

SCSC 2010

by Chris Zema

The church supported me in several ways this past summer as I partook in a mission trip to the cheese (or dairy, not exactly sure) capital of the world, Wisconsin. Here I wish to write to you about the amazing things God did this summer to me and through me. I also want to show how being a steward of God's resources and making the sacrifice to pray can hugely impact God's kingdom and a fellow brother in Christ. So thank you for being stewards and for praying for me.

The first week of the mission trip entailed a week of training. Highlights of this week included giving my testimony in front of thirty or so people, which included many pastors who I respected. This raised much fear, but God removed that and helped me in becoming a stronger speaker about the amazing things Christ has done in my life. Another highlight included the mentoring and Bible studying that Pastor Andrew Camenga shared with me throughout the week. His passion for God's Word ignited a flame within me that has made me so in awe and in love with Jesus Christ. Overall the week was an amazing and intense time of growing into more of the soldier Christ wished me to be.

My team then drove the three hour trip to New Auburn, which was Pastor Matt's home town which he grew up in; what an extremely small world we live in. I would spend three and a half weeks there and every moment was time I'll never regret spending.

My role on the Sabbath in New Auburn was teaching the children's Sabbath School. I also gave one children's message, presented my testimony to the church, and gave a fifteen minute sermon.

Another part of the ministry was to go on visitations with the pastor. I went with him to several hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants, and people's homes to talk with various people in need. Many visits included encouraging several widowed women in the church. We also counseled a man who recently was released from prison after raping his daughter. He was seeking God and Christ forgives all. We also met with many people dealing with either drug issues, mental diseases, vehicle injuries, death in the family, divorce and other hardships and challenges. I found this to be a ministry that I felt passionate about and really "enjoyed".

My partner and I also led two different youth groups - the junior and senior high youth group. This entailed games and a lesson. This was an extremely productive time spent where several "God-things" occurred in my own life and the lives of others. One week I and another young adult talked with two young men about the Gospel for two hours. These two boys had been to church before and youth group but never knew Jesus rose again and didn't know other seemingly obvious Christian facts that you'd expect. I've learned that this is probably true for many of the youth we meet in church. This led me to give a quick gospel/salvation presentation in front of the entire group the following week. (Another opportunity for God to help me with my public speaking skills). We then had the group split into small groups where

we had the kids ask questions about Christianity and what it means to be a Christian. The conversations we had were absolutely terrific. Many were actually able to hear what the Bible really has to say about Jesus and many took to heart what they heard. After two hours of youth group each week the kids would stay and hang out with us. These were more great time of conversation - of just getting to know the kids and of taking an interest in their lives and trying to show them why and how God needs to be involved in their life. Youth group was filled with laughing, crying, and the constant revelation about what Christ did on the cross for everyone of us.

The other youth group was with children ages 3-12. This was called "Fun in the Park" and most of the kids who came were un-churched who we simply invited off the street or in the park. We'd play games with them in the park and have a snack and Bible lesson. Most of these kids simply walked from their homes to the park and many of them have horrific home lives. Many had been sexually or physically abused, several don't know their real dad or their parents ditched them a long time ago. Most have moved to different schools every couple months because of the multiple remarriages and divorces they constantly experience. One group of sibling's dad was in jail for trying to kill their mother. Many of the parents are potheads and alcoholics bringing home different partners every week. This is what kids this young are fact with and more! Can you imagine?

The same is true for the junior/senior youth group and I began to see the results of what a horrific home life can do to kids as they get older. The older kids were rebelling through suicidal attempts such as cutting, and many are heavily drinking, smoking and sexually active. It was scary seeing the future of what would happen likely to the "Fun in the Park" kids. I spent a majority of my independent time simply hanging out with the youth since I was so appalled and saddened by their situations. I loved this experience the most because I constantly hit the kids over the head with the fact that Jesus intercedes for us on the cross so that we can have a relationship with a Dad who will never leave them or abuse them and that the church can be like a mother to them nurturing them and helping them grow through support and love. I also preached on this through Galatians 4:4-7.

Another ministry was basketball evangelism. We would go to the indoor and outdoor courts and get pick-up basketball games going with anyone we met. Basketball was very popular there so we were able to play and converse with dozens of people, most of whom were college kids and high schoolers. I absolutely loved this time and constantly thanked God for giving me another chance to use the talent He gave me to help others and praise Him. I believe much like the youth group productivity, this ministry was also very productive. I was able to share the gospel and to invite several to weekly church events, which many responded to and came out. Also God allowed me to simply plant seeds of showing people that Christians aren't all like the ones you see on TV. Showing those I met that here a young Christian guy who loves people enough to come sacrifice his summer from New York to New Auburn in helping the church and community. People were hit by this and it got them thinking, and the great news is that the church has a good percentage of young adults who will continue to be a light of Christ in that environment.

I also helped out with young adult Bible studies and spent a lot of time encouraging and evangelizing at the weekly campfires and cookouts where those from the church and youth groups were invited. I also helped with free food stands to the community as an act of kindness to the lost.

The entire experience at New Auburn was amazing. There were several times through those three weeks that I knew people must have been praying hard for me. God was working random and awesome miracles throughout that were so spontaneous that I knew prayers were made. I was able to get home at three in the morning several nights after 17 hour days and not be tired, but simply feel overwhelming joy over the God that I have a personal relationship with. I know much of that stamina, peace and joy was through the help of your prayers.

I then traveled to Missouri for a week of more training and another week of working with the denominational conference. Despite being involved with mostly saints, God presented opportunities for me to share the Good News with an Ethiopian cashier and with two homeless men who I met. These two weeks were much more slow paced compared to New Auburn but the time spent was similar to the first week of training is that I was able to learn much more about what the cross means in my life, more of the increasing knowledge of our God's character, to being convicted and sanctified in areas that are still very sinful in my life, and to becoming wiser and stronger in serving His kingdom. I also spoke in front of around 100 women at a banquet about my experience in New Auburn, which I loved. By the end of the summer I had started loving to public speak!

There is so much more that happened, but I don't know how to write concisely. But I'll end on a verse I want to share that really was the verse of the summer for me, which was John 17:3 - "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Our eternal life, which is now since we became believers and will continue also after our earthly death, is knowing and having a relationship with God. He is the essence and fullness of everything beautiful and lovely and that is what we should be aspiring to each and every day because that is what will bring us unimaginable peace, joy, and self-control. That's what we were created for, to enjoy the beauty of know Him.

Isaiah 26:8 "...your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul."

Psalms 73:25-26, "Who have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Thank you again, church family, for all you continually do for me. I'm so thankful and can't wait to bring what I learned to college this fall. I'm praying all that I learned will radically change people's lives at New Palz and wherever I go.

Thank you, God, for everything. You did this summer, it was all because of You and Your Power. I just got the undeserved opportunity to go along for the ride.

