

SHERIDAN LUTHERAN CHURCH



2019

Youth Mission Trip

Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp | San Francisco, CA
July 13-21, 2019

Reflections

Madalynn Abele

The past week on the 2019 youth mission trip has been absolutely amazing and life-changing. I'm so glad I was provided this opportunity to serve, learn and grow so much. At first, I was really stressed about traveling with a group of 55, and then on top of that, not knowing exactly what service I was going to do and what our schedule was going to look like. I like being prepared and knowing what's happening, so even though I knew I would love the trip, I was focusing on the unknowns rather than preparing for the spiritual and educational trip itself.

The very first day put all of us in an eye-opening experience. We stayed at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco in a building next to the main worship center. The rooms were tight, with hard floors and only two bathrooms on the girl's floor and two on the boy's floor. I learned that the building we stayed in will be opening soon for homeless people to take shelter in, making me realize how amazing it was for the church to let us stay there and experience just a small portion of what it feels like to be put in a homeless person's situation. The same day we saw the Golden Gate Bridge, or at least tried to. Even though the fog made it impossible to see the bridge from anywhere besides on it, it was still the highlight of that day for me. It was just one visual of how God's creation is so much greater than anything man-made.

The next day all of us traveling went to worship in a beautiful sanctuary at the same church. It was really interesting visiting a Lutheran church in another city with completely different styles of worship. Some of my friends and I decided that it almost reminded us of a Catholic church, just because of their traditional style of worship. It was different from what we are all used to, causing the service to be even more memorable and educational for us traveling, especially since the sermon was about living in God's name by serving. After the worship service, we drove down to Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp in Santa Cruz. When we got to the camp they told all 55 of us, including adults, all sorts of rules that really only applied to campers there. The camp also didn't know very much about our schedule and how our church did things at first, such as praying and devotions. This was yet another experience that caused us to have trust in God and our adult leaders in that everything is meant to happen in the way it does. And it did. By the second day, we all really enjoyed staying at the camp and loved the worship and team building they provided us. On the first day at camp, they split us up into five small groups that we kept throughout the week for Bible study and team building. I immediately grew closer with my small group after low ropes, not only because I had a good number of close friends in my group, but because everyone was super welcoming, kind, and helpful to each other even if we didn't know each other super well.

A big thing we talked about on that first day that stuck with a lot of people was the three different zones: green, yellow, and red. The green zone is the area you are completely comfortable with, the yellow zone provides a little bit of discomfort but causes you to branch out of your green zone, and the red zone is when you feel like you have to say "stop." I definitely related activities I participated in all week to this scale, and I was glad to realize that a lot of what I was doing was in my yellow zone and was helping me grow. Speaking of these "zones," surfing the following day was most definitely in my red zone. We all headed down to a beach where we had Bible study with our small groups and ate lunch. In between those two things, about half the group went surfing. I was already nervous just because I've never been a super big

fan of the ocean, and I definitely don't have good balance, so I already knew surfing was going to be awful, but having the opportunity to surf with my fellow youth in California was too good to pass up. Unfortunately, surfing went exactly how I expected. I got pulled under water every time a wave came near me, and one time I couldn't even get out from underneath my board until about three waves had passed. Having such an unfortunate experience, however, provided me the opportunity to get to know some other kids from Sheridan even better. It was a perfect example of a blessing in (a very, very good) disguise. And hey, now I get to check surfing off my bucket list and never do it again! After surfing and lunch we went back to camp and did high ropes. High ropes was really cool because we got to put trust in each other while climbing through the Redwood Forest.

On Tuesday I helped at the Second Harvest Food Bank. Some people packed bags of fresh vegetables and a few other of us packaged melons, carrots, peaches, kale, and pears (pear gang) in boxes and made sure it was all fresh and safe to eat so it could get sent out to other food distributors in Santa Cruz. After service, we met at Mt. Cross for a pool party which really helped us grow as a group. That night was my favorite activity the whole trip: the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. The boardwalk had rides, games, food, and shops, all right on the beach. My favorite story from our time at the boardwalk was when we were waiting in line for the big wooden roller coaster, called the Giant Dipper. There was a man named Adam loading into the train in front of us who was told he had to switch rows because they couldn't put the lap bar down enough for him to fit. He got all frustrated with not being able to fit so he started to leave, even though his friends were all shouting for him to come back and ride with them. Since he was leaving, a group of ten of us staring chanting, "Adam! Adam! Adam!" until he finally came back to sit with his friends. After we got off the ride, the adults stopped to talk to him and he said that we were the reason he came back and the reason he was in a good mood the rest of the night. He said that our chanting gave him joy that even a bunch of strangers still care about him, without even knowing him. The whole night was just a lot of fun!

I helped at Habitat for Humanity on Wednesday. I really enjoyed it, despite the very early morning. While we were at the housing site, we dug up an entire driveway and leveled off the ground in the backyard for a fence. It may not seem like a lot, but it required a lot of hard work. In fact, everywhere anyone from Sheridan volunteered, we were always told how great of workers we all were. At the Second Harvest Food Bank they told us we served three times more than most groups. Our youth really showed their dedication to service and their care for others the whole trip. After helping at Habitat we had a calmer evening at camp which provided much needed rest and time to reflect more on the week and what we had learned so far.

On the third and final service day, I was sent to help at the Homeless Garden. I wasn't really sure what to expect to be doing in my time there, except for that it would be an open garden where anyone could plant whatever they wanted to and volunteers would help take care of it. My original thought was very incorrect. The Homeless Garden is actually a garden where they train people how to tend to plants and sends them out to be able to use their new skills in other local farms where they can then make money. It's a really cool concept that I hadn't ever thought of before. Everything the garden grows gets sent back out into the community and into a store downtown we visited after our time volunteering. While we were there, the volunteer coordinator took us on a tour and had us pull weeds. Lots of weeds. About 30 of us had to clean

up three very long rows of plants, and it took much longer than I expected. Luckily with good conversation and good Disney music playing, the time flew by and we grew even closer as a group. Thursday night was pretty chilly, making it not the best night to have a campfire and Bible study on the beach, but knowing our group, we made it work. We closed the night with a worship service right there on the beach. The counselors led a few songs and briefly talked about a Bible verse, but the best part of the whole night was when the counselors opened it up for our youth to lead some songs, and Sheridan youth LOVE singing in worship. It was really cool to see how everyone stepped up immediately to sing all sorts of songs that even the counselors had no idea of. I love seeing how excited everyone gets when it comes to worship.

On Friday morning we started to pack up at the camp and invited our off-site friends to lunch at Mt. Cross for burgers. After a sad goodbye to camp we all drove down to Henry Cowell State Park for a beautiful walk through the Redwood Forest. It was amazing how all of the youth could fit inside just one tree trunk. Walking through the forest was nothing like I've ever experienced before. The trees were honestly taller than I imagined. God's creation is absolutely breathtaking. After the state park, we drove to St. Luke Lutheran Church in Sunnyvale, California and unloaded before our group dinner at Maggiano's. The group dinner was a great way for the youth and adult leaders to take advantage of how close we had all grown to each other and simply spend time together. We took that joy for being with one another back to the church where we played soccer in a big backyard and had the second dance party of the week. Late that night was one of the hardest moments of the trip: Prayer Around the Cross. This event hit me much harder than I thought it would, just because of how much support I felt from and for each and every person I traveled with. There was so much love being passed around on Friday night. Saturday was a blessing. We got to sleep until 8:00. After lots of needed rest, we headed up to Pier 39 in San Francisco before checking in for our tour of Alcatraz. Both of these were super fun and definitely a great way to end the trip.

I miss this trip with everyone so, so much already. I grew as a Lutheran, as a servant, as a child of God, and just as an overall person. The mission trip is consistently my favorite week of the year, and this trip will be no different. I have been blessed with this wonderful opportunity and I thank you sponsors for it! Thank you for your never-ending support! I will leave you with the words we sang every night at camp: "And he said go in peace and love one another as I first loved you. Proclaim to all who hear the good news of my coming. Keep faith in all you do."

Elise Anderson

This week was full of community and fun, but it was all brought together by service. Over the past 8 days, I, along with 54 other youth and adults, were given the amazing opportunity to travel across the country and serve. We stayed at churches some nights and a Lutheran camp called Mt. Cross in the Santa Cruz area on others. We were so incredibly lucky to be able to participate in Mt. Cross's "Adventure on the Coast" program. This program allowed us to do activities at the camp like high ropes, eat their camp food (which was surprisingly good!) and help to restore some of the camp's facilities. The program also took us to off-site locations, like the beach, the food bank, and the Homeless Garden Project. With Ian's help, we

also got to have fun, group-bonding time away from camp. Some of our youth were not able to stay with us at Mount Cross, so they met us for all off-site activities. A normal day started around 6-7:30 AM, where we would wake up, pack lunches if we were going off-site, eat breakfast, and prepare ourselves for the day. Then, on service days, we would load our vans and go out into the community.

One of my favorite service projects was volunteering at the Food Bank in Santa Cruz. They started by giving us a tour of the site, which was massive! They talked about how every \$1 gave 4 meals and gave out around 8 million meals a year. Then, they showed us how to pack bags for meals. The bags included 6 canned goods, beans, rice, and peas. They told us that this, along with a bag of fruits and vegetables, would be a meal they could give out. We then formed an assembly line. I was given rice, so every bag that was sent my way got a bag of rice. After a short picture break, we got back to work and I packed tomato sauce. This service project was my favorite because I could feel God's presence in the room and I could see how I was making a difference. Between us and another group, we packed 3600 bags.

Another fun activity we did was high ropes at Mt. Cross. Let me tell you, I am terrified of heights and I didn't know if I could do it, but I knew I wanted to try. I did a very long course, but it was worth it! All of the courses were built within the Redwood forest, so I started by going up a redwood and stepping onto a tightrope. I held onto a rope and walked across that. Then I stepped onto a platform connected to a redwood. Next I came to a "broken bridge" which was essentially 4 platforms you had to bear crawl across. These were terrifying for me because I was forced to look down, but I had a whole crowd cheering me on. Kate, one of the youth, saw I was struggling and she said I could "scream it out" with her. So, all of us were just screaming to get all of the nerves out. I also heard one of the adults say, "I am so proud of you, but if you are scared look around and enjoy the place you are in." Those words also calmed me down and I could really see God shining through Kristin and those words.

