

Skagit Valley 2012

Mission Trip to Mount Vernon, WA

July 15-20, 2012



Reflections from our Mission Team

About Our Trip

Dear St. Thomas Family,

This past July, six youth and three adults from St. Thomas drove up north to spend a week in the Skagit Valley. Joined by a team from St. Margaret's in Factoria, we went to serve and further build our relationship with La Iglesia de la Resurrección in Mt. Vernon.

Resurrección is an Episcopal church that serves the Hispanic farming community that labors in the fields of the Skagit Valley. St. Thomas supports Resurrección throughout the year through Project Outreach grants, school supply collections in the fall, and a Christmas "giving tree" to provide presents for the children of the church. Our mission trip continued our tradition of support for our brothers and sisters, and expanded the ways that St. Thomas witnesses to God's love in the broader community.

During our trip, we woke up at 4:15am to work in the raspberry fields with the Paz family, one of the founding families of Resurrección. We weeded and tended the organic vegetable farm operated by, Salvador, one of the key members of Resurrección. In the afternoons, we hosted a Vacation Bible Camp for the children of the community at a subsidized apartment complex for farm workers.

Our trip was one of service and looking for the ways that God was already at work in the Skagit Valley – empowering the oppressed, providing for the needy, and comforting the afflicted. But it was also a trip of immense growth and learning. We found that we were served more than we served, that we received more than we gave, and that God was at work in us as much as God was at work through us.

It is with great joy that the 2012 Skagit Valley Mission Team present this book of our reflections. Thank you to all who supported us through prayer, encouragement, and financial contributions to make our journey possible.

The 2012 Skagit Valley Mission Team



Our groups with the Paz family in the raspberry fields

Isabel

I saw God at work in all the ways I was changed. But before we got there, I had no idea I would feel that way afterwards...



The car rumbles along the dusty road. Inside, a crew of girls and a fun-loving driver dance to music and munch on candy. They have left the city and enter miles and miles of farmland, with the odd farmhouse here and there. Cows and sheep are a delight to encounter.

I was in that car that day, one of many that were headed to the Skagit Valley. Daphne, the driver of

that car, had said she wanted to be “changed in ways she didn’t know she could be changed” in the Skagit Valley. I didn’t really agree with that, at the time. Why do I need to be changed? I thought to myself. Why can’t I just learn things and remember them? I thought of the mission trip as a learning, not a life-changing, experience.

I don’t know if that was a hollow wondering or a true question with more meaning than I realized. But what I do know is that I have been changed in more ways than I could have previously imagined. And I didn’t know that until weeks after the mission trip, when I really began to reflect on what had happened.

During our first dinner in the Skagit Valley, after a church service at La Iglesia de la Resurrección, we learned how long we’d be working. Six hours one day, four the next. I remember specifically the words I thought when I first heard that announcement: Six hours. Hm. How could I even imagine the thought of six hours of hard labor? It was unthinkable to me. I was numb at the time, until it sunk in later, when I was going to bed.

Six hours. That’s impossible! Six hours of plucking pink berries? Four hours of yanking pesky plants? No mistakes, either. You make a mistake, that’s one more worry on the family you’re assisting. It was difficult to fall asleep that night.



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I can tell you right now that six hours of hard work isn't as impossible as it seemed that first night, when I was still fresh from a nap at home, still naïve to all the hardships we'd experience and learn about. Now, though, I know what it feels like. Six hours feels more like four when you think back on it, but when you're in the midst of it, it feels like triple that. However, you press on, because you know how important the work is to do, without complaints and without hesitation. Weeding, I felt, was easier, because a) you're doing it for a longer time, and b) you're not surrounded by pros at this job, so there's pressure off your back.

But it wasn't just the work that surprised me. It was also the people. I expected them to be a bit...gritty, I guess, a bit gruff and a little cold and resentful at us, driving in after working less than half the amount they do each day. They were, a little bit, at first, but not exactly like I thought. Then they softened to us, and I saw how sweet, kind, and joyful they all were, in their hearts. The Vacation Bible Camp we hosted showed me that.

My point here is that, during this mission trip, my expectations were shattered. They were completely devoured by spiritual enlightenment, realization, and deep, ponderous thought. Skagit Valley was one of the hardest and yet best experiences of my life. I am proud to have been part of this mission trip.



Nathan

I saw God at work through farm workers.

When I heard that we would be waking up at 5:00 in the morning to work, I was extremely agitated. I understood that many farm workers did the same every morning, but working so hard in the raspberry fields so early in the day was really not the way I wanted to wake up. I knew I would have to pull it together in order to be able to keep up my spirits for that day. It turned out to be quite fine. It was the only day I had to wake up so early, because I was to leave for another trip after three days. However, the experience still stuck with me long after the mission trip.

