

POST-MISSION REFLECTIONS: SASKATCHEWAN

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INTRODUCTION



This summer, we were blessed with the opportunity to go on mission to Saskatchewan. It was a tough yet enriching experience where we were able to learn more about the history of residential schools and the ramifications that persist today. Working directly alongside individuals who are part of this history gave us some insight into the lives of those who are still, to this day

affected by discrimination and marginalization. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity that God has blessed us with, so that we may continue to bless others. Here is a compiled e-book of some of our reflections that we would like to share from our time in Saskatoon. Enjoy!

-Elisabeth, Monica, Doyeon, Torrance, Paul and Joel

EMOTIONAL AND PROCESSING REFLECTION

After a full two weeks of sensory, emotional and mental stimulation, what are some feelings and emotions you are sensing within you in relation to the mission trip? Why do you think you have such feelings and emotions?

Among the many feelings and emotions we are sensing within ourselves, one that stood out was the feeling of gratefulness. Feeling grateful, not for our lives, but really grateful that we had the opportunity to do this, and meet all those campers and counsellors. Just meeting people from a different province gives you a whole new perspective on life and made us realize that this world is so vast. We didn't leave Canada, yet it felt like we were meeting people that lived such different lives. We are grateful that God has allowed us to meet and interact and share our stories with one another.

We're also filled with a feeling of sadness that we probably won't see many of these kids or counsellors ever again. Truly they were all such good people at heart and we regret having reservations or judgements when we first met. The recurring feeling of guilt is present as we felt like we could've gone into everything with a more positive mindset and purer heart and intention. Our only hope is that through feeling such guilt towards all the things that we have done, it will stick with us more that way we may learn from these all and grow together as a community and people of this church.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

“He said to them,
“The harvest is
plentiful, but the
laborers are few;
therefore ask the
Lord of the harvest
to send out
laborers into his
harvest.”

Luke 10:2

How do you think the Lord “send[ing] our laborers into his harvest” relates to the mission trip you just experienced?

The Lord “send[ing] our laborers into his harvest” relates to the mission trip I just experienced because the mission trip was basically me being sent to go serve another community outside of mine. In a sense I guess you could say it was all part of the calling from God and our journey of seeking signs. Being called towards something in your life through God, is basically what happened for this whole mission trip. Being apart of this internship was one calling, and then the mission trip being apart of the internship and us actually going to serve is another calling we all received. The Lord is sending his people out into missions to go and serve and spread the love and word of God, that’s what this whole Saskatchewan mission was all about.

Missionaries don’t send themselves, missionaries don’t get sent by people, missionaries get

sent by God. God sent the 6 of us to do work and serve in Saskatchewan in various areas. Every single day it felt like we were doing work to help others or to be a positive presence for others. The first week was VBS, every single day we did VBS where we helped out Martha and hung out with the kids. We also did the inner-city mission where we helped serve food to the locals in the area. The second week we provided helping hands at Camp Christopher by being counsellors. All three of those things required all of us to be there, present and engaged. I think we were able to touch the lives of a handful of campers and VBS kids, it may not have felt like it in the moment, but looking back it’s easier for me to see that we actually did do a lot of good for a lot of the kids. If they were the harvest, we were sent to them to harvest joy and love out of them and provide it for them at the same time.

“Go on your way.
See, I am sending
you out like lambs
into the midst of
wolves.”

Luke 10:3

What resonances do you find from this verse with your mission experience?

We are so sheltered, like lambs, we are always under the watch of someone who can protect us. We are given everything and are kept safe. Like many of us who went on the mission trip, we have been blessed with a life where we don't need to worry about things other than material, and social needs. We don't need to worry about where we are going to live, our parents, or what tomorrow might bring. We worry about our own future in the sense of friends, and job security. It's hard for us to put our shoes in the place of people who worry about what to eat, or what dangers come in the future.