One night we went to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk just to hang out and have fun, and it was fun! However, roller coasters were pretty scary to me when I arrived. Kate and Annika took me on a starter roller coaster called "Haunted Castle". It was kind of like a low key version of Disney's "Haunted Mansion". It was the perfect ride to start with! It was very slow moving and not scary at all! Then I was told I absolutely had to ride the "Giant Dipper" which was the biggest roller coaster there and I was so nervous, but I went on it! I had to apologize to Annika a bunch of times though because I think my screaming may have made her temporarily deaf... oops. However, we all had so much fun bonding together!

Every night we would end with worship at camp. The camp counselors would read us scripture, give a short message, and sing and dance with us! It was always very fun and meaningful. On Friday, our last day at camp, we had our worship on the beach. We did the normal worship thing, but it was different somehow. All around us there were many types of different people. All these people were doing their own thing, but you could occasionally see them glance over and smile. It might have been because we were screaming a song that went, "all God's critters got a place in the choir," but I think it went deeper. I think they could feel God in that place, just like I could. After every worship, we would get together with our small group and share our highs, the lows, and God sightings. It was always such a fun and interesting time to hear everyone talk about their day.

This mission trip was an absolute amazing experience! Coming into it, I didn't know what to expect because the youth trip last year to the ELCA Youth Gathering, was a much different experience. I knew my faith would grow and my friendships would grow stronger, but I didn't know how. Now I do know. My faith grew immensely! I could see God everywhere! I could see God in the waves crashing on the beach, in my friends' laughs, in the mission work I did, in the people I served, and more. My relationship with God became astronomically stronger. I believe in God's path for me and trust he is doing the right thing. The community with my friends also became very strong. Memories were added to our stories and now we have too many inside jokes to count. I am so grateful for the youth who went on this trip, the adults who came with us, and especially the sponsors, without whom we couldn't have done half the things we did on the trip. I am forever grateful.

Hailey Anderson

California was one of the best trips I've been on! It wasn't just the mission work we did or the sights we saw, but it was also the people I was surrounded by and all the little moments with these people that made it amazing. All the mission work we were able to accomplish was beyond what I thought. Together we were able to bag thousands of pounds of food: including fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as cans of fruits and veggies, bags of beans and rice, plus even more! Some of us also got the opportunity of visiting the Homeless Garden. It was really cool to see the small community of volunteer working on these 3 acres of land in order to provide the less fortunate with fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs. It was even cooler knowing that we played a role in this process. We were able to weed a few rows of herbs and onions. Besides helping the community of Santa Cruz County, we were also able to lend a helping hand to Mount Cross by planting and maintaining certain areas to make it a safer and more welcoming place.

I loved getting to know the new people we served and hearing their stories and encouragements. Minus the mission work, I think just our presence in general really brought a smile to everyone's face. Our positive attitudes combined with our willingness to serve touched many. God was definitely working through us and our smiles this week. Although serving so many people was beyond incredible, the people I was surrounded by was definitely one of my highs from the trip. I have been able to grow closer to the friends I already had as well as to build new, strong relationships with the people I didn't know.

I'm so glad I was able to come this summer and can't wait for our journey together next summer. I just want to thank everyone who supported us, or prayed for us, especially those who donated, for their generosity to our youth group. Although I'm sad it's over, I'm even more thankful for all the opportunities to learn about different communities, grow in my faith, and to share the word of God with others, whether it be through singing or serving. We were able to end the week with a special prayer around the cross. We were able to think and reflect over everything that happened throughout the week. Once again, youth group is amazing and I love every single one of the people who are a part of it. If they've taught me anything so far, it's to trust in God and be your true self and to not change that for anyone. Thank you Ian, for being

the best youth leader and taking all of us on the best adventure to California! I can't wait for next year!

Skylar Anderson

God was shown through all of the kindness that everyone was giving. Throughout the whole trip every youth was very selfless and always put others before themselves, and to me that is being a servant of Christ and loving and serving our neighbors whether it's living in community for a week or sleeping great for 8 hours, it can always be really challenging to put others before yourself, but with the help and presence of Christ it is much more humbling and rewarding to give and serve to others.

The most meaningful part of this trip for me was all the different service projects that we did. Not only physical labor, but hearing about all of the facts about the organizations that we were helping out. Our few short hours there helped touch so many people and their families. It is really inspiring to know that there are organizations out there dedicated to giving back to their community and solely run off of different volunteers. The most rewarding story I heard was Paul's sobriety story. Only those who are going through recovery and those affected by an addiction will understand the daily struggle of gratitude and humility along with acceptance. For the longest time I could never understand why God gave me the struggles he did, but I am slowly learning that these negative situations can be used to create good in this world, and that is exactly what Paul taught me. It will never be easy, but that makes you a stronger person with an even more rich story.

Along with accepting what I have and don't have, came love for myself, and this has helped me grow to understand why I am who I am and yes, I was created for a certain purpose – this doesn't make my struggles any easier nor does it make me wish my daily pain on anyone else... it has given me a humble mindset to share with others and help them grow in their faith. It is not easy to see what others have and not envy them for that... But that is not serving God in anyway. You must take on and fight every single battle that God throws at you and use it to give back to him.

Thank you to all of the adults who came on this trip and gave us their time and guidance. I would not have been able to tick the week out without all of the kind and selfless adults who continued to check on me. It meant the world to me to be able to share my story with them without being judged and feeling out of place. I felt God's arms around me with the support of the adults around me. The adults gave me such great advice to stay true to the hard working person that I am.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you to every single sponsor who made this trip possible for me. Without the generosity of the sponsors this trip would have never been possible for me! I got to serve the Lord and see all of this beautiful creation. I saw the ocean for the first time. I worked really hard to be able to pay the other half of the trip which makes me even more thankful for those of you who donated your hard earned money for myself and others to be able to go on this trip. Thank you again!

Aleksey Betancur

Throughout my week long journey with my peers, I haven't only grown closer relationships with them, but also with God. This last winter I really struggled mentally and emotionally. I wasn't myself, I lost a lot of weight, I began to isolate myself from family and friends. I even started losing interest in athletics and other hobbies. I not only isolated myself from family and friends, but I also started losing trust in my spiritual beliefs. While struggling, I always felt the need to go and see Ian and his kids at the High School Youth Group. I always felt safe and always felt welcomed and like I belonged in a group no one judges, no one carries deep conversations out of that half of the great room. At that time that's what I really needed. So I kept showing up and eventually my struggle slowly eased. Being able to bond with such a wonderfully talented, sweet and loving and caring group this last week really pushed me over the top for finally feeling myself again. Yes, there are times in my life where I don't do well, but no matter what, with them I feel safe and secure not only mentally and emotionally, but physically also. I definitely saw God during this period even though it didn't seem like it at the time. Throughout this week, while away at camp, I built up a stronger support system for myself by strengthening the relationships I already had going into the trip and created so many more.

The most meaningful moment for me on this trip is the relationships I'll be walking out with. I've "adopted" my underclassmen, (Ella S. Hailey, and Cadie) who have been my so-called kids throughout the week. Also, my van was the best one out there. It was also really special for me to go and serve in the community of San Jose. Digging for 5 hours with Habitat and working with the Food Bank for a handful of hours and as a half group packing 1200 pounds of food for those who are less fortunate. To know that I am involved with something that seems so small, but it's so huge for those receiving such a beautiful gift. Another heart wrenching moment would be the prayer around the cross. Everyone was crying and worshiping God asking for forgiveness and or praying for someone or something else. No one walked to the cross or prayed alone and to have that feeling of so much love and support comforts everyone. While sitting there and just talking and having a conversation just about anything and everything that was on your mind with a burden. It was really nice to be supported while I prayed and took things to the cross. It's a feeling I'll never forget.

I loved others as I love God and God's creation. I've always been taught to love thy neighbor as yourself. Treat others as you want to be treated. Growing relationships with my new family will be beyond irreplaceable. To grow closer to Christ which, definitely was needed for me. I really needed to figure out my path for my life. It isn't the same as everyone else's. But, everyone else sure is a part of it. While coming home from this trip, I am beyond grateful for everyone having the opportunity to go. Without grateful and generous donations from sponsors and the congregation, my brother, Evan and I would not have been able to go, whatsoever. So a huge thank you goes out to all who helped. This trip was an amazing experience and was truly life changing.

Evan Betancur

I saw God in nature wherever we went. For example, it was great being able to see all the living creatures including redwoods and banana slugs. The most meaningful time was probably worship by the cross. It got to me because of how much I needed to spread and share my love with God. I loved by showing others how much they meant to me. I grew in my faith due to the fact that we helped so many people. It just enlightened me. I shared my faith with those who needed it the most. For example, homeless, Mt. Cross, second harvest, and many others. This trip meant a lot to me.

Cadence Bonneau

I saw God in the trees when they blew so gently and in other people when they would encourage and lift other people up. I think the most meaningful moment for me was probably the worship at the cross in Sunnyvale. This was because so many people just relaxed and let it all out to God. Also because I feel like we became much closer after everybody realized that everybody is going through hardships. It was so somber and peaceful afterwards and everybody connected on a much deeper level. I also saw God when people were having fun and laughing with one another. When we were all gathered at the beach worship for a closing Mount Cross worship, we all came together and sung and lead and helped each other. I saw God when people continued to push others out of their comfort zone to help myself and others grow in faith and trust within one another. I think I grew with other people by helping each other through everything. I shared in my love for song, adventure, and my talents of flexibility when plans changed and time management because we always made it to plans on time. I loved God by sharing his words and love to others and sharing in service. I also loved by supporting other people when they needed it. I loved other people with hugs and service at the food bank, at camp, and at the homeless garden.

Corbin Bonneau

On the 2019 youth mission trip I grew as a person both mentally and spiritually, I have also had the opportunity to make many new friends. Knowing that on this trip we made a difference for people that we don't even know makes me feel happy and helpful. Some of my favorite moments on the trip were the food bank and the homeless garden project because at the food bank we were able to pack over 13 crates full of food, and in the garden we were able to make it so there plants could grow and they wouldn't have to pull as many weeds. Spending so much time with all these new people was very enjoyable and all of these people have also helped me to grow in my faith.

