



United Campus Ministry Mission Trip to Vietnam

December 21, 2013 – January 6, 2014

We traveled to Vietnam to serve, learn, and make new friends. We added two rooms to a school in rural Ben Tre Province and taught English to 3rd – 5th graders. We had 12 people participating in this trip. Seven members of the team are United Methodist. Our partners in Vietnam for this project were the YMCA of Vietnam and the local Vietnamese community members.

Following the conflict in Vietnam, the United States had turbulent relations with that nation. We strongly believe our trip fit within the vision of Peace with Justice. Slowly, we as Americans are rebuilding relationships with the Vietnamese people and their nation. This trip allowed us to contribute a little to the healing of past wounds. It gave us, as United Methodists and friends, a chance to share Christian love and peace with people thousands of miles away. Our team built bridges of peace and love between two very different nations. We experienced transformation that will last a lifetime as well as to serving God in this very special and unique way.

Here are some reflections from team members:

Initially when I told people I was traveling to Vietnam or had traveled there (now that I'm back), a lot asked, "Why in the world are you going there?!" or "Oh cool ...that's different. Of course they were excited for me but I could tell the first reaction was because of the relationship



the US and Vietnam had from the war. I'll be honest that I was nervous to see how the people of Vietnam would react to seeing Americans after everything that had happened so long ago, and I will tell you right now that there was not a single sign of negativity. The thing that really opened my eyes the most was when we went to the War Museum in Ho Chi Minh. As we walked through the halls, examined the photography taken and the stories told from the Vietnamese side of things, I was in shock. It was devastating, absolutely devastating. I think we, as Americans at home, generally see the war only from our point of view, we have little idea what horrific things the civilians of Vietnam were going through. It was a feeling that can only be felt from standing in a room staring at pictures of mutilated bodies, deformed children, and wounded civilians. I have formed strong friendships with the Vietnamese students that even distance could not shatter. I believe that the bonds we formed have overcome any stigma, and will create a peace that will last a lifetime. God truly blessed our time in Vietnam by serving the rural people in the Mekong Delta and building relationships with our fellow Vietnamese volunteers ...Thank you for the opportunity.

- Izzy Ebre, Junior at Shippensburg University

When I was a student at Shippensburg University I wanted to attend the Vietnam trip with my friends in 2002. I went home and asked for my parent's permission and my Father immediately said, "No". My father is a Vietnam War veteran. He told me that if I would attend this trip that he would not be able to sleep while I was gone due to his memories of the war. So being a still under my parent's roof I was unable to go on the trip. Seeing all the pictures and hearing all the amazing stories of my friends made me want to be able to go sometime in my life.

In the summer of 2012 Rev. Jan Bye told me that she was thinking of taking another group to Vietnam the Christmas Break of 2013-2014. I took some time to pray about this opportunity that has come around to me once again. I decided to say yes to going on the trip I just had one obstacle to overcome, getting my father's blessing. That Thanksgiving I went to visit my family and told them of my plan to go on the trip. My father's first response was no but after a long conversation he started to change his mind. He told me he could not prevent me since I was an adult but was unsure of the trip. The next day he walked up and gave me a dollar towards my trip and I know that meant he gave me his support.

Traveling to Vietnam gave not only me an experience of a lifetime but also provided my father with an experience as well. I had the opportunity to make amazing friendships with the Vietnamese I interacted with daily. They in turn also were able to have a positive experience with people from America. Learning the language and experiencing the culture was very eye-opening to me. I was overwhelmed with the simplicity of life and how that enabled great joy in their lives.

Our group went to visit the Cu Chi tunnels and the Vietnam War museum on the last day of our trip. These two places were very moving experiences. While I was at both all I could think about is my father and how he could be one of these soldiers. It was hard to hear the other side of the war experience. Being the enemy walking through these tours is very eye-opening. I am able to talk with my father openly about his war story and share my story of what Vietnam is all about today. I believe God transforms old enemies into new friends through loving relationship!

-Ann Schwartz, Shippensburg University Alum

Since this was my third trip to Vietnam I had a feeling about how I would be treated by the local people. I was expecting them to be helpful but not overly friendly. This time everywhere I went the local people went out of their way to help me. Everyone I met was friendly and kind. I had lunch with a local family and was taken into their home like I was a longtime friend. I felt very safe and welcome. I visited the Cu Chi Tunnels and the War Museum and found out how terrible the conditions of the war were for both sides. I feel that even though we

were once at war the Vietnamese people treat Americans as their friends. We are able to work together like we did when we worked on the school building. My visit opened my eyes to how it is possible for two countries who were once enemies can move beyond the past and work together toward a better future. God's love and grace presided over our time to serve.

-John Reed, Member 1st UMC, Chambersburg

Thank you for your support!