The scripture resonates with our mission trip, as we are the lambs, however I don't see wolves as just the people we were going to be meeting on the mission trip, rather I saw it as the mission trip as a whole. We were travelling alone, we needed to do everything for ourselves, we for the first time thought what we needed to eat, what troubles may come from working for the people who were in need, the dangers- it was all very scary and

new to many of us. The sheltered life we have been provided doesn't really prepare us for these kinds of things, the wolf is something a lamb is not experienced with, and when you put face to face with it, you're unsure what to do. You can teach and teach what to do in new situations that we will come to experience, however there is no better teacher than experiencing it live and in person.

I think this verse really reminded me of our time at Camp Christopher. When we first arrived, we really had no idea what was going on. It felt like we were thrown out into the wilderness with no help. The other counsellors at the time were upset at us at the time and talking negatively about us behind our backs, and it seemed like a hopeless situation because we didn't know what to do and we couldn't ask them for help because it felt like they hated us. It honestly felt like we were under attack and there was a night where I'm pretty sure all of us felt like giving up.

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ”

Luke 10:5

What were some moments where your peace was shared? How did that feel, and how would you describe this “peace”?

I think the biggest moments where my peace was shared was during the first week of my mission trip. When helping out with the VBS at St. Andrews church it was amazing how receptive and loving the kids were. It felt like every day when we would “peace to this house” they would happily share in it and our peace truly rested on them in the way that I would find peace in them and the interactions between us.

It definitely felt like a more rewarding and enjoyable experience as this “peace” felt more like appreciation, acceptance and in a way affirmed that the work I was doing truly made a difference. This just generally made working with the kids and alongside my other peers not feel like work. I looked forward to each day I would get to spend with these kids and treasured the

moments we would spend together. I didn’t feel like something we were forced into doing, but something that we wanted to do voluntarily with the sole purpose for the kids. I wasn’t drained, unmotivated, I found peace in those kids and in the people around me.

Peace can be anything in my opinion. It could be a simple blessing, grace, or greeting. During our first campfire with all the campers and counsellors of Camp Christopher, we had a prayer circle. I said a prayer, saying thanks to God and wishing for everyone to be safe and have a great time. I had a stronger emotion than what I usually have when I pray. I think this kind of peace can be described as a simple prayer of blessing, just as saying “Peace to this house!”.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

How can you open yourself to experience more of God's grace?

I did not exactly have the smoothest experience with my faith and my life up until now and having more struggle building on top of that in such a short period of time, I see myself keep trying to push everything down, such as trust and emotions. I think I need to really open up to God first to experience more of his grace, and I think the only thing I need is more time and less walls.

I think we are called to listen and empathize. Of course, many of us have not lived through their pain and hardships yet we can still empathize. By listening and empathizing we demonstrate our natural curiosity, interest

and care for them and their lives. If they can sense that there are people from around the world who care enough to listen and pay attention, that right there is good reassurance for them. Our goal as Christians is not to listen to what they have to say and then go "yea I feel you, but I think I would have done it differently by...". Our goal is not to go over and offer our ways of thinking. Sure, advice is welcomed but it isn't a priority I feel. I think the biggest thing is just conveying our care and interest in them. It tells them that they're not alone, and that there are people from around the world who actually care about what they're going through.

A person is water skiing on a lake during sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, and the water is dark blue with white spray from the skier. The skier is wearing a blue shirt and dark shorts. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees under a clear sky.

How has in-person interactions given new meaning or insight to what you studied prior to the mission trip?

In person interactions have given so much more meaning than research could ever offer. A lot of the research we did was focused on the history of residential schools and the involvement of the church's it was a look to the past and there was not much information we could find about present day first nations peoples. I still am grateful that I studied the history of it all because it helped me understand the current context of today and how all the ramifications from the past are still present. I then talked to a handful of individuals who are first nations and it helped me realize that all the research I did was very legit and a lot of the pain from the past still exists today.

The in-person interactions has taught me that no factual learning and understanding of culture can prepare you for the new hurt many of these newer generations feel. You read the basic hurt story of a few and you assume that it's textbook reconciliation, follow the rules and steps to creating a relationship. Newer generations of hurt are so much more complex than that, certain aspects repel these children- there are a diverse number of things that are happening to them, you can't treat every child like they are the same problem that needs to be solved. Reconciliation and love is so much more ambiguous than that, you must find what works for each and every individual and hopeful you may reach out to them.