My faith has been changed in many new ways because seeing what God can do in unbelievable like making waves for instance, it would take so much man power to do that but God is able to do it without using all of his power. Sheridan's mission statement really came into

play on this trip, because we were able to spread love around in everything we did, we helped people grow, even people in our group, and we shared our time without even worrying what we were going to do that day for others. I saw God everywhere we went on this trip, including at the food bank, seeing that God called others to help those in need as well, and places such as the ocean. I became more social on this trip and was able to talk to many new people.

Annika Bostrom

This mission trip was definitely one to remember. I met so many new people and visited places I've never been including Northern California and Alcatraz and Mt. Cross camp. These experiences definitely helped me grow in my faith. By saying our highs and lows every day, reflecting on the day and serving the community of Santa Cruz and San Jose, I can definitely tell my faith is stronger. I really enjoyed the beach and Mt. Cross. They were both places that I saw God and relaxed and centered myself from all the outside distractions. I also saw God at the Food Bank and Homeless Garden. We worked hard and put our best foot forward because it was not easy work, but we did it all for the Lord and Creator. At the Food Bank we put together a bag of non-perishable items to be distributed to the local churches and schools. The part that I really appreciated about that day was the speech a volunteer gave at the end. It was all about turning his life around after being an addict. That speech reminded me why I love and want to keep doing this. At the Homeless Garden we pulled weeds. It was the most perfect day to do that because it wasn't too hot or too cold. It was dirty work, but we got a good majority of it done. After we finished we were all tired and filthy from working in the dirt all afternoon, but I could tell that we were all very fulfilled.

This whole trip was meaningful to me. Aside from the sack lunches every day, I tried not to complain. I loved everything about this trip, the tourist attractions, shopping, meeting new people, and the service. If you told me to choose the best part, I wouldn't be able to, because it would be way too hard to choose. But the most meaningful part was probably the prayer around the cross. I always love a good cry session. We all prayed and supported each other that night and it was really powerful. I would love to thank the sponsors for making most of this possible. The group dinner that they all helped support was amazing and a fun night. But most of all I would like to thank Ian, Michelle and all the Adult leaders. They all made this happen and keep us in line the whole week. This was one of my most favorite weeks of the entire year and this one is hard to beat.

Kaylee Denker

This is my first mission trip I have ever went on and it was amazing! God was shown through so many ways including the Urban Garden, Food Bank, and the cool sightseeing objects like the Golden Gate Bridge. It was also very cool to see new animals/insects because we know that God put them on this planet. The most meaningful moment for me personally was seeing the leaders' smiles when we were at different places. It made me think about how much they really

do care. Another meaningful moment for me would just be interacting with other people that went on this trip. Before, I only knew about 7 people and now I know all 55! Which leads me to thank the adult leaders, they were so supportive in everything we did and they tried their hardest to make everyone have fun. I also want to thank the youth because they were very including and they never let anyone sit by themselves. I loved by helping others in need and was including to everybody. I grew by growing in my faith. I think that sometimes we forget to thank God for the things we get but I will definitely never forget this mission trip! I shared by helping at different places so others could have food, homes, and know that they are loved. So thank you sponsors for everything you guys have done for us to go on this mission trip! It really means a lot to all of us!

Jett Durante

Having just graduated, this trip was most special as it was my last trip as a youth. Mission trips have been an extremely important and exciting part of my summer. I found that all year I look forward to a week of service and friendship with youth group, as well as escape from day to day life. The highlights of this week were the service at Habitat for Humanity and the sponsor dinner though I will say this entire week was amazing simply being with these amazing people.

At Habitat, my group excavated out space for a driveway, breaking up dirt with a jackhammer-like tool, shoveling it out and relocating the dirt with wheelbarrows. We cleared out a large area in the two short days we volunteered. Though the work was back-breaking, we were smiling throughout. The “manual labor” type of service (our work at the food bank included) is my favorite type of service and I greatly missed it after not having many opportunities for service on last years trip. The group dinner was another highlight for me because it reminded me how incredibly exciting being in the presence of others can be. My table spent every minute of the dinner tearing up with laughter. We couldn’t sip water or eat food we were laughing so hard, just in the moment humor and stories, something I believe everyone needs more of. The group dinner also reminded me that my church friends are a few of my closest friends. This trip provided an opportunity to be even closer to them and to meet some new friends: to love, grow and share as a unit. We loved each other and those we served for and with. We grew spiritually, intellectually and emotionally tolerating scheduling conflicts other issues such as weather that we could not control. We shared everything; stories, bug spray, water bottles, life advice, helping hands; you name it, we shared it. They only thing I have to say: what a family we’ve become. We’re there to support each other in emotional distress, physical challenges and other hardships. We make jokes like nobody’s business, but most of all, we love each other like a family. I owe a lot of myself to some of my other youth as well as the great adult leaders we have with us. Through the four trips I’ve been a part of I find that they influenced me a lot and I hope you all know how much you mean to me. Much love :)

Justice Durante

On this trip some of the places I saw God were in all of us when we were serving in the community, and the church that let us stay for the first night. During the trip I grew in faith serving at places like the Habitat Restore and the Food Bank, where I was able to make a difference by packing and sorting through food. My favorite part of the trip was making new friends and strengthening relations, and going to places I haven't been before. The most meaningful thing I did on the trip was work at the Restore where I sorted and cleaned all sorts of donations, which would be sold to help build a cheaper house that was sold to a low income family. Some ways I lived out the Sheridan Mission Statement was by volunteering my time to help others, and respecting and caring for everyone I met and I would like to thank all the sponsors, because without them we wouldn't be able to go on this trip. I would also like to thank my family because they let me go on this trip. Finally I want to thank Ian and all of the other adult leaders who came on the trip with us.

Cassidy Eckhart

Going to California has been such an amazing experience. I have grown in my faith so much. While in California, our group did many different service projects. We served at different places, such as Habitat for Humanity, the Second Harvest Food Bank, the Homeless Garden, and different projects at the camp. All of us had an awesome experience serving. We all enjoyed helping others and seeing what we did. It was awesome being able to see a before and after of what we did. We also did a lot of sightseeing and group building activities during this time. We all grew in our faith, and as a group, so much during this week. I saw God in about everything I did. While I was serving I saw God by the way we were serving as a group, and help those in need. At the food bank, our group tried our hardest and fastest that we all could. We ended up filling 14 bins of bagged food during our short time there. The staff and the camp and two churches also helped us grow in our faith. The most meaningful part of this trip was probably the food bank because we all bonded while we were working on bagging the cans of food. We also knew that we were helping other people, while we were having fun and bonding as a group. At all of the places I volunteered, all of the other volunteers and staff at the place were super friendly and kind.

During this week, each of us were separated in vans, rooms in the camp, and we also each had a small group. I feel that everyone ended up becoming good friends with the different people in every group. Since this was my first mission trip, I wasn't sure what to expect. I ended up having a lot of fun and really enjoyed the time with the people. I would like to thank all of the sponsors of this trip. None of us would be able to go to California or do anything without the sponsors. We would also not be able to go without the adult volunteers and they made the trip so much fun. Without the adults, we wouldn't be able to drive anywhere and it would take a lot longer to do everything. This trip has helped me grow in my faith so much and create so many new memories with people I met on the trip.

Lydia Flachsbart

When you go on a mission trip you don't necessarily think about the friendships you are going to make and make stronger that much. It was really neat how that happened though. For example, since we were in different groups we got to talk to and work with different people. Therefore, we learned more about each other. For instance my opinion changed for the better about some people because I didn't know them very well. I also got to know some people and became friends with them. It was really nice that there was only a small group of people I didn't know because I would have probably been frantic to get to know them, or nervous around them. I really liked getting to know the group better, and I think that wouldn't have happened if we didn't work together. It's amazing what happens when we work together.

During the mission trip my first service project was helping out the food bank. I threw the bad vegetables out and bagged the good ones. At first I thought "ew this is so gross," because some of the bad ones were really bad, then I remembered it's helping people and all was good.

My second and third service project was helping at Habitat for Humanity. The first time we dug and moved a bunch of dirt around a house and I'm pretty sure that it test most of our communication and teamwork skills. Our second time was at the restore I cleaned sinks, broke down cardboard boxes and recycled them, found hangers, and moved chairs to tables. Most of us just sorted things though. It was really cool to see what they had because we found things from creepy dolls to record players.

I think the most thinking I did was when we were in nature. For example when we went surfing I learned just how powerful and violent yet peaceful the ocean is. It just amazes me how God can create things like that. How the fog would come in the morning and around 10am it would go away and be sunny and clear every day amazed me too. I guess it's god's way of reminding us that there is a beautiful calm after the storm and that we have to get through the bad times to be in the good times. This trip not only let me see the beauty of nature but it also reminded me that God gave everything a way to protect itself. For example, a banana slug is covered in a slime that when you touch it that part of you will get numb.

Bryson Haecker

Thank you sponsors! This trip has meant a lot and has changed all of our lives. Everyone connected with God someway or another in a very meaningful way. For me, it was doing the service projects. I felt like I really got close to God when we helped others in need. I picked weeds, filled 15 buckets to the rim, helped build a retaining wall, leveling out the ground by moving dirt, and sacking food at the Food Bank; 5 crates and 3,600 bags in two hours. We all worked hard and enjoyed doing it. But we couldn't do it without you. In all, we were donated \$14,000 to help us go on this trip and do the things we wanted to do and help their community at the same time. Thank you so much for donating and letting us better help this community and connect with God.

Our camp was amazing too. We were surrounded by Redwood trees and even had the chance to sleep outside with them. Camp was one of the best parts of the trip simply because God was all around us in many different ways. He was in the trees, plants, shrubbery, stream, bugs and even the other children that were at the camp as well. We all celebrated, laughed and played in God's name each morning and night during worship.

It was forever an amazing experience. On Sunday we got to go to St. Mark's church which is a traditional style church service with a humongous organ that they played. All in all, going on this trip helped everyone better connect with God and get a little closer with him.

We also got to enjoy our time in California let me not forget by visiting the Redwood Forest, Alcatraz, and the Golden Gate Bridge! They were all amazing and pretty cool to experience first hand. We couldn't do any of this without your help, so we thank you all very much for donating to this trip and letting us connect with God and nature and help out California at the same time.

