

SPR 2017 MISSION TRIP JOURNAL

In August 2017, the St. Paul & the Redeemer youth group traveled to Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan, to learn about Christian/Muslim interfaith dialogue and allyship. Each night, the trip participants took turns writing reflections on the day's events.

Day 1: Rethink

Sunday, August 20, 2017

Brianna Lambrecht & Ben Pruitt

Here's a recap of our day's events from our youngest member, Ben Pruitt:

"We left SPR wearing mission trip T-shirts and listening to podcasts in the cars. We stopped for slushies and sandwiches at a Speedway gas station. When we had some extra time, we stopped at the Dollar Tree to get Dungeons & Dragons figurines to represent our characters for our campaign this week. We ate Lebanese food for dinner. They had fresh baked bread and hummus as appetizers, then we ate chicken shawarma and beef kababs for entrees. We finally made it to Littlefield Presbyterian Church and watched Hasan Minhaj's *Homecoming King* to discuss over devotions."

While stretching out in a circle on the forest green carpet in the Littlefield church lounge, the youth shared where they saw God today. Some said they saw God at dinner during our conversations over Lebanese food (at Alameer Restaurant), in their sustaining goldfish snack crackers given by prayer partners, or through the hospitality of the day. The youth and leaders reacted to the comedy sketch and shared what struck us, what we learned, and how the stories we heard about Islamophobia and racism can help us rethink how these ideas might

connect to ourselves, family, friends, neighbors, and communities.

We are extremely grateful for the hospitality shown by our server at the restaurant, and, most importantly, by Littlefield Presbyterian Church, who welcomed us into their space for the week with open arms. The space is decorated with cozy 60's-style furniture, complete with a TV for our media portion of devotions each night, piano, kitchen, and a table fit for Dungeons & Dragons!

Day 2: Reframe

Monday, August 21, 2017

Ari Karafiol

We started the day with a tour of Zaman International, a nonprofit that offers a variety of services, including a resale shop, ESL tutoring, Boost (a sewing program for women-led families), and a food pantry. After the tour, we were put to work assembling backpacks full of school supplies for middle-schoolers and sorting donated food items (with a carefully scheduled break for lunch and watching the solar eclipse with our neighbors at Zaman!). Though Detroit was not in the path of totality for the eclipse, we had a great time sharing eclipse glasses—and a welding helmet—with the adults nearby. We then went to a nearby community center to swim in the pool (with a

slide!) and shower, something we all appreciated by the end of the day.

After a visit to a local mosque, the Islamic Center Of America, the group went to another halal restaurant to partake in some much-needed dinner. Tonight's dinner was very similar to Sunday's, consisting of kebabs, shawarma, rice, hummus, and falafel, among other delicious dishes. Tonight's treats were the restaurant's homemade baklava and sweet Syrian tea (or as our leader Addie preferred to call it, "a warm hug in a glass"). At dinner, the group discussed the difficult question of disagreement, and how to pursue and be mindful of dialogue with people who hold very different views than our own.

Finally, we returned to our space at the church to watch YouTube videos by and for hijabis-Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab as a practice of their faith. The group discussed where we saw God throughout the day and the complexity of having empowering in-groups and safe spaces for people on the internet, before sitting around our table together to continue our game of Dungeons and Dragons! Here's to another good day in Dearborn!

Day 3: Reform
Tuesday, August 22, 2017
Liam de Jong

Today was a day of rest, like the 7th day in the seven days of creation. We did get to do some fun things, though. We got to sleep in until 10:30, which was quite nice, because on Monday we went to bed quite late and had to get up at 7:00. When we left around 11:00, we went to a Lebanese bakery called Shatila Bakery that sold many things, like ice cream, baklava, meat pies, pancakes filled with

cream, and croissants. Fun fact: Croissants were first made in the Middle East, which explains their crescent shape. They also had some French pastries, because in the original owner's travels, he stopped in France and learned how to make them. We got to meet the original owner's daughter and enjoyed a tour from one of the bakers, which we loved!

Then we drove from Dearborn to Detroit to enjoy a nice salad lunch and do a walking photo scavenger hunt with Operation City Quest that brought us to important landmarks and other random things in Detroit. We went to different places in Detroit, like the Lafayette Green Gardens, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, and a statue of God that was in front of the Spirits of Detroit wall. We also found a place that had a foosball table, so we spent a few minutes playing foosball. While we were in the middle of the hunt, it started to rain heavily, and we had to go inside for a little bit. When the score was tallied up, we found out that of everyone who did this scavenger hunt across the U.S. and Canada today, we got second place!

On our way home we picked up pizza from Halal Pizza, which had vegetables and meat. (We learned that halal meat is meat from an animal that was prayed for while it was killed. It is supposed to be cleaner and better for you when you eat it, and Muslims do this as an act of their faith. We are eating halal for most of our meals this week.) We ate the pizza while watching a 3-hour movie called *The Message*. (By then, the pizza did seem more cleansing.) The movie was about the Muslim prophet Muhammad, who received messages from an angel, saying that he would be the Messenger of God to God's followers. The movie showed what all his followers did when the religion of Islam

began and how people reacted to those early believers. It was very interesting to see what non-Muslims did to new Muslim believers. I would recommend the movie—as long as you are ready for a three-hour movie!

After we talked about where we saw God today and how we were reforming our faith, we finished it off by playing another continuation of our Dungeons and Dragons game. We are happy to have had another amazing day here in Dearborn and Detroit.

