volunteer supported and operated Community Center.

The evenings were devoted to nightly worship and local activities. While at the ministry site, our youth had the opportunity to experience the rich local heritage of Coahoma and Clarksdale; the group attended the Blues Museum and a performance by a local blues artist. Clarksdale is the infamous intersection of highways 49 and 61, the historical birthplace of the blues named the Crossroads. Additionally, the group attended a gospel service at an area church, and had a picnic on the Mississippi River. They were also treated to a potluck dinner, attended by the folks of Coahoma. They had the opportunity to try black eyed peas with okra and southern fried chicken, all cooked by the Mayor! The experience was "southern hospitality" at its finest.

While traveling to Coahoma the group did some sight seeing. While on the road, they toured Mammoth Cave, the Louisville Slugger manufacturing plant, Beale Street in Memphis, Nashville, the Arch in St. Louis, and Graceland. While traveling, the group stayed in four ELCA churches. In

all, the group traveled 2,400 miles through Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi.

This year's trip was the fifth partnership the youth of First American have had with Youthworks, Inc. Previous trips have been to McGraw's, West Virginia, Custer, South Dakota, St. Louis, Missouri, and Lynn, Massachusetts. Youthworks, Inc. based in Minneapolis, Minnesota provides relational ministry experiences to approximately 30,000 junior and senior high youth in over 70 different communities yearly. The mission of Youthworks is to provide life changing experiences by partnering with established local urban ministries to address the basic needs of the local community. With this year's trip, over 50 people have participated in the First American mission program.

From eating a meal with the mayor of Coahoma to helping at the volunteer literacy center, God's presence, love and grace have been with us wherever we have traveled. Many friendships have been made, and our eyes have been opened to the struggles of the world. We would like to thank the many people who have supported our ministry and offered prayers and encouragement while we have been on the road.

A planning meeting for next year's 2007 mission trip will be held on September 10th at 6:00 PM in the Youth Room at FALC. For additional information about this ministry, or to request information, please contact the church office at 834-2460, or visit the website at firstamericanlutheran.org. For additional information about next year's mission trip, please call Brad Weber (Youth Director) at 920-834-2479. Any youth in grades 9-12 who want to serve through relational and work oriented service may participate in the mission program. Spaces for the 2007 mission trip are limited.

Youth participating in this year's trip were: Melanie Bradshaw, Mandy Caldie, Kristin Cox, Ariel Dickenson, Tria Dickenson, Stacey Heise, Karlie Martens, Laura McDermott, Austin Moore, Cory Muhowski, Lexie Olson, Dana Scheffen, Lexi Woodworth, Lindsey Wusterbarth, Katie Zoeller, Paloma Vinas, Marshall Bradshaw, Chad Heise, Ross Heise, Tyler Nordquist, Charlie Olson, Matt Peterson, and Casey Wusterbarth.

Adult chaperones for the trip were: Brad Weber, Jane Weber, Brenda Bradshaw, Tom Olson, Kelly Heier, and Derek Henning.

MISSION TRIP PARTICIPANTS TO COAHOMA, MISSISSIPPI



YOUTHWORKS CREW AT BRUNETTES GARAGE



LEXIE OLSON AND KATIE ZOELLER PICKING UP TRASH IN JONESTOWN



AUSTIN MOORE AT KIDS CLUB



LINDSEY WUSTERBARTH AND KRISTEN KOX AT KIDS CLUB



MANDY CALDIE AT KIDS CLUB



CHAD HEISE, MELANIE BRADSHAW AND PALOMA VINAS AT WORKSITE