Taylor Haecker

This was my first mission trip and I went into it not knowing what to expect. Over our week in California I experienced more than I ever could've imagined. I was nervous to go on this trip because I didn't really know anyone. I am the type of person who is afraid to step out of their comfort zone and this trip forced me to do that. When the time for high ropes came around, I sat on the ground afraid to climb up into the redwoods. But, through the support of my group I faced my fear and climbed up the ladder. When I was up on the cable in the trees I felt this calming sensation wash over me and I was able to complete the course without me shaking too much. What I learned from these experiences I can do anything with the support from friends and God.

Throughout the week we served the people living in and around the bay area. One day we were at Second Harvest Food bank and packaged about 6 tons of fresh produce that were handed out the next day for those who needed it. At the Habitat for Humanity Restore, we saw the love of God flowing out of the staff and volunteers to the shoppers. They made an effort to show kindness and hospitality to shoppers. At the Habitat Build sites we were building homes for those who were living in places too small or in a dangerous place.

The trip wasn't all work though, we were tourists as well. We saw the Golden Gate Bridge, which was beautiful when it wasn't covered in fog. We also went to Pier 39 to do some shopping and then we sailed over to tour Alcatraz. My favorite thing we did was visit the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. I loved the roller coasters and other rides.

I'm sad this trip had to come to an end. It had surpassed all my expectations and I accomplished my goals of growing closer to God through Mount Cross and our service work as well as making new friends who were kind enough to include me in things they did. I am very thankful for this experience and can't wait until next year's trip!

Brooks Hinrichs

I saw God during prayer around the cross because of all 55 of us joined together to pray to and for anything and anyone. There were so many candles which warmed my heart to see how many people cared about others. I grew in my faith by building a new “family” consisting of Eden, Chandler, Molly, Madelyn, and I in the cabin. It was nice to have a small group to rely on for anything, especially in small groups before bed. My favorite, most memorable part of the trip would be the drives we’d all take in the vans. Our “Van Gang” as we called it would crack jokes and make the rides seem like 10 minutes. I lived out Sheridan’s mission statement by trying to meet, talk to, and make a good impression with people I hadn’t quite bonded with yet prior to the trip. A lot of people were nicer than what I thought they’d be. I would like to thank my parents for helping me be able to go on the trip. They have bent over backwards to have Madelyn and I be able to join this mission trip.

Madelyn Hinrichs

I’ve been in six mission trips now and I can say they were all the best weeks of my life. They all had the same meaning, to worship and serve. But I got something different out of each one of them every time. After going to California with Sheridan I saw the beauty of Christianity through van rides, site seeing, worship, and serving. It’s amazing to be with other youth, serving God together and knowing that being a Christian is just important to them as it is to you. I have my doubts here and there and sometimes it feels like there’s less youth in the church, but after this week all of my doubts fade away. There wasn’t just one time I saw God. God is everywhere whether we see him or not. What stuck out to me was God in others and in His beauty of California.

As not being a member of Sheridan and not living in Lincoln, I really didn’t know anyone. Everyone was welcoming and loving. I immediately found friends whole I hold dear to my heart. Touching the cold sea salt water, hearing the waves crash, feeling the sun warm my skin, and smelling California’s fresh produce was a great reminder that God is truly everywhere. I also saw God during our service work days as we all worked so hard because we wanted to. One more God sighting was being able to stay in the cabin with Molly, Chandler, and Eden Schmit. Without them, there might’ve been a possibility of Brooks and I not being able to go. We were all able to bond and we ended up having many similarities. I had an absolute blast on this mission trip. I was able to get to know the youth of Sheridan and locals of Santa Cruz. I LOVE Santa Cruz and the people. I can’t wait to go back. Loving, growing and sharing all kinds of combine into one. I grew friendships and my faith. My faith is what makes me and getting opportunities like this help me get to know my faith and myself more. California is a trip I will never forget. Sheridan has amazing youth who will do even more amazing things.

Zoe Hoffmeyer

I had an amazing week. On this mission trip I have seen God almost everywhere. I saw him in the people we served and the people who helped us. I also saw him shining through each and every person on this trip in different ways. Everyone was so nice and was always there for everyone. I saw God in the volunteers helping along side of us at the food bank also.

The most meaningful moments are when Kristen told us that hugs just make everybody's day better and after everyone has been giving at least one hug a day to someone in our group. Also, when I was having a hard time feeling like I fit in, friends and adults came and made me feel included and loved so much more. I know and will never forget that they helped me realize I am loved so much more than I know and think. They also made me feel so much happier and feel like I fit in. They also taught me to be myself and not change because they love me for being me.

I met so many new friends on this trip, it is amazing. I met and grew to know the freshman and others who are newer or I just haven't talked to that much and I know them better now. I loved volunteering there. I helped at the camp to make a retaining wall by their climbing wall so it is safer. I also helped at the food bank and homeless garden, all were amazing and life changing experiences. I made friends, but I also made family. These kids on this trip are amazing and just care about everyone. We also reminded each other that they are a Child of God and are loved. I thank you so much that you helped make this trip happen and be amazing. I will definitely go again and always remember the experiences we had on this trip. Thank you.

Leighton Kasik

I had tons of fun on the California trip, from laughs in the van, to helping others in service projects. We were able to find God everywhere with us. We learned a lot about nature and God's love. From my experience from staying at Mt. Cross, I was taught to pay more attention to the world around me instead of being on my phone a lot of the time. I also learned to not get over anxious about not knowing all the information and schedule. I think we all learned about that and grew from the experience because towards the end of the week we weren't asking as many schedule questions. We all knew God had a plan for us. One of the most memorable moments was the service projects. I helped at the food bank by sorting through the produce. I also was sorting through donated clothes at the Habitat for Humanity restore. At Habitat builds, I helped with the structure of a new Habitat for Humanity house. Through my experiences doing service projects, I learned to be grateful with what I have and how I can use that to help others. Another memorable thing that I'm very grateful for is how close I've become with some people that I've always looked up to and have wanted to be friends with. I'm very thankful for my new friendships I made and old friendships that have become stronger. Prayer around the cross was very powerful and emotional. I don't like seeing my friends upset and I asked for God to help them go through rough times. The seniors' speeches were very impactful and I learned to continue to go to youth group, even through rough times. It's sad to see the seniors that I've looked up to leave youth group.

This mission trip has been so much fun and very impactful. It would not have been possible without our sponsors that supported us and we can't thank them enough for this opportunity. I have really grown in my faith and spiritually staying at Mt. Cross in the Redwood Forest which was breathtaking to see. I learned a lot from this trip and will bring what I learned back home and tell others. I would like to have our youth group help with Habitat for Humanity, either with builds or at the restore. I'm very proud of us for working so hard to help others. I definitely saw God in others' hard work at service projects. It is amazing to know that we helped and impacted many people in California. When I get back home I will tell my family and friends about how I have helped others and show them how they can help too. I will show them how they can volunteer in Lincoln, possibly at Habitat for Humanity. Overall, I think we have grown as a group and we trust each other more and have all become better friends through this trip. Once again I want to thank all our sponsors for giving us something I will never forget. I am very excited for next year.

Anna Keester

Going into this mission trip, I really didn't know what to expect. Last summer I went on the youth gathering trip, but it's pretty different from a mission trip. These nine days have shaped my life and impacted my faith greatly – just as the youth gathering did; but in slightly different ways. One of the most meaningful service projects I took part in would have to be helping build a house through Habitat for Humanity. For as long as I can remember, I have heard about Habitat projects during church services. Even when I was little I would picture myself with a hammer in hand, helping build a place to live for someone who needs it. Finally, I was given the chance and opportunity to participate only this time instead of a hammer, I used a jackhammer – talk about girl power! How surreal. The work was taxing on my body, but as a team we pushed through and continued to work our Keester's off.

I also really enjoyed working at the food bank. With my group we created a system of working together to find the most effective and quickest way to box and bag healthy foods. A few hours later we had thousands of pounds worth of food ready to go. It's incredible and really moving to know all the hard work put in is truly going to make a difference. We may not see it firsthand, but to know we are humbles you, for the lives we live are not near as difficult as it could be. The people we volunteered with seemed eternally grateful for our help, which only makes me more excited and determined to step out again sometime soon to continue showing God's light and grace through our service. I saw God in every service event we did, and through the people. Seeing endless smiles on faces and making people's day. Seeing friends break out of their shells. Becoming more confident in my own faith. Taking in the beauty of creation. It's all by God. I saw God during nighttime worship. Hearing everyone sing together, which is something I love to do, really moved me. I loved trying new harmonies in songs I love with my friends around me. This whole trip to me was beyond meaningful, but one of the most meaningful was our worship around the cross. It was emotional, it was moving. We all cried and felt so connected. The Holy Spirit was drifting through us all. It is great to be about to go into college knowing how to help and serve others and know I have 54 other people who support and

love me.

That final worship was like icing on the cake. Loving others is so important to do, whether you know them personally or not. This trip has helped me know people I didn't – on this trip and off. Just as I've spread my love to others, I've felt the love in return. How beautiful. This entire experience would not be possible without the help of each and every sponsor. For that I am eternally grateful for you all. More thankful that you will ever know! Your kindness, generosity and support are appreciated so much by every single person. This mission trip has changed who I am, widened my perspectives, filled my heart, and taught me lessons I will never forget. Lessons that are vital in this time in my life. Thank you. A senior signing off. Xoxo.

Jacob Kile

Throughout the whole trip God was present. But I mostly felt him when the whole group was together as one. One of my most meaningful moments was when everyone was crying and praying over the cross. I was praying for my grandma and as everyone was supporting me, I saw a shooting star out of the corner of my eye. I truly believe that I will remember that moment forever. This trip has been great to me and for everyone else. I have made new friends and have strengthened my other friendships. None of this would've been possible without the sponsors and I am so happy and grateful that they helped us make it here. I will remember this trip for a very long time and I hope I can go on another trip like this one. I loved helping the homeless and people without food. I had a sense of happiness after I finished the work. I shared my love and work with those in need and I hope they enjoy it and I hope their situation improves. Again, this trip has been meaningful and enjoyable for all. This has by far been the highlight of my summer. Lastly, I'd like to thank the sponsors for donating and helping us get here.