Day 4: React

Wednesday, August 23, 2017

James Pruitt

Today we got to sleep in until 9:00 and then proceeded to begin our day and get ready for the various events that we had planned today. What were they? Well, first we went to the Arab-American National Museum and got a tour from our wonderful guide, Dave. We learned about immigration to America from the Arab world, Arab-American life in the United States, and contemporary Saudi resistance art. After our informative tour, we ate delicious shawarma wraps for lunch at the museum, followed by a presentation on Islamophobia and the industry that profits from and encourages it, courtesy of our amazing museum educator, Petra.

Afterwards, we left for Freedom House, an organization that helps people who are trying to apply for asylum in the United States. We learned a lot about the asylum process in the United States and how long it can take. However, we were still able to have lots of fun with the people there—it was like a family reunion with strangers. Back at Littlefield Presbyterian Church, we watched *Five Broken Cameras*, a movie about a Palestinian man

who filmed his everyday life and over the course of five years had five cameras broken by the Israeli military.

What common theme connected all of these events? Reacting faith. We reacted today when we learned about stereotypes held in media at the Arab-American National Museum. We reacted when we analyzed the propaganda of the Islamophobia industry. We reacted when we met asylees and broke negative stereotypes against refugees and asylees. And we watched a Palestinian man react to his experiences under occupation. We look forward to the rest of the trip, and hope to continue reacting through our faith in the future.

Day 5: Reflect

Thursday, August 24, 2017

Julia Rademacher-Wedd

Today was a long one. We started out around 8:00 in the basement of Fort Street Presbyterian Church in Detroit. We were there to participate in the church's Open Door Ministry, which provides clothes, food, hygiene kits, transportation, and employment to thousands of people each year.

We helped serve a meal from 9:00 to 11:00. Everyone got a full tray of warm food, as well as lemonade, coffee, or water, and dessert. We served hundreds of wonderful people over two hours. I got to work the dessert window, which was arranged just like a café. Everyone got to pick which slice of cake they wanted, and I met a girl named Melody who came with her grandma to volunteer, making it quite a lively experience.

After breakfast ended, we were given a tour of Fort Street Presbyterian. Our guide, Peter, said that it

was the oldest continuous congregation in Detroit, founded in 1849. The sanctuary houses beautiful black walnut pews and a 400-pipe organ. We were also led downstairs to a chamber that used to harbor those fleeing from slavery as part of the Underground Railroad. We then got to eat lunch communally and talk with the other volunteers before heading to the pool.

We have been showering at a local community center, the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center, all week. Today we got to swim for longer than 5 minutes (yay). Everyone took the water slide and swam in the lazy river. After swimming, we all took showers and arrived (fashionably late) at the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant (birthplace of the Model T). The old factory-turned-museum is in really good shape, with original wood flooring and pillars. In the open space, tens of old cars sit, many gleaming. Most of the cars we saw were manufactured during the first two decades of the 1900s, and we learned a lot about Henry Ford and the early automobile industry from our docent, Don. After we toured with Don, we got to sit in a Model T, looking fly as can be.

So we got to meet and serve people in need and learn about cars ... very fitting activities for a mission trip in Motown.

Then we got to go back to our church/hotel and relax. The movie for our media study tonight (which is what we've been doing for devotions) doesn't start until 11:15p because it's at the drive-in theater! We ordered more halal pizza and reflected on our day. Much of the conversation was about serving those experiencing homelessness that morning. We discussed how giving people choices was important, such as we did in the café, and how

much we admired the dedicated volunteers who come every week. It seems that this was a good experience for everyone, and I'm hoping tomorrow's theme, *Repeat*, includes repeating this particular activity. For devotions, our task was to reflect on faith. Almost everyone said that they saw God in the people they met, which is a testament to living faith. Faith is a community, and therefore must include other people, as well as being an individual journey.

Some of us took naps in between DnD sessions, since we'll be out late at the drive-in. Everyone is anticipating watching the film *Detroit*, since we've enjoyed our time here. Yet another media perspective will be offered. You'll hear about that from Declan, who is taking over tomorrow for our last blog of the week.

Day 6: Repeat
Friday, August 25, 2017
Declan Bigger

Friday did not so much begin on the trip, it continued, with both 11:59p Thursday and 12:00a Friday being spent watching the movie *Detroit* at the Ford Wyoming Drive-In Theatre. The film depicted the events that took place at the Algiers Motel in the summer of 1967, when a report of gunshots led white police officers and National Guardsmen, and one black security guard, to raid the Motel's annex, which was occupied by several young black men and two young white women. During the raid, the film depicts the brutality the white police officers inflicted on the residents, including the killing of three of the young men, and later depicts the trial in which they were found not guilty on all charges. While the film took place in 1967, many of the issues it brought up

regarding police brutality and systemic racism remain relevant to this day, and the group discussed these issues after the film ended.

Later in the morning, after returning to the church to sleep, we packed our things into the cars to prepare for our final departure. However, that departure did not immediately head for Chicago, with stops at Masri Sweets in Dearborn for Palestinian pastries and at the Jerusalem Garden in Ann Arbor for lunch.

After lunch, we headed home, ending the trip and going out into the world to repeat what we learned on the trip about giving and receiving hospitality, choosing love over fear, and fighting Islamophobia and racism. We pledged to carry our new knowledge and experience into our own neighborhoods in Chicago and the country as a whole.

Thank you to our mission partners in Dearborn and Detroit!

- Littlefield Presbyterian Church
- Zaman International
- Islamic Center of America
- Arab-American National Museum
- Freedom House
- Fort Street Presbyterian Church