When I got to the fields, I felt extremely self-conscious. I mean, I bet they were all thinking that we were just there to mock them or something. They wake up at five to work, and leave at nine in the evening. However, as we proceeded through the morning, I felt less and less self-conscious as I just wanted to help these people make a living. I was blown away to find that they earn \$4 for around twelve boxes of raspberries. Each one of those boxes is worth \$4 at their lowest. These workers were



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extremely desperate for this money. In fact, many children as young as four were in the fields. At noon, our team had to leave the raspberry fields for VBS, and I felt I should have stayed to help until they were all done with their work. The experience at the raspberry fields was most gratifying and I will never forget what happened that day.



Our hosts in the raspberry fields, Mr. and Mrs. Paz

Joslyn

I saw God at work through the families and communities we met.

This was my very first mission trip, and I did not really know what to expect. When we arrived at La Iglesia de la Resurrección on the first night, we found out how early we would be waking up to work in the raspberry fields and at Viva Farms. Our group was up for the challenge, considering we were only working until 11:00 AM, whereas most of the workers stay until approximately 9:00 PM.

For every pound of cannery-bound raspberries the workers pick they take in just forty cents, which does not even come close to making minimum wage. We met a fourteen year old girl who began working in the fields with her family when she was only six. When I was six I was probably still learning to tie my shoes, not helping to provide for my family. I was most surprised to see that the workers were all smiling and laughing amongst themselves. They have learned to make the best of their situation and they have chosen to be happy.

I enjoyed hosting Vacation Bible Camp for the children living in the community of Raspberry Ridge. When we first arrived, the kids were hesitant to join us. But by the end of the day, thirty kids were gathered at the park. I will never forget the second day of VBS. When we pulled up the kids were waiting for us and ran to our cars to greet us. They were all excited and were wearing the shirts they had decorated the day before. It's amazing how much had changed in just a few hours. The kids were there for the next two days to meet us at our cars and to hug us goodbye on the last day.

The people we met in the Skagit Valley are not much different from us. They have dreams, too. It makes me sad to think that they may not come true. One girl we met that week wants to go to Harvard. Another wants



to become a special education teacher. I met another young woman who wants to be a nurse, but can't because she is not a documented U.S. citizen. They are people like us, and like us, they deserve to have their dreams come true.



Since this mission trip I am more appreciative of the life I live. I learned so much and I'm glad I went. Life is not always fair and we definitely experienced that during our week in Skagit Valley.

John

I saw God at work in us, and in the people at the church, when we were putting on the Vacation Bible Camp, and entertaining and educating the children.



During the Skagit Valley mission trip, I saw a lot that changed me for the better. I saw people working as hard as they could, and earning less than minimum wage. I saw kids who worked with their parents in the fields so they would have enough to eat. This trip made me realize how fortunate we are to always have enough to eat, to have nice homes, and to be able to go places like Skagit Valley to help people who need it. I know now that, while some of us may think that the chores and stuff that we

have to do is rather unfair, it's really not that much compared to what some of the children living in the Skagit Valley have to do.

The fact that we can make this book and that we can put on this event shows us how fortunate we are. The more we help people in need, the better we make ourselves. There was also time for fun on our trip, which was mostly spent playing cards at a picnic table, and sitting at the top of a hill. This trip was most enjoyable, and I plan on going again.



John contemplates the origin of the raspberry.



Kaila

I saw God at work in the raspberries that help farm workers survive.



God, and the people I met on the mission trip, pushed me to get up in the morning very early and help others. While working on the first day, I tried to fill as many buckets of raspberries as possible. When I heard how much the workers get per flat, I wanted to work even harder. God also showed me to not procrastinate when helping others. The horns of passing trucks seemed to be saying “Keep going!” or “You can do it!” as encouragement for us to help the crops stay healthy and finish our row of weeding. Sometimes I was so annoyed with weeding, but powered through the rest of the time. This helped me truly realize how much a little can help others. When we attended a service at La Iglesia de la Resurrección, I couldn’t understand the service, but I knew inside we were all there for God. The Skagit Valley was an amazing experience, and I’m very thankful I got the opportunity to work with these people. During our mission trip, I got closer and closer to God. Now I feel like a better person.



Halle

I saw God at work in the strength God gave us as a community to work as hard as we could on this trip.