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I failed to realize just how much impact these school had on future generations. One specific example is how demanding a handful of the kids were to us. On numerous occasions I would have girls calling me and ordering me to come to them and take them places and at first I did find it quite strange, however when I look back I start to connect a few dots. Of course this is mainly just speculation but this is essentially what I recently thought:

At the residential schools, a lot of the kids were probably ordered around and told what to do and where to go in a very strict manner and once they left these schools they probably took that sort of relationship with them. As a result they could've treated their children in the same manner and these kids could've adopted this sort of interaction as their norm and not see any problem with it. What we find a bit rude, they might find completely normal. In general, I think I noticed just how far these schools have affected and how much it has as well, as I haven't even began to touch upon the drug abuse and physical abuse that the kids attending these camps endure on a day-to-day basis.

From your direct experience, what are some challenges with healing and reconciliation?

I think some challenges with healing and reconciliation is that there's still not sufficient help or support that is being given to the First Nations community. Though the churches have admitted to their wrongdoings and churches like the pcc and united church worked together to co-run the camp we got to stay at, I feel like there still isn't even that is being given to help these families and individuals. Hearing so many stories about how half of these children come from families where their parents are either physically abusive or are drug addicts, I'm pretty that started from the trauma their parents received when they were children and so on. Meaning, there isn't enough early action being done to help these families or even children who are apart of such families.

Schools teach compassion, but they never teach you to understand hurt. Ultimately,

sometimes I feel like it's not something that's taught, but learned from experience, and like many of us who have been on the mission trip, we see that compassion is harder to understand as we can't find the same experiences of hurt that these people feel, it feels so foreign. I want to say I understand, but I know I don't, sometimes I want to tell them I never will understand exactly how they feel, but I understand that they are stronger than I ever will be, but I really want to just make a relationship with them. I want them to truly understand that I come from a place of understanding and true compassion. I don't want to just make them feel satisfied, I want them to feel what I feel, honestly I don't even know if I'll ever learn how to do this, but it's something that always itches the back of my brain, how can I really show them my true feelings of empathy for them?

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I feel like there are so many hardships and obstacles when it comes to healing and reconciliation for something of this extent. For starters, I feel like since it has been going on for so long and we are all still in the process of reconciling, it's a bit harder for those we are trying to mend the broken ties with to maybe see the intentions or thought process behind reaching out. I don't know if they all really realize why it is that we are doing what we are doing and I don't even know if the thought of why even occurred to them. Not only is simply not being aware a challenge, but also since it was such a long time ago, I feel like it's a bit difficult to sort of bring up the topic of the residential school in an organic and natural way. Also in terms of healing, I feel like it came very easily come across as pretentious if some outsider city kids just waltz in and ask what's your problems and then try to fix you. I'm sure that there could be some who recognize that our intentions are pure, but a lot of them might even be reluctant to accept our help for their own various, personal reasons. In addition to all of these, I feel like just in general change is hard. Especially because their lives have been established for such a long duration, it just increases the difficulty to break out of that cycle and heal.

How do you think we as Christians are called to respond in these in-person encounters?

One of the biggest takeaways I got from all the interviews with the people working in the PCC office was to listen. I think when we are truly interested and receptive to the things that they say, they can sense that and sometimes venting or letting things kept inside of ourselves out can be very healing. So through being that person who is fully engaged and open to listening, maybe that is how we can respond to those in difficult situations. To be there when they are ready to share, all on their own time.

Reciprocate the love we have been given to these children, sometimes kids love to talk about themselves, sometimes the hurt is something they put a barrier over, whatever the kids are talking about, just listen to it with your whole heart. Kids are

young, sometimes they don't pick up things, but one thing kids will always feel is your engagement and honest excitement to listen to them. The elders are harder to reach out to, they've lived out their whole lives, some have felt more love than others, some believe that it's everyone for themselves, no matter what kind of person you deal with, no matter the hostility, offer your peace on to them, they may take what you give, but throw the peace back in your face, that's fine. I believe that helping those who need it no matter how rude or kind they are all deserve the same respect.