

# Mission Trip Corner

*This summer (and into fall, we hope), EMerge is highlighting summer mission trips sponsored by congregations of the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area. Has your congregation sponsored a summer mission trip for youth or adults? Please email your brief written report, with pictures, to executive presbyter Jeff Japinga at [ep@ptcaweb.org](mailto:ep@ptcaweb.org).*

## **First Presbyterian Church, South Saint Paul**

Junior high and high school youth from First Presbyterian Church in South St Paul served for a week in July with Urban Youth Mission at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. They stocked food shelves, worked in community agencies, helped at a day camp, visited in a senior center, sorted clothing donations, weeded a community garden, and still found time for Chicago-style pizza and exploring the city. Pastoral interns at the church helped them consider the issues of poverty, homelessness, and racism in evening sessions, and they relied on the use of public transportation for the week. It was a great experience and a program they'd recommend to anyone.

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A group of students are working on a project at a long wooden table in a workshop. On the table are several blue plastic storage bins, some of which are open, revealing small components. A large cardboard box with a cartoon illustration of a blue van and the text "SPECIAL DELIVERY!" is also on the table. One student is opening the box. Other students are looking at the bins and components. In the background, there are shelves with various items, a sign that says "Woodman", and a large window.



Valley has a long tradition of sending their youth across the Midwest each summer. This summer, Valley high schoolers headed for Kansas City, Kansas to work with the La Paz Kids summer program at Grandview Park Iglesia Presbyteriana, a bilingual (English & Spanish) Presbyterian church. The middle schoolers headed for Manitowoc, Wisconsin to assist the Manitowoc Cooperative Ministry (a partnership between one Presbyterian and two United Church of Christ congregations) with landscaping and moving needs.



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In Manitowoc, youth learned about the impact that three days of weeding can have on the welcome that a church extends to its broader community, and the challenges of three different congregations working together in ministry. Just before Valley's arrival, the two UCC churches had agreed to merge into one congregation, and Valley youth helped move furniture from one church building into the other. There was frustration and excitement as these congregations invited Valley youth into the messy process of finding new identity together.

In Kansas City, several youth used their Spanish skills to communicate with many of the La Paz kids, and stretched themselves to spend time getting to know the kids and letting the kids get to know them. Throughout the week it was not uncommon to see a youth with a sleeping child in their arms or squaring off in a makeshift Gaga ball pit in the rec room. By the end of the week everyone was sad to be saying goodbye to their new friends.

These trips illuminated not only how God transforms us when we are the stranger in a new community, but how important it is to enter a new community with an open heart to allow others to share themselves with you. Both communities invited Valley youth into a new relationships, ones that taught us that mission work is about loving our neighbors enough to form mutual relationships that beckon us toward God's kingdom.