Anastasia Krueger

The 2019 Youth Mission trip was the first one I went on and it was an amazing experience. We started off the trip by getting up super early on Saturday morning, which meant we got to San Jose in the morning. Throughout the entire week, we had many different experiences, and all of them are ones that I will remember forever. Some of the service projects that I helped with included serving at the food bank, helping at the Habitat Restore, and at the Homeless Garden. The first service project that I helped with was at the Food Bank. We got a tour of the facility and learned different facts about it. When we actually started the volunteering part, we put different kinds of organic food in bags. The next project that I helped on was at the Habitat Restore. The Restore is where people donate different household items (clothes, shoes, lighting, furniture, etc.) and they sell the items to help build houses for people who don't have homes. Volunteering, we helped with sorting clothes, organizing, dusting, cutting wires, and helping anywhere else that was needed. The final place that I volunteered at was at the Homeless Garden. There, we helped out the garden by pulling weeds and we filled 18 buckets. All of the

places that we volunteered at were very moving experiences and I am so happy that I had the opportunity to be a part of this.

Over the course of the week, we stayed at two different churches for three nights, and Mt. Cross camp for the other nights. Staying at the camp showed all of God's creations and how beautiful they all are. We got to bond with many new people and even with people that we were friends with before. One night, we were doing worship at the beach around a campfire and it was so amazing. Everyone was participating and singing and you could see everyone coming together as one. Now that the week has come to an end, it's kind of bittersweet; as much as everyone is ready to be back on their own schedules, it was definitely hard to say goodbye to all of these wonderful experiences. I would like to give a huge thank you to all of the sponsors of this trip because it definitely wouldn't have been possible to experience all of these amazing things without you.

Ella Laessig

In just eight days, my life was, simply put, changed. The experiences that I was a part of will stay with me, and the memories I made with friends new and old are ones that I will cherish forever. We shared laughs and cries, knitting us together closer than ever before. These relationships were a vital part in this experience. We visited many super fun places throughout the trip, from the half view of the Golden Gate Bridge, to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk and Alcatraz Island. One of my favorite sightseeing activities was surfing, which I had never done before. It was super exciting for me, and a little scary. The service work we did, however, was what made the trip for me. Our first day of service work I spent time at the second harvest food bank, which I packaged sacks of fresh produce for families in need. I really enjoyed this because as a group we worked really well together and got a ton done. My favorite service experience by far was getting to work on the Habitat for Humanity home. I loved this in particular work because I really got to see with my own eyes the difference and progress that I was making.

In all these experiences, I was able to see God everywhere. But there were two particular moments on this trip where I felt his presence the most which were at our campfire at the beach and at prayer around the cross. There was a moment on the beach where our group was singing and worshiping together, and I felt a powerful connection to both the group and God. The second moment was when we had our prayer around the cross. The support that this group had for each other touched me immensely and I felt God there, among us as we prayed. Prayer around the cross was overall one of my favorite moments from the trip and I feel closer to the group because of it.

I personally loved, grew, and shared on this trip in many ways. I loved the people around me as we had this experience together. One way in which I grew was in my faith, and realizing even more than before the beauty of the Earth and how God created all of it – and me. We as a group shared our songs with our readers from Mt. Cross, and shared our services with the community. Mt. Cross was a beautiful place to stay, and they had lots of delicious apple leaves. The counselors were all super nice and I give them props for putting up with us.

However, this life changing trip would never have been possible without the adult leaders and our generous sponsors. Being able to put up with 45 kids for 8 days is exhausting, and the patience our leaders had was amazing. And finally, a huge thank you to our sponsors, because without their support we would have never had this life altering time. I had an absolutely amazing time on this trip, and I am beyond excited for the trips to come.

Callie Martin

This past week has truly been life-changing. I had never been on a trip with my church before the 2019 Youth Mission Trip. Quite honestly, I wasn't sure what to expect. I helped out with numerous fundraisers and knew of about half the people who were going, but I was only good friends with two of the other girls. One thing I will most definitely take away from this trip is that you don't have to be smart or athletic or have any specific characteristics to fit in. You can be yourself and the people around will love you for who you are, just as God does.

Although I felt God's presence throughout this whole trip, there were a few specific moments where I felt his love more than usual. I truly felt like a Child of God at the Food Bank, at the Restore, at the Homeless Garden, and while worshipping around the campfire every night. Every night we sang a song that went, "And he said go in peace and love one another, as I first loved you. Proclaim to all who hear the good news of my coming, keep faith in all you do." This song will always hold a special place in my heart. There was something special about it that instantly brought me joy.

Another meaningful moment I experienced on the trip was at the Food Bank. One of the volunteers explained why he volunteers as much as he does for several years now. He said he volunteers to give back to the community that he once destroyed because he was a drug addict. He went to prison for 5 years and decided to turn his life around. Unfortunately, he is now battling cancer, but he asked that we say prayers for him. This moment opened my eyes to how lucky I am for the necessities God and my family have provided me with.

I loved others on this trip by giving back to the community, accepting people for their true colors, and for including everyone. The people who came along on this trip helped me dive deeper into my faith, specifically at the Prayer around the Cross. I plan to share my experiences with others from our congregation to encourage more people to go next year. Thank you again to the sponsors, adult leaders, and my peers for making this an unforgettable trip. I will cherish the memories for the rest of my life.

Taylor McMurray

I don't even know where to begin! This week has been amazing. I've grown so much in my faith! The very first place I saw God on this trip was when we first got to Mt. Cross and we were put into our small groups. My group went to the spider web challenge. The goal of the game was to get each person from one side to the other without hitting a rope and whenever you

went through a hole it closes and you have to pick another one to get through. Seeing all of us working together and laughing, despite only learning each other's names 20 minutes before!

God was also very present in our van rides down to San Francisco! In some neighborhoods you'd see 5 to 10 nameless people all living under a bridge or a tarp or under a bus loading area. Although this isn't a positive God experience if you look at it from another point of view it can be. We were going to be working at the second harvest food bank a couple days later! While thinking about that work to come and the homeless right in front of us, I found God in the hope. I had hope that through the second harvest food bank the amount of work we did and with time the homelessness would decrease.

Another God experience would've been the story Paul shared. Paul is a common volunteer at the second harvest food bank. He shared how he was a drug addict and did many bad things in town. One day he passed out and he woke up to his family around him crying! Once he was released the doctor said "you can go back out there and continue what you've been doing and not make it to Christmas or choose a different path! Paul chose a different path and has been helping at second harvest for over 10 years! Paul's story was an eye opener into the life of many people in Santa Cruz, San Francisco, and San Jose. God always shows two paths with each choice, and it's our choice to find the right one. The most meaningful moment on this trip was probably seeing the lady next to the house we were working on. One day this week four of us worked on turning a garage, separate from the house, into a one bedroom apartment! While we were working the lady who is renting her garage, because she was having trouble paying for her house, came by to thank us. Seeing her face and just seeing how thankful she was made me feel like we were making a difference in someone's life. Sometimes throughout this trip it was hard to see the change we were making or the impact we had on someone. It was definitely a feeling I won't forget!

Throughout the week, loving, growing and sharing was the easiest! The group of people on this trip and the people I've grown close to made it so easy. We all experience this trip together, walking in faith and building each other up every day! Whether we were at our service projects or just walking down the street the people around me inspired me to be a better Christian. One night after the boardwalk someone has two rides left on their card, but instead of throwing it away, this person gave it to someone else. Although this wasn't a hard task, it made me realize that we have so many things that we just throw away. This person showed me what it meant to give and share. Not only did this person give away her rides, but four more people followed after. This was the continuous pattern the whole week! The entire group was full of leaders willing to give a part of themselves this trip. Overall, the people will be my greatest take away on this trip and all I can say is I can't wait to continue to love deeply, grow spiritually and share abundantly with this group of people.

Zoey Moser

I saw God in the beauty of nature. He was in the Redwoods at camp and the waves at the beach. I saw God in the service work we accomplished. He was in the food bags at the Food Bank, the trenches at Habitat, the fruit at the Homeless Garden. But most of all, I saw God in the

people surrounding me. He was in every smile, every laugh, every cheer, every high five, every hug. God was with us because we were with each other.

There are lots of meaningful moments that stick out, but I think prayer around the cross was the most important part of the week. It was truly holy time- even though I was a crying mess (a lot of us were!). The air was heavy with love and melancholy; it finally hit us that the week was ending and that we would soon have to say goodbye. For prayer around the cross, we sang acapella and put our hands on each other's shoulders as we prayed by candlelight. Cars whizzed by on the nearby street, but we didn't pay any attention. We were surrounded by those we love, giving long hugs and holding hands as we exchanged tearful smiles. At the end, the graduates all had time to share what youth group means for them. It was incredibly impactful to hear how youth group has transformed the faith of so many people. What really made me break down, though, was when I hugged Jett. In Brock's words, we hugged for "four years." Jett is one of my closest friends, and because he graduated this year, this was his last high school mission trip. That's one of the reasons why the end of this week was so hard. At the same time though, that's one of the reasons why I'm glad this trip was so great.

In the most literal way, I loved, grew and shared through service work. I gave my love and shared my time and talents at each mission site. However, the deeper answer to the question "how did you love, grow, and share?" comes from the people I was surrounded by. I loved, grew and shared because of the incredible team I was lucky enough to travel and serve with. I shared my experience, leadership and flexibility. I grew in friendships, new and old. Most importantly, I loved my fellow youth with all my heart. They taught me so much about myself and the world and God. They reminded me why communities of faith are so utterly important. Long story short, I just want to thank the other 54 trip members for one of the best weeks of my life and for more love and support than I ever could have dreamed of. You guys truly have my entire heart.

To the sponsors, thank you for supporting the incredible experiences we had in California. You were all there with us, in our hearts and minds. We could never have had such a wonderful trip without your generosity. Thank you.

Raegan Mulliner

Going to California has been a life changing experience. Being able to experience faith in different people and places was amazing. I could see God in every Christian, fellow volunteer, and person we met on the trip. Everyone assisting us on our faith journey was kind and supportive and I could see God in every one of them. To be able to see how other people of faith worship and being able to take part in that with the people of St. Mark's, Mt. Cross, and St. Luke was something very special.

On this mission trip we were able to allow God to work through us in new and different ways. While helping others we were spreading God's love by helping his creations, whether through helping feed those in need or by weeding a garden I let God to help me serve others.

I grew so much on this trip in many ways. I reaffirmed my belief and seeing God in a place that felt so close to him with beautiful sights and amazingly kind people helped me understand God a little bit more. I was nervous to go on this mission at first and made many

excuses why I shouldn't go. In the end, my parents and I decided I should go, even just to make more friends in my youth group. Now, after an amazing week, I feel so blessed with the opportunity to go on this trip with so many awesome people. I made new friendships and got to know so many new people, I also learned how to sit back and trust God's plan for me and my group. We didn't always have an entire plan for the day, which probably stressed me out more than it should've at first. Eventually I understood that there is always a plan, God's plan, for all of us and he would take care of us.

