

A Tale of Three Houses – Olivet, Alexandria's Mission Trip to Iowa

We had a marvelous opportunity to live our faith (loving our neighbors as ourselves) during our June 21-27 mission trip to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As we drove into town on Sunday evening, we recognized parts of the town from the photos we had seen of last summer's flood. One picture in particular stood out in my mind. It showed the town hall, an island in the middle of the river, with no visible connections to the land. On our way through town, we saw the bridges that had been connecting the town hall to the land all along, but were under water last summer. The next morning, we used those same bridges to go to the volunteer center. I was surprised to realize the top of the bridges were about 30 feet above the normal level of the river.

The members of the Olivet group were David Harper, Ed and Ann Schneider, Ann Caulkins, Desmond Campbell, Jim Scott, Tim Wilmoth, and Dan Wilmoth. We stayed in town at Christ Church. Special thanks go to the people of Christ Church. Their warmth and hospitality were exceptional, and they did everything they could to make us feel at home.

The recovery operation in Cedar Rapids is a huge endeavor. The week we were there, they had over 250 volunteers working. I happened to glance at the project scheduling board and noticed over 100 projects listed. During our week there, we worked on three different houses, each with its own story.

At the first house, we met Bob. Bob was working to put his 93-year-old mother's house back in order. Bob had been working on the house, pretty much by himself, for a year. The flood water had been about seven feet deep around the house and the first floor of the house had been ruined. When we first arrived, he expressed his concern that we might be a well intentioned but poorly skilled volunteer group. His fears were soon allayed as we brought some very good skills (especially in the likes of David Harper and Ed Schneider). During our two days with Bob, we removed and replaced several windows, framed out two closets and a bathroom, prepared the walls for dry walling and secured the subflooring. This turned out to accelerate the recovery of the house by several months. We found out this was especially appreciated by Bob as he told us the government grant his mother had been receiving for rent was running out, and he needed to get her back in the house by the end of August. With a little luck, Bob will be moving his mother in this August.

On the third day, we met Christine. Her house had not been damaged as much as Bob's; recovery was further along, but she too needed help. She needed railing going to the basement and some wainscoting installed. As it turned out, the space where the work needed to be done was very small, and therefore precluded using the whole team. Thanks to some very quick thinking team members, other jobs were identified, and Christine's garden and yard benefited that day. Christine was very grateful, and we left feeling very good about what we had done.

The final two days were spent at the house of a young couple, Kendra and Jeremy, and their 7-year-old girl. Their house was within a block of the river and had sustained about the same damage as Bob's mother's house. They, too, had been doing much of the work themselves and still had a lot to finish. We spent our two days removing the hardwood floor on the first level and replacing it with subflooring for the carpet to be installed later. We also did a lot of cleaning on the first floor, in the basement and on the front porch. We left feeling good about accelerating their recovery and making new friends.

As a team, we put in 271 volunteer hours over the five days we worked in Cedar Rapids. One constant during the week was the weather. It was very hot and humid, and dehydration was always a concern. As the team leader, I am so very proud of each member of the group. We worked hard and we worked as a team. I believe we are all much closer to each other due to this experience. We also made new friends at Christ Church and the three families we helped in Cedar Rapids. The work that we did and the manner in which we accomplished it continues to remind me of Micah 6:8 - "What does the Lord require of you: only to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God."

Recovery efforts in Iowa will continue for the next one to two years. Many of the neighborhoods we drove through had only about one in every 10 houses fully repaired. With this in mind, we will continue to provide assistance to any group in the Diocese who would like to go to Iowa this fall or next spring. As for Olivet, we're looking at going back next spring. Visit our web site at: <http://www.olivetepiscopalchurch.org/IowaRelief.htm> for more information.

Submitted by Dan Wilmoth, Olivet, Alexandria