

Rev Diane asked that we write a reflection of our experience to share with the congregation. I have felt at a loss for what to say. When people ask “How was your trip”, the short answer is “It was AMAZING!” Otherwise, I need a few hours of heartfelt conversation to truly express what the mission trip was about. I have not yet found a middle ground answer to the query. The trip has impacted me in that I will view my intact home and my intact family and my intact community with greater gratitude. I feel blessed to have experienced the communal energy of a diverse group of adults who gather with the purpose of wanting to help. It is always an amazing gift when people who would never find each other in the normal course of life become steadfast friends because we have shared an incredible experience that binds us forever.

When I returned from New Orleans, I was thrust into the festivities of Thanksgiving. I was blessed to have an old time friend at our home for the week and then family come for the holiday. This gave me a great opportunity to tell stories upon stories about my Mission Trip. Having now had the benefit of a bit of time for reflection, I realize that there is a story that I did not tell. And it has to do with my own faith journey. I have been a member of the Welcoming Women group for several years, and been on a faith journey with these wonderful women. My most difficult challenge has been finding the answer to the question ”How can God allow such suffering to happen in the world?”.

We stayed at the Good Shepherd Church, and participated in their worship service. We heard about the devastation that the church building sustained and witnessed the glorious renovation. What was striking for me was that the minister explained the flag on the alter “God is Good all the time; All the time God is Good”. This congregation had adopted this mantra soon after Katrina and The Flood. How can this be? How can these people who have suffered so much readily adopt such a statement? Where is the anger? Where is the outrage? I spoke with people who were at the church service; they told stories of horrific experiences, but found ways to feel blessed and gratitude. They were so grateful that we had come. That they were not forgotten. When my work group went to Lowe’s and Home Depot and the coffee shop the people were so friendly and helpful, and when they learned that we were from a church group, they said “Thank you for coming”. Where is the anger? Where is the outrage?

I have been a church-going person my entire life, but have never before experienced the pride of being with a church group, UCC, visible and doing God's work.

My work group took two "road trips" driving around New Orleans with the help of a map. We saw signs for UCC and Habitat and Baptist and Catholic Charities. It's true that the work being done in New Orleans is being done by the churches, and faith communities. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to go to New Orleans, and the people I met have helped me along in my own faith journey.

My prayer is that I will be a capable voice for people in New Orleans who continue to struggle. We have so much to be thankful for.

Heidi V