I made so many amazing memories on this trip that I'll remember for the rest of my life. It was very powerful seeing something we'd worked so hard on really helping the people of Santa Cruz county. We got to double up and grow in our faith while helping others to have their needs fulfilled. I truly believe that God sent us on this trip for a purpose and that what we were doing did matter.

My strongest memory and probably where I felt God the most was during prayer around the cross. Kneeling by the cross while feeling physically the support of everyone around was an incredibly moving experience. I could feel God within me and blessing our worship. I have never felt closer to God then during that and the trip as a whole. In those moments I forgot my doubts and allowed God to help me grow and share his love with all those around me. The memories and friends I've made will last a lifetime along with a new found connection to God and all his creation.

Maddie Nelson

Currently, I am writing in an airplane. Wooooo!! I've never done this before. Anyways we're heading back home and it's bitter-sweet for me. I miss the redwoods and sunburns already. (Just kidding about the sunburn part.) But I want to go home! Still, I know that what God has given me this past week will forever be an experience I'll reflect upon.

During the trip, I saw God mostly in the beautiful environment that surrounds us. The redwoods were taller than I could ever imagine in comparison to our trees back in Nebraska. The time I really noticed God was there when my friends pressured me (in the best way) to sleep under the stars, or what you could see of them, with some other brave members of the group and our counselors. It was so peaceful and even though the forest made me feel small, I felt protected by not only the trees, but by God.

Other than the redwoods, I found the chilly beach beautiful as well. Not only was it because of looks and weather (which we were very fortunate to have good weather while we were there) but because of one of the days we worshipped on the beach. We praised God around a fire near quite a few people and sang our lungs out. Yes, people were staring, but it was the stares of people who wanted to join us. They weren't disturbed, they were intrigued. This was so meaningful to me because it showed how God brings people together for the best reasons and represented how worship was like before the first actual church was created like the-generation-after-Jesus's worship would have been like.

Through our worship and service, I feel like our youth and adults have grown significantly because of this experience. Whether that's by sharing our physical abilities to build

a house (well, dig a trench/use a jackhammer for a driveway, for me) listening to each other while sharing our love of god, or just growing closer together as children of God, I feel that this trip has definitely helped each person think about their faith and how much they've grown or changed as a person.

So, I'd like to thank everyone who made this trip possible. It truly was one of my favorite church experiences. And nowww I'm done writing in an airplane for the first time! I think there is only an hour and a half until we are in Omaha. Man, I'm going to miss the weather back in California... but yeah. I really appreciate everyone who gave us this opportunity and is reading this paper I wrote when I was super-duper sleep deprived ☺

Brock Palmer

The 2019 Youth Mission Trip was an eye-opening experience for me in several ways. First, I gained several new strong friendships over the week we were together. There was something special about serving with other people that really brought us closer. It was really cool to see all the new bonds that formed on the trip, on top of old bonds that grew in strength significantly. Secondly, it was really cool serving at all the different places that we had the opportunity to go to. It felt good to witness firsthand the change we made in the community around us. I really enjoyed that part of the trip. Another part of the trip I really enjoyed was seeing all of the historic monuments around San Francisco, such as Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge. These were once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that I thoroughly enjoyed.

While in California, we stayed at a camp called Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp. Mt. Cross was a Lutheran camp in the redwood forest, and was absolutely breathtaking. While there, we did several activities that brought our group closer together such as service work, going to the beach, and my personal favorite, high ropes. Mt. Cross was a very unique experience that taught us patience, kindness, and service, all while helping us all grow in our faith. At Mt. Cross, there was an abundance of God's creation in the form of gigantic redwood trees that surrounded us wherever we went. Mt. Cross was truly a special place that helped us all grow in not only friendships, but faith. In conclusion, a great group, an awesome atmosphere, and meaningful experiences make for a great mission trip. I can't wait to make more memories and have fun together again next year!

Laura Patterson

I am so incredibly grateful for the opportunity the sponsors made for all of these amazing people to be able to go on this unforgettable trip. Everything we saw wherever we went had beauty in it. This trip truly helped me grow in my faith. I had never been to camp before so when we arrived at Mt. Cross I was a little nervous. When we were kind of settled in and started doing some get-to-know-you games, I felt better and already knew I was going to enjoy my stay.

At Mt. Cross we went on a low ropes course and a high ropes course. On the low one, we were all working together helping each other get across. When it came time for the high one, I

think most people were nervous, I was terrified. I got up to where it started, and let me just say, it's way higher when you're the one up there. But everyone was cheering and encouraging each other. We also went surfing. I definitely will not be trying that again, but I'm glad I tried it at least once. A few times I crashed into the shore and wanted to stop trying, but Elise and Skylar wouldn't let me just give up so I got back out there after fighting the waves and I sat on my surfboard with my hands and feet in the water. I would have to say that was the highlight of the trip for me. It was absolutely gorgeous. Perfect weather, calming water. That moment couldn't have been better.

The next day while the other group did the high ropes course, we went to the Second Harvest Food Bank. We put together bags of fresh organic produce for hungry families to take home. I was on carrot duty. Two to three handfuls and threw out the gross ones. Then Paul told us his story before we left. He was into drugs and was dying when he decided to turn his life around. He has been sober and volunteering for 6 years. He is an inspiration to me and a lot of other people.

Tuesday night we went to the Santa Cruz boardwalk. I only got to go on about 3 rides but they were so much fun. Elise was so sweet to hold onto my bags of gifts I had bought for my family. A bunch of us went on the Big Dipper, which was my favorite! Ian was in the front as we pulled in to get off, he chanted "Go Big Red!" There were some people that asked what that meant. We explained our Nebraska Husker pride.

We did two more service projects this week. One of the ones I did was the Habitat for Humanity Restore. It's a store full of random donated items and they sell them for an affordable price to raise money for more houses. We cleaned shelves, organized, sorted, moved donations, and even built a bunk bed! My group all worked together so well and we got a ton done. The other service project I got to help with was the Homeless Garden Project. We pulled weeds for a couple of hours and you could really see the difference we made. We brought speakers and jammed out which made time fly.

I've had Alcatraz on my bucket list for some time now and I finally got the chance to see it. I saw God shining through these kind-hearted people that I was blessed to be able to go with. Another big highlight of this trip was the prayer around the cross. Each prayer was supported by others as they lay a hand on your shoulder. That is probably the single moment I have felt the closest to God. I'm so grateful for all the memories I have made and the experiences I got to enjoy.

Sarah Patterson

I am so grateful to go on the youth mission trip this year. I have grown in my faith through this past week. I have also made great friendships with the other high schoolers and adult volunteers. When we got off the plane Saturday morning, I was so nervous about making friends and the different experiences. We started to play games and having inside jokes and I felt so included and part of this awesome group! When we got to Mt. Cross we did low ropes and it gave me an opportunity to help out the group. When we started the service work I really enjoyed helping the camp get one step ahead for expanding the camp for the future.

We also helped out at the food bank. I was amazed to see all the volunteers working together to get to a final goal. It was also great to see how much we helped other people in the community to get food.

I was also grateful to see the beautiful sight of the ocean. It was wonderful to see God's creation. When we looked into the water, it was calming and the weather was perfect. We also went to the Redwood Forest and the smell of the trees and the sight of all of them surrounding us was a life changing experience. When we went to the Homeless Garden, we pulled weeds and we made sure the plants were going to grow healthy. It was really relaxing knowing we were helping and making a difference. After we served we went to their store to buy home-made goods. They smelled so good and I bought most of my gifts there. I enjoyed the thought of the community was coming together to change for the better to reduce waste of food.

On one of the last nights we had worship by the fire and it was very emotional for everyone. I really felt God's presence and he had put everyone in that moment for a reason. Overall this trip has been life changing and I will definitely come to youth group and more mission trips! I have made great relationships and memories! I'm excited for next year!

Rachel Rockemann

This week has been an amazing one in so many ways. God was not just in one place here and there. He was everywhere. Every pile of weeds in the homeless garden, to every item being sold or donated at the restore. I saw God in those we helped and I saw God working within us. This week has been a blessed one for sure. I shared the gift of song with my peers, counselors, and all the little kids who were staying at camp with us. I shared my talent of hospitality while working at the restore, and I shared my time with those who needed it. I feel like we have all grown in one way or another this week. I grew closer to God. I grew closer to my peers. I also grew some unbreakable bonds with people that I won't soon forget. This trip has certainly been one of the best I've been on. I hope I can go on more in the future and spread the love of God to others who need it. Spreading God's love doesn't end at the end of a trip. What we did this week was the start of the love rippling to others.

Dominic Sander

The 2019 youth mission trip was a completely life changing experience. I learned so much through this trip and I'm so glad I decided to come. We had fun sightseeing and going to the beach, but also did a lot of meaningful mission work. As a group we went to the beach, saw the Golden Gate Bridge, went to Pier 39, and even saw Alcatraz! The sightseeing was great for exploring the bay area and getting to know each other better. Some of the most meaningful moments I had were with them, coming back from service. We'd share what we did and what that meant to us.

On the trip we did a lot of service. Those 16 and older, (not me) helped at Habitat for Humanity. We also had groups serve at the Second Harvest Food Bank where thousands of

pounds of produce were packed and over 3,600 meals were made. We also got to go to a Homeless Garden where we weeded. We helped build a retaining wall around a high ropes course at Mt. Cross Camp that we stayed at.

I think we all loved, grew, and shared during this service time. We grew spiritually alongside each other as we helped those who needed it. We loved deeply in what we were doing because each and every one of us made a huge difference. We all shared abundantly our time and energy. We assisted the food bank, Habitat, the Homeless Garden, and the camp by sharing our time and energy.

I had my birthday over the trip, on the 18th of July. On that day we went to the beach for a barbecue and worship. I saw God during that worship. The counselors from Mt. Cross led us in worship by the fire. It was a lot of fun worshipping on the beach with everyone, but afterwards, we had some leftover time to sing songs. I saw God shine through the group during that time. Leaders for songs came forward and sang for us all. It was a lot of fun and a great way to end my birthday.

