

UMCOR WEST DEPOT – SALT LAKE CITY

OCTOBER 2014

Greg Poling, Don Booth, Casey Compernelle and Jackie McKenzie travelled to Salt Lake City to volunteer at the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) West Depot. UMCOR Depots assemble and ship a variety of kits and supplies all over the world, including birthing kits, school supplies, hygiene kits, flood buckets, and layette and bedding kits.



On our first night, we ended up in a hotel instead of our host church due to a miscommunication, but within 24 hours all was well, and we settled into our “home” for the next five days. Luckily, the parsonage had a TV so all could enjoy the World Series, as well as air mattresses, convenient bathrooms, and a well-appointed kitchen.

Our contacts at the Depot were Rev. Brian Diggs and Meeko. The Depot is located in a commercial strip center and fairly unimpressive from the outside, BUT never judge a book by its cover. The inside “warehouse” was organized and well supplied – floor to ceiling – and included a break room, kitchen area and an area designated for worship and prayer, the “Chapel.” The break room was impressively covered with graffiti – drawings and signatures from the many volunteers who had ventured to Salt Lake City to give of their time and talents. Greg unbelievably found the names of two teens from California who are the kids of some good friends of his from the U of A. This spurred good conversation about the interconnection of United Methodists *changing the world through Christ, by caring for all people*.



Each morning started with devotions. Then, we started working! Unpacking and checking health kits and school kits for quality control, and then repacking the kits in large boxes for shipment. We also counted and counted and counted, too many towels to count! We all had a “whistle while you work” attitude, and best of all, really got to know each other better, as each told stories from our past and present and shared hopes for the future.

A word about quality control: It was of the utmost importance that the kits contain EXACTLY what is designated. For example, the hygiene kit contained a hand towel (specific dimensions), one washcloth, one bar of soap (specific brands not allowed that caused moisture intrusion) one pair of nail clippers (not toe nail), one toothbrush, six band aids, and one comb. No identifying markings, NO American flags, no names/phone numbers on anything, and nothing controversial like camouflaged designs. We were all surprised how many notebooks and packages of crayons proudly displayed the American flag, and cutting or blacking that out was thought-provoking and a little disheartening.





Finishing a whole pallet was a real accomplishment! We would break and recite the Pallet Prayer, which blesses the shipment and the people destined to receive the supplies.

Wednesday was our community day, and we worked in the bakery at the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) Welfare Square. The bakery produces 4,000 loaves per day. The campus also contains a dairy, granary, employment center, thrift store, cannery and more. We took a tour of the center. The Mormon

philosophy is to help people in need and to foster self sufficiency. Everyone was welcoming and proselytize-friendly.

In the afternoon, we were able to be “tourists” and toured downtown Salt Lake City and Temple Square, and learned a lot about Mormonism. The members of their church are enthusiastic proselytizers. The beautiful architecture and waterfall in Temple Square were impressive. The next night, we watched the Mormon Tabernacle Choir rehearse: 350 voices and an enthusiastic conductor. We won’t forget that amazing rehearsal!



On Friday, we had the unique privilege of loading a shipping container that was bound for Afghanistan and possibly for Syrian refugees. UMCOR does not have a presence in Afghanistan, but they have vetted some local groups to accomplish delivery of our precious cargo. This was sheer manual labor. A forklift moved the pallet into the container, and we were responsible for stacking each box by hand. The particular container we were filling was 9’ high and 50’ long. Unloading and restacking over 50 pallets was back-breaking, shoulder-aching work. Luckily Rev. Diggs enlisted help from 3 Tongan youth (all football players and in great shape). They kept us moving at a brisk pace. When the



shipping container was loaded, we prayed over it – in Tongan by one of their elders! It was a powerful and edifying experience, sharing work and prayer with people who had only been in the U.S.A. for a few weeks. Connecting with Methodists from another country, and working together to serve people in need in the name of Christ was such a blessing and benefit.

There are many other experiences we shared from good food and conversation, to morning devotionals within our small but mighty group, to enjoying the cool crisp weather and seeing the incredible colors of the leaves as they changed colors. If you want to know more, or participate in an adult mission trip, stay tuned for opportunities in 2015. We don’t know quite yet where we will go, but we can guarantee that the experience will be memorable and soul and spirit-fulfilling! Come to the planning meeting on February 12.