The 2012 mission trip was a life changing experience. I went on it last year and it was a blast and definitely changed me as a person. But going on it this year, a year older and wiser, made an even larger impact on how I live my life. I saw how much just coming and being with those bright eyed kids made an impact on their lives and their faith in God. They are so smart. It is so amazing how the little 6 year olds can speak two languages and 73% of Americans can only speak one (Gallup Poll). They have dreams to be doctors and lawyers! That's so amazing. When people think of undocumented workers they think they are "illegal." No

one is "illegal," they are just undocumented. Why does that matter? By the things that I saw, they are giving us fruits and veggies and working twice as hard as many "legal" citizen would. They are saving us from having to work 16 hour days and having a gun held to our heads if we wanted a break. If the people that we worked with were undocumented, so what? Why does it matter?

When I was in the Skagit Valley it really amazed me that situations like this were so close to us. The family that we helped pick berries for was the Paz family. We picked for about 6 hours and we were exhausted. I don't know how I could go for 16 hours every single day doing that and nothing else. The kids in the Paz family have been working in the fields for most of their lives! I can't even imagine. Then we went and pulled weeds for 5 hours the next day. I can't imagine doing that everyday either.



I gained a lot from this trip but the main thing was to be thankful for what we have. Some people have so little and are still thankful for what they have. I am thankful I went on this trip. What are you thankful for?



Daphne

I saw God in the kindness with which our youth treated each other and the respect they gave our hosts and leaders.

The idea behind a mission trip is to minister to and change a community, but most frequently we are the ones changed the most. In the weeks leading up to our departure I spent a lot of time worrying about not having the skills to love and care for our youth and our community, especially because my husband, Erik, and I don't have children. I shared this concern with our leadership team and through their thoughtful words and prayers I finally realized that God had given me all the tools I needed for a successful week with our amazing youth. They taught me a lot about leadership, patience, laughter, joy, hard work, and love. I



I was amazed by God's love, in seeing it expressed through our youth. They treated each other with kindness and the children who attended our Vacation Bible Camp with gentleness. Their capacity for leadership within our small groups and Vacation Bible Camp astounded me. I must say that in just one week with them I am confident in their ability to lead the future. Their cheerful servant attitudes impressed me; I very rarely had to ask them twice to complete a task. I learned I have a deeper capacity for patience than I realized. I learned about how welcome and unifying laughter is; it crosses cultures and ages. And if you can laugh at yourself it's even better. I learned how backbreaking the work is to get food to our tables. I don't look at clamshells of strawberries, raspberries, or blackberries the same. Every time I have the opportunity to talk about where our food comes from, I do. I think it took a month for me to feel back to normal after just three hours of weeding lettuce. I learned respect for the families who come to our country to make a better life for their children. I learned to be thankful for my privilege. When I asked Rosa, the young lady who was our "guide" in the raspberry fields what she did for fun during summer vacation she shrugged and said, "I don't really go out during the summer." This fourteen-year-old girl is responsible for contributing to her family's livelihood. When I was fourteen I complained about walking the dog and here she is providing for her family. That was so humbling. Finally, I learned I cannot wait for next year's trip and the challenges and triumphs it will bring!



Daphne and Rosa in the raspberry fields



Arne

I saw God at work in the faces of our youth as they experienced a new reality through a variety of special and unique experiences.



The work in the fields was challenging and difficult and yet, in a way rewarding. It took our young people (and us!) out of their “comfort zones”, placing them in intellectually uncomfortable situations and surroundings. With our support and guidance they were able to see, feel, and learn how our friends and neighbors from the Skagit Valley live, worship, and survive just a short 70 miles or so from the friendly surroundings of Bellevue. The experience stretched us all spiritually and brought us face to face with many difficult social issues that need

changing. Perhaps one of our youth (or us) can in some way have a positive impact on improving the lives and existence of our friends. At the very least our new friends and neighbors will remain in our thoughts and prayers going forward.



Arne playing catch at Vacation Bible Camp

Brian

I saw God at work as the body of Christ came alive through service, hospitality, and friendship.

At her best, the Church is a sign and a foretaste of the kingdom of God. We know that God is at work in the world, redeeming all things and drawing all people into God's loving embrace. But throughout the course of history, the word "mission" has been tarnished by well-meaning Christians. All too often, mission is understood as extending or growing the church in new places. Tragically, this has sometimes been accomplished through force or coercion, and at the expense of cultures and the dignity of others. Before our team left for the Skagit Valley, we had some very fruitful and thoughtful discussions about the purpose of our trip and what "mission" exactly is. We concluded that our mission is to find the places God is already at work in the Skagit Valley and to join with others as they lived into God's loving embrace. While we went with an attitude of service, looking for ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others, we found that God was at work in and through those we went to serve as they became the hands and feet of Jesus to us.