All in all, this trip was amazing and I think it's safe to say everyone who went on this trip has been changed for the better. I can't wait until next year's mission trip!

Hunter Sands

Thank you so much! This has been an amazing experience. Even though I'll be a sophomore soon, this was my first mission trip. I could not have done this without you. The first day was waking up early, flying and sleeping, for me mostly. But towards the end of the first day we got to see the Golden Gate Bridge. Even though we couldn't really see it. It was so foggy. But the Church we stayed at was great. The Sunday service the next morning was good too. The Church had more of a traditional Catholic service even though it was Lutheran. But later after that service we drove to Mt. Cross and I just have to say it was amazing. I've never seen a redwood tree before. Most people were pretty upset about the cell phones but I didn't really care. There was so much to do. We prayed before home cooked meal, including breakfast, lunch and dinner if we were on site.

Monday was so fun. I've been to the Atlantic Ocean on the beach, but I've never been to the Pacific. While I didn't surf, I did go boogie boarding. It's kind of like surfing but instead of standing you're laying down. I let some of my friends bury me in sand. It was either that or go back into the freezing water. I had so much sand on me it took probably 30 minutes to get most of it off. We even had Bible Study on the beach. It was so fun and cool. The theme for Mt. Cross the whole week was our relationship to God's creatures. I'm not really a big nature kind of person, but even I have to say learning like this was really cool.

Tuesday my group did high ropes, then part of a service project. The high ropes was really fun and exciting, but really scary too. I went on both courses, but everyone else really only decided to do one. When I got to the small walk blocks, I had just climbed the tree. The worst part was taking the first step off but then just standing there you realize you're just trusting God that he'll catch you if you fall. And while I didn't fall, I know God was with me the whole time. After that we did a little of our service project we had to clean up and install gravel stairs

around a climbing wall site. My friends and I used a pickaxe and shovels to install the stairs. It was actually really fun. Then after that we had a pool party where Ian kept trying to show off his “fantastic” swimming ability. But luckily we got to end the day with the boardwalk so we didn’t have to see any more of his swimming ability. The boardwalk was so fun. I played mini golf, which surprisingly had 13 holes, and laser tag. I would have gone on some rides but I started to feel a little uneasy. Thankfully I would end the day being okay.

Wednesday was just absolutely amazing. We went to the food bank and I truly felt what Christ meant when he said be humble and love thy neighbor as thyself. We filled 3,600 bags in 2 hours. That means so many homeless families will be able to eat again. After that we worked again on our service project at the climbing site. This time we finished it.

Thursday was spectacular too. We went to the homeless garden that day. There we weeded plants so that the plants going to the homeless would be healthy and clean. To end the day we had a bonfire/campfire at the beach (a different one). It was great. We cooked hotdogs and hamburgers. Then later we made s’mores. It was so much fun.

Friday was something else though. We ate breakfast and had morning worship. Then we left to go see the gigantic redwoods. It was impressive. I don’t remember how many people we got in the tree though. Next we went to St. Luke’s Church where we unpacked everything. We had a great game of soccer and dance party. But for Friday’s grand finale we had prayer at the cross. Everyone gathered in a circle around a couple wooden containers with candles in them. Everyone was crying it was so sweet and nice to remember past love ones and current ones.

Saturday was awesome too. We went to the Pier which had so many shops. Then we saw Alcatraz. It was incredible. It was cool to see something so historical and significant. Then we left to see the Golden Gate Bridge again but, we had to leave to go pack.

And then today, Sunday, was going home day. This week this trip has been so wonderful. I would gladly do it again. I would personally like to thank all the parents that came with us and Ian. But, I would like to especially thank you, the sponsors. I have learned so much about God and myself and made new friends. Thank you so much.

Whitney Scherer

When I signed up for this mission trip, I had no idea what to expect, because I had never been on one before. The past nine days have changed my life in a way I never thought was possible and have helped me to learn about my faith and find myself. There were so many opportunities to see God through his creations and the work we were doing to help others. Even though the projects and activities took a toll on our bodies and we were sore from day one, it was all worth it. Some of my favorite projects were the Second Harvest Food Bank, Habitat Builds, and the Homeless Gardens because we could see the progression as we were working and looking at pictures of before and after made me realize how much we actually accomplished. Not only did we grow in faith individually, but through our work we were able to grow in faith as a group and team together. It was especially important to work as a team to maximize the amount of service we could accomplish in our short nine days. I had so much fun meeting new people, making new friends, and getting to know all of the 54 others on this trip. I enjoyed

learning all of the new songs and prayers that we used in worship and even incorporated into a very meaningful worship on one of our last nights.

I am glad we were able to have so many adult leaders on the trip with us to have a shoulder to lean on and to have constant support throughout the entire trip. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have this as my last youth group memory. Thank you so much for all your support and donations to ward this trip. Without your love and support none of this would have been possible. I can't think of a better way to spend my last youth group event as a graduated senior. I can't wait to take everything I have learned on this trip to college and to continue growing my faith. I will never forget this amazing experience.

Carlie Schlisner

I saw God in many places this week, but he had really shown through when we were worshipping on the beach. We were all celebrating and loving him all at once. It was really amazing! Sure it was really cold outside, but we had each other and our happiness to keep us warm. We didn't even think about the cold.

The most meaningful part of this week was our last worship. We all really leaned on each other when we all needed it. It showed me that youth group is one big family and that they are where I can turn to when I am troubled, and feeling down. I really do love every single one of them.

I really loved that we helped build houses for others that cannot afford it. Also that I was sharing the skills I have and putting it towards something that can slowly but surely change the world. I 100% grew in my friendships. I am so happy that I did.

I really am extremely grateful for all the adults that came on this trip, as well as all of our generous sponsors. Without them I would not have been able to go on this trip. I loved every part of this week and I definitely plan on coming next year!

CJ Schlisner

The whole trip has been a blessing. Without the sponsors, I wouldn't have been able to go. So thank you millions for all the people who contributed and gave to help us fulfill the trip! God was a big part of this journey. He helped me go on this trip and along the trip too. I was relieved every time we drove somewhere, I knew I'd be safe. The nature was a big part for me. There were so many plants and trees I had never seen before. It was so peaceful and calm. What touched me the most about the trip was the impact we had on others. To see the smiles and joy on their faces made everything worth it. I grew a lot spiritually and personally. We all also grew as a community. I learned how to have changes and surprises in life on this trip. Overall, I feel so blessed to be a part of this community and I don't know where I'd be without the church.

☺♥

Chandler Schmit

I write to you 38,988 feet in the air traveling 527 mph. A place that not so long ago would've only been imagined. Looking down on God's creation just as he did when the world first began. Being in the air you see the beauty of the world that so often we walk right through and never see. Miles and miles of mountains, plains, deserts, and water. I would say flying itself is truly a spiritual way to start and end this trip. Being that this was my first mission trip ever, I wasn't completely sure what to expect. However the week coming to an end brought myself and most others to tears. This has been one of the greatest bonding times and moments that were humbling. Wow... don't stop writing in the middle of a sentence and come back assuming you know what you were saying... But this trip has been life changing. Never have I seen so much passion and love. One of many humbling experiences was the work at the food bank. The amount of people that came through to volunteer not including us was amazing. Their work there and the amount of food they put on tables is incredible.

While I, along with my sister and two others, were not able to stay on camp, we had experiences that couldn't be replaced. On Friday before we met with the rest of the group, those of us staying off camp went to a coffee shop. My mom told me there were guitars in the back so I got my coffee and headed back to see. There was an older man sitting and playing one, so I picked up the other and sat next to him. Little did I know that saying hello to the man who introduced himself as Stewart would turn into the most impactful conversations I have ever had. We talked for what I think was at least an hour and played music together. The conversation and music we shared had me floored. In one moment I had to stop playing and fight tears because meeting this stranger was so God sent. I can't say I have ever had a "God Moment" that powerful before. Something changed in my heart. Along with the rest of the week, I have been changed. I never feel like I have been negative toward people but this week working for those who don't have all we do was a good boost to remember that God created each one of us. And we were told to love everyone as if they were yourself. Every day after doing service work I felt accomplished. Not for myself so much as knowing I did something that I know for a fact will help someone in their walk of life. There were so many moments that words can't explain and that nobody could understand without experiencing it. For all the sponsors, I thank you more than you could know. I have grown up in the church but this is by far the greatest experience in my faith that I have ever had. Even just your prayers and thoughts for us while we were gone made this trip all it could be. Somehow God was there around every curve of the road and every step of our way during this trip. Without all of you, this life changing experience may have never happened. I can't express enough as to how much this trip formed me and how grateful I am for this experience. We all love and appreciate you!

Eden Schmit

This past week has been such an amazing, faith building, and incredibly fun time. All of the high school kids and adults were so awesome to be with this week. I built up so many

relationships, and got really close with a lot of people this week. I also met so many people and gained new friendships this mission trip.

In California, we got to serve in many different ways, helping out around the community. I got to serve at the Food Bank in Santa Cruz where we had to put together packages of fresh produce, and foods going out to their community. I really enjoyed serving others in this way to provide them with their needs for food, especially healthy food. Some youth went to build at Habitat for Humanity and the Habitat for Humanity Restore, so we were able to serve the community in that way as well. I also had the opportunity to pick up trash on the beach with some of the other youth: Chandler, Brooks, and Madelyn. We ended up collecting a huge bag of trash from the beach that otherwise would've been left behind. We really enjoyed doing this because while we were serving, we got to enjoy the beauty of the beach and the ocean. By doing this, we were not only able to serve the people in the Monterey Beach area, but also to make the beach even more beautiful than before. Also, we were able to stop some trash from ending up in the ocean, or harming the ocean wildlife.

Another service project we did was at the Homeless Garden. There are so many wonderful and fresh crops at the garden available to those in need. We helped to pull a ton of weeds from the rows of crops, making more room for the plants to grow and be healthy. All of the service work we did was so incredibly faith building in the sense that we were able to help others in need in other communities. You could really see God's light shining through all of the youth and volunteer to be with, and driven to help other people in need. To me, seeing this is such an amazing experience and different way to see God that I might not see everyday.

Not only was this service work faith building; it was also incredibly fun! Working and hanging out with your friends for nine days is so fun. You build up your relationships so much and get to know everyone in a whole new way. When you do stuff like this with your friends you are constantly laughing and having fun. This is what makes mission trips some of my absolute favorite memories. Not only are you building your faith, spreading God's love, and serving others, you are also with some of your best friends the whole time, having so much fun together.

