

The Congregational Church in South Glastonbury
Testimonial for Adult Mission Sunday
April 22, 2018

Adult mission is but one facet of a myriad of programs that South Church sponsors which reach out to our Christian brothers and sisters here at home, across the country, and even internationally. However, it is a very important one to me as it provides women and men of our church an opportunity to give back something from our blessed lives to people who are less fortunate than us, as they might not be able to afford homeownership in the conventional way and may need a hand up from an organization like Habitat for Humanity. Or they may have suffered the misfortune of having their homes damaged or destroyed as the result of a natural disaster. Whatever the reason, many people out there need our help, and it is our privilege to be able to serve.

However, more than just the realization that our responsibility as Christians is not only about faith, but also about works, the many stories of people's lives changed for the better that have resulted from adult mission trips provide a powerful testament to why we do what we do. Three of these stories are indelibly etched into my mind, and they are always worth re-telling.

From our first trip to Gulfport, MS in February 2007, just 18 months after Hurricane Katrina's ferocious blow, I recall the story of a man we helped who whose house had been literally under water, a phenomenon that occurred so rapidly that he, his wife, and daughter were forced to quickly retreat to higher ground—first to the second floor of their home, then a short time later onto the roof of the house, and finally to the safety of the branches in an adjacent tree, where they were forced to ride out the storm for many hours until help arrived. The family was traumatized by the experience, so much so that it caused a break-up of this man's marriage and the moving away of his wife and daughter. Our group was able to help mend this man's house, and a chaplain in training with our group at the time, spent time with him to help mend his spirit. This story had such a good feeling for all of us as we felt that we met this man where he was and provided him with what he needed at the time.

Fast forward to our seventh trip to coastal New Jersey in May 2013 to work with the local Habitat for Humanity chapter in Spring Lake following the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. Our group was called to work in the condominium of a woman named Meredith, a woman who found herself unable to face what had happened to her home by working with our group. However, her friend Phil did yeoman duty in taking her place, and we worked together to make things right. The first floor of Meredith's home had been under about 3 feet of water, which required dry wall to be gutted and replaced. Many of our group were working in the rooms on the second floor. At about 11:30 in the morning, the valve to the water service located in a storeroom on the first floor broke, immediately causing a new flood of water to rapidly spread into the living room area, threatening the newly replaced drywall. Within minutes, everyone in our group, including those folks who were working upstairs, was hard at work removing the water so that the drywall could be saved, while other members of the group were contacting

the local utility to shut the water off at the street. In less than half an hour, a crisis was averted! This incident demonstrated to me what was perhaps the best example of teamwork I had ever been a part of in an adult mission experience!

No adult mission trip would be complete without a humorous story or two. My final story provides a great example of that and occurred during our work with Habitat for Humanity of New Haven in May 2014, which included excavating an area in front of a newly constructed home for the purpose of pouring concrete footings for a small deck. A rather large rock was in the way and had to be removed. Our own Rev. Liz Miller made that task her own, and by the time she was finished, she had dug a hole so large that when she crouched down, her entire body was engulfed by that hole! We'll never forget the great pictures taken to document the fact that our Associate Minister was not about to be defeated by any rock—no matter what the size! In fact, there may have been some divine intervention in its removal, although I guess we'll never know for sure!

Another humorous aside which I feel compelled to mention is the fun had by all at each year's reunion picnic, including the now famous cherry pit spitting contest. If you haven't been part of adult mission yet, you'll just have to join us this year to learn more about this not to be missed annual event!

Whether it's meeting people in their brokenness and trying to help their healing as in Gulfport, MS or Spring Lake, NJ, or just helping people who are less fortunate by giving them a hand up and helping them realize the dream of home ownership, ***Adults on the Level***, as our group has become affectionately known, has had a hand in giving back out of the many blessings that God has given us something to make the lives of others a little better. In so doing, a great small Christian community has been built over the last decade as regular participants and new folks have joined together each year in furtherance of the common goal of helping others less fortunate than ourselves. A great side benefit has been the comradery that has developed and the new life-long friendships that have been formed. Folks who have participated have come to realize that with ***Adults on the Level***, we can accomplish great things together, and that with a group we can accomplish so much more than any one of us could accomplish individually. It's a great feeling to be a part of something bigger than oneself and in the process help South Church be the Global Mission Church it has become.