

Bethany UCC's EPHRATA ("hometown") WORK CAMP

Bethany UCC, Ephrata, Lancaster Association, has a history of going on mission trips. Recently, Bethany folks have gone to West Virginia and Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi. This past year, it was suggested that we try something different – a work camp in our own hometown where we might help with some local needs. We decided to do this in July, 2016.

Ephrata churches already have an annual "Ephrata Project" where volunteers help individual families in town. We did not want to duplicate that effort. Instead, we decided to partner with two local ministries: the Good Samaritan Shelter and the Mennonite Central Committee. And, our own trustees let us know there were a lot of projects that needed to be done around the church!

Our recent trips to West Virginia and Biloxi taught us that mission trips are more than simply volunteering labor. A mission trip or work camp experience includes a group of people working together, living together, playing together and learning together as we serve Christ with our time and talents. Travelling to serve in a faraway place enables this to happen. We tried to incorporate some of the mission trip experience at our Ephrata Work Camp here at Bethany. We ate meals together, breakfast and lunch each day. We got to know one another better with this table fellowship and working with folks we might not have known very well. And, we were educated by guest speakers and tours after lunch.

Three days, July 14-16, 2016, were set aside for our Ephrata Work Camp. Members and friends of Bethany could sign up for one, two or all three days. Our partner agencies and our Bethany trustees gave us a list of projects we could do based on the number and experience of the volunteers. Each day began with breakfast and devotions at the church. Then we broke out into our project groups, returning to the church for lunch and a talk from one of our partner agencies. We returned to our worksites after lunch. At the end of a long, hot day of service, we went home for showers and sleep.

The 2016 Ephrata Work Camp was an unqualified success! Forty persons participated in the work camp, volunteering approximately 350 hours of labor to the church and community. It took a lot of planning, but it was worth it.

The beauty of this type of "Hometown Mission Trip" is the opportunity for many people to get involved. And, it can be done in a small, medium or large size church! The only limit is your imagination! If you want to learn more, come to our workshop at the PCC Annual Meeting this June.