



In God We Trust

By Candi Rice

About ten years ago, 26 teens and adults from SMMP went on a mission trip to Monnesson, PA. We had been on a few mission trips before, but never one like this. Little did I, the youth minister, know that we were to be at a site that had only been open for two weeks. A group called YouthWorks was running the site and the person in charge was a 22 year old young lady that had little or no experience running a mission site.

We arrived at the site late afternoon and as we drove through the neighborhoods, we noticed that there was no one on the streets or sidewalks. We felt this was very strange and we were a little uncomfortable. This was a pretty rundown town and it was clear to us that there was a lot of work that needed to be done. What we did not know was that there was a shooting an hour before we arrived immediately across the street from where we were staying, and that a young man-16 years old-had been gunned down.

This town was ripe for guns and drugs and the 13 year olds seemed to be the drug dealers. As the week progressed things got worse. There were 5 year olds roaming the streets at night on their own! And the language they used was shocking all of us. The kids from the neighborhood were also very physical, actually hitting my teens. Our own teens were at a loss at what to do because there seemed to be no boundaries that these neighborhood kids wouldn't cross.

I really wasn't sure we should stay there, mostly because I feared for the safety of my teens and adults. Adding to the craziness was the fact that our site host had very little common sense when it came to just about anything which was reeking havoc with all the adults. I felt that as soon as I plugged a 'leak' another one would spring up! There were many calls back to the parish as well as many meetings on site. This was a tough one for "trusting in God." But we did a lot of discussing and praying and we stuck it out.

Somewhere along the line, our group picked up a neighborhood teen, 13 years old, that just attached himself to us. His name was Addante. In the beginning, Addante was quite cocky. This was just what we didn't need. But as the week went on, we began to get used to him and Addante realized he didn't need to try to be someone he wasn't just to impress us. And he began to join in by working along side of us. By the time the week was

up, we were all crying because we were going to miss Addante so very much. A bond had truly formed.

Fast forward to last year. I am sitting in my office and one of the people who was on this trip, now a young college graduate, Mike Feltes, stops in to tell me a story. He had decided to do mission work and had joined YouthWorks. He was sent to Atlanta for some training. During the day, they broke into small groups and were sharing their experiences of mission work. Mike begins to tell his story of Monnesson and of Addante. A regional manager of YouthWorks overhears his story and comes over to Mike. He begins to tell him that he knows Addante! (I mean how many Addantes could there be in Monnesson, PA?)



It turns out that Addante is now a part of YouthWorks, doing the kind of work we were doing. He kept coming to join other groups that first summer week after week, summer after summer until he was 19 years old. Then he began to train to do mission work. When Addante first told his story of why he came to YouthWorks, he said that it was because of the first group (that's us) that included him, that that influence gave him a real reason to do mission work. And because if he didn't join YouthWorks, he was positive that he would end up like his older brother, dead before he was 17. You see, that was Addante's brother that was gunned down just before we arrived.

It took a lot of trust in God to stay that week. I placed all my trust in God that my teens and adults would be safe and He did not let us down. You see we were actually a small part in a much bigger plan that God had. But then, aren't we always? Trusting in God, it's a good thing! And it can be an amazing thing too. It can change lives.

This is another in a series of reflections on our parish theme written by our parish pastoral ministers. All published staff reflections can also be found on our website, www.smmp.com