

## West Virginia Mission Trip: A Personal Reflection on a Transformational Moment

In late June my wife and I were part of a 19 member intergenerational group from Providence that participated in a mission trip in Webster Springs, WV.



Our group divided into two teams and my team worked on refurbishing an 80-year old house. It had once featured proud hardwood floors, but in the kitchen the floor had been overlaid with plywood and linoleum that had worn through many years ago; in fact there were gaping holes in the floor. The bathroom, once paneled in beautiful Maplewood, also suffered from severe water damage and the plumbing did not work. The house had been unoccupied for several years and it looked it.

Wikipedia defines “transformation,” as: “To change greatly the appearance of form of.” Our job then was to “transform” this remnant of what had been someone’s home into something that could be lived in again.

The life story of the woman who owned the house seemed to parallel the story of the house itself. She had divorced one husband and lost a boyfriend to illness. She herself had fallen into the hell-world of drug addiction. Like her house she probably once had life’s version of beautiful hardwood floors and a shiny-faced family, but her life had fallen into disrepair. The local site supervisor told us that the only way she could qualify for the assistance we were providing was by turning her life around. The person we saw was drug-free and had a job! Transformed!

We also learned that as a youth she had participated in a mission trip to help fix up peoples’ homes. Was that where God first planted his mustard seed of faith, hope, and love in her life? One wonders how and why that seed had fallen among the thorns of poor life choices for so many years and how it came to be, well, resurrected. On our last day on the job for lunch, she brought chilidogs for us. It was her special way of thanking us for all the work we had done on her house. We had learned that chilidogs were a local delicacy! Were chilidogs the sacrament *de jour* that day? Transforming!

Then I think of my work partners at the house, particularly the youth. Some were hesitant and fearful, but willing; others bold and brash. As we all pitched in, the

hesitant became emboldened, operating noisy (and downright scary!) power equipment and achieving more than they ever thought they could. Transforming!

The bold pushed the limits of their abilities and blew us all away with their energy and courage! I sure won't go under the house with all those big spiders! Transformation!

By the last day, we had installed a new floor in the kitchen and bathroom, new handrails outside the house, a new door next to the kitchen, and new plumbing throughout the house. Transformation!



But there is another meaning of the word “transformation” that had also taken place in others and in me: “To change in nature, disposition, heart, character, etc.; to [convert](#).” Ah yes, a change of the *heart*!

So on that last morning, I could not help but sing to myself some of the words of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* (OK stick with me here!)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,  
He is trampling out the vineyards where the grapes of wrath are stored...  
In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me!

What I saw that week was the glory of the coming of the Lord in every lovingly offered child, every caring act, every compassionate word. Christ had transfigured us all!

At week's end, I was tired, *really* tired of the food, in need of a shower and a shave, and, and... and Blessed!! Amen!

David Kepley