As our team labored hard and early in the morning in the raspberry fields or in the vegetable farm, it was easy to question what we were actually accomplishing. Certainly, the extra fruit picked for the Paz family would help support them with a few extra dollars - but would it have any lasting effect in the kingdom of God? I will not forget the phone call I received on Wednesday night of our trip. It was the Rev. Robin Ringland from Resurrección calling to give me a report from the Paz family. I wondered whether we had been working well enough to make their extra effort supervising us worth it. I wondered if we were picking the right quality of berries. I wondered if the other workers in the fields had viewed us as "outsiders" who were not recognizing their dignity and hard work. Robin told me that the Paz family was delighted with our group. The other workers in the field also noticed our work and service to the Paz family and asked them who we were after we had left. Mr. Paz's response was simply, "They are from my church." There is no better witness to the kingdom than the church loving, caring for, and respecting others.

Not only did our group witness to the loving and caring body of Christ through our service, we also received it from our hosts. Robin told me about all of the preparations Mr. Paz had made for our arrival by speaking with farm owners and field managers to get permission for our group to work. Rosa, the daughter of the Paz family, was an exceptional host and guide in the fields, making sure that we always knew what to do. During our small group time one evening, we asked the groups where they had seen God that day. Several of the youth answered that they had seen God in Rosa. Pressing them a bit further and asking how they had seen God, they described Rosa's hospitality, grace, joy, kindness, and loving guidance. That sounds like God to me.

The body of Christ came alive during our mission trip and it changed everyone involved. Our group worked and served tirelessly and selflessly, but we were served by our hosts as well. Sharing Eucharist and a delicious, warm meal cooked by Resurrección on our first night, we were brought together around the table. As we encountered Christ in one another, we discovered our shared humanity that crosses culture, borders, and immigration status. Encountering Christ through others and in the body of Christ working together changes you...and we have all been changed.



Baudelina and Esmarelda serving up soup at Resurrección

The Rev. Robin Ringland

Deacon of La Iglesia de la Resurrección

Two churches and their young people came together this summer in the middle of a raspberry field. The mission group from St. Thomas Medina headed north on I-5 and arrived to worship at a small church in the Skagit Valley, La Iglesia de la Resurrección. It was a hot summer Sunday night and the church treated them to a good old-fashioned Mexican meal of posole soup. Many in the congregation were not present that night because they were in the midst of working long days in “los campos,” the farm fields of Skagit Valley. Only a handful of the youth of Resurrección were present because they were with their own families working until dark in the raspberry fields. Weeks before, it had been strawberry fields, and later it would be blueberry and blackberry fields.



Prior to their arrival, the youth group of Resurrección met to discuss how they could best host these young people from St. Thomas. Why were they coming? What did they want to do? What did they want to learn? I told them that they had been studying issues of justice and immigration, that they wanted to learn more about the lives of migrant farm workers. It was simple, the youth of Resurrección said, “We’ll show them what we do. Do you think they can handle it?” Well, we found out.

And so began the adventure of the youth of St. Thomas and the Paz family, a founding family of Resurrección, that offered to be their host in the raspberry fields. What they offered was to take the young people from the Eastside into the fields of the Skagit Valley, allowing them to work alongside the children in their own family – Rosa, Otavio, Jacob. Señor Paz got permission from the field manager to bring 10 youth each day, half of the group, to work with his family in the fields. Each one was given a bucket to fill with raspberries. Buckets were a prized commodity, but Mr. Paz made sure they all had their own. Rosa, their 9th grade daughter, was the ambassador to the fields. She explained how to pick and how to fill the boxes.

On a normal day the Paz family left at 5:00 – 5:30 am and the young people from St. Thomas were at their home ready to follow them into the fields. Could they handle it? The other families in the fields asked just how the Paz family was so lucky to get this extra help. Where did they come from? Señor Paz simply said, “They are from my church. They want to understand how we live.”

I am reminded of a simple song that our young children sing at church, “Jesús es mi amigo.” One of the lines in the song is “Me transformó” which means “Jesus transformed me.” That is what I saw with the young people of St. Thomas. They came on that hot Sunday night not knowing what they were going to be doing in the raspberry fields. In fact, the leaders hadn’t even told them how early they would have to get up. I shared with them the privilege it was for them to be invited by the Paz family to work alongside them, to learn what the life of a migrant family truly is. Not very many people get to see and experience what they did. And they worked hard.

At the closing campfire I saw transformation. Like the song says, “Jesus had transformed them.” They were changed because they, as the body of Christ, had touched the lives of others, who are also the body of Christ. Could they handle it? Yes, they did and they did a fine job!



