

AREA YOUTH RETURN FROM MISSION MINISTRY IN MONESSEN, PENNSYLVANIA

The First American Lutheran Church Youth League recently completed a week-long mission trip to Monessen, Pennsylvania. Eighteen area youth and four adults participated in the trip which began on Friday, July 13, 2007. Youth participating in this year's trip were Allison Behnke, Lauren Caldie, Kristin Cox, Cory Muhowski, Dana Scheffen, Amber Trepanier, Lexi Woodworth, Katie Zoeller, Marshall Bradshaw, Nathan Cox, Chad Heise, Ross Heise, Adam Martens, Mike Nerenhausen, Tyler Nordquist, Charlie Olson, Matt Peterson, and Casey Wusterbarth. The adult chaperones for the trip were Brad and Jane Weber and Tom and Elizabeth Olson.

Monessen, an urban town approximately 30 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is an economically depressed community of approximately 8,500 residents. Due to recent steel mill closures, the population has decreased from a high of approximately 18,000 in 1960, resulting in many abandoned and substandard housing units. The average annual household income in Monessen is \$26,000, in comparison with a national average of \$42,000. The town's unemployment rate is approximately 10%, and approximately 16% of the population lives below the poverty level. Abandoned steel mills line the river with many areas listed as National Hazardous Waste Superfund sites.

Once they arrived in Monessen, First American youth partnered with two other youth groups from Ridgefield, Connecticut and Orchards United Methodist Church in Vancouver, Washington. The groups were housed in the Schooner Youth Center, originally a Catholic Church school located in downtown Monessen.

While at the site, the mission participants had the opportunity to serve by painting homes for elderly residents, working at the HUD Housing site preparing low-income rental units, working with the day care program at the Salvation Army, working along side the Mission Build Program to help with the rehabilitation of two housing units, and operating a Kids Club.

The evenings were devoted to worship and local activities. While at the ministry site, our youth had the opportunity to swim at a local pool and participate in a tour showing the progress that the community has made in helping impoverished areas of the city. The youth attended a local church service and were also treated to a potluck dinner attended by the local residents of the community.

While traveling, the group stayed in four ELCA churches located in Ohio and Indiana. In all, the group traveled 2,200 miles through Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. On the way to Monessen, the group was able to do additional sightseeing. While on the road they attended a Toledo Mud Hens baseball game, toured the Toledo Zoo, the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the William McKinley Memorial, the Palace of Gold in the hills of West Virginia, and the Jelly Belly factory in Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin. The group also had the pleasure of being able to eat a meal with a local Amish family in Shipshewana, Indiana and assist at a local Habitat for Humanity build site for an Amish family.

From eating a meal with the residents of Monessen to helping at the Salvation Army, God's presence, love, and grace have been with us wherever we have traveled. We have made many friendships, and our eyes have been opened to some of 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.

This year's trip was the sixth partnership that the youth of First American have had with Youthworks, Inc. Previous trips have been to McGraws, West Virginia, Custer, South Dakota, St. Louis, Missouri, Lynn, Massachusetts, and Coahoma, Mississippi. Including this year's trip, 57 different people have participated in the First American Youth mission program.

A planning meeting for next year's 2008 mission trip will be held on September 9th at 10:00 AM in the Youth Room at First American Lutheran Church, 511 Madison Street, Oconto. 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 2008 mission trip are limited. For additional information about next year's mission trip, please call Brad Weber (Youth Director) at 920-834-2479. For additional information about this ministry, or to request information, please contact the church office at 834-2460 or visit the church's website at www.firstamericanlutheran.org.

YOUTH ASSISTING AT AMISH HABITAT BUILD SITE



Lexi Woodworth, Allison Behnke, Tyler Nordquist, Mike Nerenhausen, Tom Olson

YOUTH AT AMISH HABITAT BUILD SITE



PREPARING FOR NEW SIDEWALK AT MISSION BUILD SITE



CHAD HEISE AND MIKE NERENHAUSEN

DRYWALL CREW TAKING A BREAK



BRAD WEBER, ADAM MARTENS, DANA SCHEFFEN, AMBER TREPANIER, AND MARSHALL BRADSHAW