

## Mission Trips

St. John's takes to heart the concept of pilgrimage when it comes to mission. A mission trip at its best allows the pilgrim or missionary to experience a deeper spiritual understanding and to grow in their relationship with God, each other, and the rest of God's creation as they come into closer contact with Jesus' life and ministry. In similar ways, when a mission trip is understood as a pilgrimage, it becomes a mutual journey of growth and discernment and helps to foster an experience that authentically reflects our values as followers of Jesus, of humility and self-giving, openhandedness and equality, the building of peace and mutual understanding.

Through working, eating, and worshipping together, sharing stories and experiences, both those who are sent and those who receive have opportunities to be challenged in the best sense and to see themselves, others, and God in exciting and expansive ways.

Here at St. John's we believe that mission trips can foster openness to grow into a living understanding of God's abundant, reconciling love for all that God has made, ready to learn from each other and listen to what God is saying to us through people and place, both those people and places which are familiar and those which are not.

St. John's members including our young people participate in mission trips in various locations throughout the world including; work with Habitat for Humanity in West Virginia, Kenya Connect in Wamunyu, Kenya, El Hogar in Honduras as well as work in Haiti and Jamaica and various medical missions. We work, play and live life together knowing that the time we spend away will change us through the love we share.

These shared journeys with those with whom we work and serve provide space for God to transform us. This might mean allowing us to see issues such as individual or cultural arrogance or shame, wealth or impoverishment, feelings of knowledge or ignorance in a new light, sometimes revealing unconscious attitudes. A sense of pilgrimage, though, can prepare our hearts and minds and communities to engage in closer mutual relationship, while we actively look for God in our midst. As well, when faced with humility and looking actively for God's

grace, even negative experiences can bear good fruit leading to transformation and reconciliation.

Pilgrimage envisions our growing relationship with God, each other, and even the whole created order as a path to be discovered by the walking – by walking together. Mission trips, seen in this way, are a valuable part of our journey with God as we are invited to experience and show forth generosity and hospitality, interdependence and inclusiveness. We actively open ourselves to better understand who we are and our own needs, the needs of others, and our relationship to the world around us.

If you are interested in participating in a parish mission trip please contact the Rev. Ann Ritonia for more information at [aritonia@stjohnsec.org](mailto:aritonia@stjohnsec.org).