

## Eighth Grade Washington, D.C. Service Trip Report September 23-25, 2007

Thirty-two students, four teachers, and five parents attended this year's Washington service trip.

The group departed three hours behind schedule due to delays on the Amtrak "Southern Crescent" train line. Nevertheless, the train provided a relaxing, comfortable way to travel. One of the themes of this trip is to offer students the experience of travel on Amtrak, DC Metro System, and four rides on city buses. Surely this is important training for the world of the future: that students learn how to get out of their cars and on to public transportation.

The eighth grade's home in Washington is a result of the hospitality ministry of First Trinity Lutheran Church on Judiciary Square in Washington. For a cost of \$15 a night, the church provides mattresses, a locked safe facility, and use of a commercial kitchen.

Parent David Consolvo provided us with the service of driving a van-load of food in order to save our carrying it or having to shop via Metro in DC. David deserves many thanks for this service.

The trip began with a walk along newly refurbished Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, the route of inaugural parades from the White House to the Capitol. Lunch happened in Lafayette Park on the north side of the White House where Tom Spivey told many stories about the history of the park. Students also saw several peace demonstrators, one of whom has kept a vigil for peace since the 1980's.

A science component of the trip happened next with a visit to the National Zoo. While not every student agreed even with the concept of animals being caged and objectified in a zoo for human entertainment, there is an element of species preservation and scientific research that the zoo allows. Some animals are given space that resembles their natural habitat, while others are not. A large new facility for elephant habitat is under construction.

From 7 to 8 p.m., when the group returned to the church, they were greeted by Felix Unogwu, who is the director of Washington Quaker Work Camps. Felix brought several DC residents who acquainted the students with issues of poverty, hunger and homelessness. Also, plans were made for Monday's service work.

One of the most special elements of a Quaker Work Camp is that students are given "real" work that would not get done if they were not doing it. Just out of sight of our National Capitol Dome is America's largest homeless shelter—1,400 beds run by the Community for Creative Non-Violence. Its founder, Mitch Snyder was a peace activist in the Viet Nam era. His work for peace has resulted in this huge shelter. The entire staff of the shelter works for no payment. Many were once homeless themselves.

Twelve Tandem students painted the walls in a newly renovated wing of the shelter where women will sleep, sixteen and eighteen to a room. Twenty-five students cut, peeled, washed, and prepared food for a thousand lunches.

Afterwards, back at the church, students reflected on their experiences. They also considered that even though they felt good about what they had done, those running the shelter were going to be doing this work the next day, and every day into the future.

Some fun happened next when the students rode the Smithsonian's carousel. David Slezak told the story of his uncle

Walter Kohler, a wood carver and machinist, who carved an exact working replica of this carousel that is housed in the National Museum of Japan.

Then followed a long walk to the Viet Nam memorial where Carey Morton described the competition to design the memorial and what the shape and design have to say about that war. David Slezak described his experience of his childhood acquaintances whose names are inscribed on the memorial.

A DC bus took the group home for dinner and a relaxing evening at the church. Students fall asleep quite easily after such a busy day.

Tuesday began with a pancake breakfast. Then Christine Putnam led a science expedition to Friends Community School in College Park, Maryland. The group traveled by Metro and city bus transfer. Friends Community School has just opened a new “straw-bale” building. The head of school and the architect who designed the school explained all the energy efficient aspects of the building. They even took the students up on the roof to see the deep gravel and the sedum plants that will spread and cover a major portion of the roof. Water that drains off is held in catching ponds that allow the water to slowly drain back into the water table, rather than running off into rivers and the bay. The students learned about the many other energy efficient aspects of the construction.

. The school visit was not only about energy and the environment. Tandem students were treated to a series of games with the seventh and eighth grade classes. They met the teachers, and had small group sessions with the Friends Community students. Finally Tandem was treated to a deluxe sandwich lunch prepared by a parent from the College Park school.

Two city buses and a Metro ride took the group to their last event, a visit to the National Cathedral. This has been a traditional eighth grade Tandem visit since the class studies the middle ages, and the Gothic Cathedral is perhaps the highest accomplishment of that era. Highlights of the visit include the tombs of Helen Keller and Woodrow Wilson, a moon rock in a stained glass window, children's chapel, Romanesque chapel, and the famous flying buttresses.

The day finished with dinner in the food court of Union Station and a 6:30 p.m. train ride back to Charlottesville.

Thanks are due to the parents who helped make this trip possible: Michelle Goodrich, Scott Gardiner, Susan Davis, Susan Del Gobbo, and David Consolvo

There is no question that the children return home tired from this adventure. But the faculty feels that this education in history, science, service, and being an eighth grade community are values that enhance not only our school year, but also our whole lives.

David Slezak