The adult leaders on this trip were so incredible, especially Ian. They always are so caring, patient, kind, helpful, loving, and supportive towards us. Not only did they mess around, laugh, and have fun with all of us, they dealt with our tired, hungry, and grumpy sides as well. This whole time, they never got worked up with us and always kept their cool. One of the adults that I will remember is Kristin. She would always talk to me, was always so fun and funny, and she is also one of the most caring and sweet people I have ever met. She was always there to make me smile and always gave me the best hugs before it was time to go back to my cabin. A huge thanks goes out to Ian. He is the most passionate and hard-working person I know. He always made sure everyone was happy and safe.

While on this trip, we did a lot of mission work, we also did some things just for fun, and did some sightseeing. We went to Monterey Beach on Monday, where we got to hang out for part of the day. While we were there, some of us surfed in the ocean. For me, surfing was one of my favorite memories and one of the best things that I have ever done. Sitting out on the surfboard in the middle of the ocean was a huge God moment for me. All you were worried about was having fun and looking for a big wave to catch. While out there, I laughed and smiled

so much. I caught some waves, encouraged others, talked to a lot of my friends and made new ones, and received encouragement from others. It was truly one of the most fun things I've done.

We also did some sight seeing in the San Francisco area and saw many cool things. We saw the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and went to Pier 39. All of which were super amazing and fun, especially with all the youth. Madelyn, Brooks, Chandler, and I also went on a hike through a river and some rocks, which was incredible. It was so, so beautiful, and swimming in the river was super fun. It was an amazing example of God's creation and all of his beauty.

One more thing that we did that I really enjoyed was going to the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. There, I rode some super fun roller coasters with my friends. We went on a couple rides more than once, which was so cool! I loved hanging out down there, browsing in shops right next to the ocean.

Lastly, a massive thank you to the sponsors of the 2019 Youth Mission Trip. This would truly have not been possible without you. Thank you so much for making this opportunity possible for our youth. We are all so thankful for your generosity. Overall, this mission trip to California was an incredible, fun, faith building, and unforgettable experience. Thank you to all the youth and all the adult leaders for making this trip one of my absolute favorite memories, and something I will always love.

Kate Schoening

This week has been very impactful, not just for us, but for those we served. During this mission trip we stayed at Mt. Cross Lutheran Camp near Santa Cruz, California, and we did various service projects throughout the week- both on site at camp and off site at Second Harvest Food Bank, Homeless Garden and Habitat for Humanity Builds and Restore. While we were at Second Harvest Food Bank, we learned that for every one dollar, they can provide 4 healthy meals. When we served there, we put together bags of food. Each bag had 6 cans and 3 packages of various foods like beans, rice and corn. In total, we packaged 11 thousand pounds and 3600 bags of food. It was really amazing to see how much we can do when we work together, and it was definitely a God sighting for me to see how much we can help others in just a few hours!

During this mission trip we also did a lot of digging (ha ha)! One of our on-site service projects at camp was helping to rebuild steps and retains around the climbing tower, and we had to move a lot of dirt! We also had lots of banana slugs at camp, (and mosquitoes). The digging continued for most of us that went to Habitat for Humanity Build site. Some of us dug trenches, and the group I was in dug a three foot hole for drainage! That was really fun for the four of us, Cambry, CJ, Taylor and me. When Cambry and I weren't putting up siding, we were helping dig the hole, and by the end, we had cut up the redwood root that ran from across the street to the backyard! That's crazy! (Also another God sighting!)

Some of my favorite memories from this week came from going to the beach twice. The second time was really cold, but we had worship with some of the camp counselors. It was just like worship we'd have at camp each night by the fire, but this time, at the end, they let us sing some songs that we wanted and it was so fun! We sang the hippo song and other favorites from VBS.

Another fun memory is the high ropes at camp, because we were all super supportive and cheering each other on. It was so great because you didn't feel alone, even though on one course you had to walk across a tree trunk up in the air with nothing to hold onto; you had to balance! I also had so many cool God sightings this week. One was seeing deer at the camp on the first day. Another was going to the redwood forest and seeing more of God's creations, and just how beautiful our Earth is!

The service work we did this past week was so fun and so fulfilling, and I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to go on this trip. I want to thank the sponsors for donating the money to make this trip happen. We couldn't have done it without you! I also want to thank the adult leaders who came on the trip. It was so fun with you guys and I applaud you for having the patience for us! I am also incredibly grateful for the new friendships I've made and the old ones I've strengthened. I am very grateful for this group of people.

Kamryn Snyder

This week I went on my very first mission trip. Visiting a whole other part of the country opened my eyes to an incredible amount of hardships and struggles that people experience everyday. Reading about something in an article and seeing it out your car window are two completely different things. People say that mission trips allow you to grow in your faith, for new relationships, and grow as a person. While all of that is true, what I saw grow and change the most was my confidence as a Christian. Having lots of friends who don't believe and make jokes about my faith has been a challenge. But seeing the impact I have made in others lives as well as my own has shown me what it truly means to be a Christian. At the food bank we packed 3,600 bags of food for children in Santa Cruz. The next day we pulled weeds for about 4 hours. Knowing that what you are doing is going to have a direct positive effect on others gives a whole new meaning to the word "productive".

Meeting new people who have had completely different experiences living in California has been great. Living in a state like Nebraska, it can be hard to experience diversity. However, those interactions with others who aren't like you is important to grow as a person, and to become more accepting of all people. I didn't just see God and grow in my faith because of the people that I met. Living in God's beautiful creation in the redwoods has been a humbling experience I will never forget. I also think this trip has been a great way for me to get out of my comfort zone, and to form and strengthen relationships. My alone time was limited to the 4 walls of the bathroom stall for about 3 minutes. I had to talk to others and make conversation even when all I wanted to do was go into my room and watch TV. That has allowed me to grow within myself in more than just one way.

Serving the Lord and devoting time to him was amazing. On a normal day, I will pray or give time to God about one, maybe two times. It has been crazy to be busy serving God and others at the same time. Usually when we get busy, we forget about God and focus only on ourselves. During this trip, I sang praise on the beach and among the trees with other youth. It has been a blessing to grow in my faith and to experience so many new things these past 9 days. I am excited to see what the future holds for my relationship with God. I would like to thank the

sponsors for allowing this incredible trip to happen. Like Ian says, youth are not just the future of the church, we are the church. Investing in something like that should bring a sense of joy and pride like no other.

Lauren Stull

Whether it be in giant redwood trees or the shared laughs in the van, God was in everything. As a kid I was taught that if you just took a moment to look around, you would be able to see God. As I grow up and get caught in a busy schedule, it becomes harder to do this. The 2019 Youth Mission trip gave me the much needed opportunity to step back and look upon God's creation with awe.

It was made very evident that this world was created by a powerful and careful creator when visiting the Redwood forest and spending time at Mount Cross. On the walk back to the cabin one night, I looked up at the stars that are incredibly far away. I was hit with the reminder that our God can create such beautiful and huge things like the stars and planets, but he still loves me. He has a specific plan for me, one small human in this giant world. Another moment where God's presence was felt was at worship. I could tell God was working in us when our voices joined together to sing him praises. These were beautiful moments that I will remember for years to come.

God was shown in people this week. God was in those at the Food Bank who volunteered their time for the hungry. God was in those who committed their lives to building homes for those who can't afford them. God was in the conversations with new friends met on this trip. God was in the hugs given to those who were having a rough time. In every act of kindness, big or small, God was present and working.

This trip was an amazing opportunity to put into perspective how blessed I am. It reminded me to be thankful for the food on my table and the roof on my head because so many people do not have this. Realizing those things allowed me to grow closer to God. Everything I have in this life comes from him, not anything I have done. Because of this, I know I need to commit to living for God. Being able to spend a week serving at Mount Cross, Second Harvest Food Bank, and Habitat for Humanity is a great step in this direction.

As I return home, I will keep this trip in mind and remember the special moments. When I remember what I experienced on this mission trip, it will remind me to love and serve others like we did this week. It is important to think of others and put yourself in their shoes, and this trip allowed me to do that.

Being a part of this mission trip was something truly special. There is no other experience that allows you to love, grow, and share quite the same way. Mission trips are full of ways to serve others, while growing emotionally and spiritually. So many blessings have come out of the 2019 Mission Trip that I would not trade for the world. The bonds and friendships that were made are so important and special. I know that I will always feel loved and supported by every leader and youth on this trip, and that is something I will always be thankful for.

This trip would not be possible without all the donations that we received. Thank you to all of our sponsors for allowing us to travel to San Francisco, California for a trip that was so

impactful. Thank you for investing your prayers, donations, and time in the youth. Thank you for empowering us to be leaders. Thank you adult leaders for spending a week with us. You are very brave for committing to spending a week with 45 teens. You made sure we had fun and supported us the whole time. I would also like to thank Ian for organizing an incredible trip and making each and every person on this trip feel loved. The 2019 Sheridan Mission Trip was one to remember. I look forward to experiencing even more in the future!

Ella Swank

The 2019 Youth Mission Trip is for sure a trip to remember. I grew in so many ways and learned so many things. God was truly everywhere during our trip. I specifically saw him in the redwood trees. He made his creations known by providing such an eye-catching wonder. The trees provided a special, calm, and peaceful place to stay. I also saw God in banana slugs. Some were small, some were big. At the same time they are so fragile, and one tiny touch could hurt them greatly. These slugs were everywhere around Mount Cross and the Redwoods, which shows that people care about them enough not to hurt them.

I saw God in laughs and smiles. He created every one of us so uniquely that every smile and laugh was different. We had a lot of laughs during this trip, whether it was about the game “What are the Odds”, making us do crazy dares, or cracking random jokes, God was with us. I saw God in the waves on the beach. God made each tide so peaceful and relaxing. We surfed those waves, we ran through those waves; we just had a blast enjoying God’s creation. We could have sat on the beach forever.

A few meaningful moments occurred during this trip. One of my favorites was worship on the beach. We sang, danced, prayed, and praised God in front of all to see with no worries about what others thought. It was one of our last worship services with the Mount Cross Staff. I will forever remember that moment with all of my friends. Another meaningful moment was prayer around the cross. Every so often during that service, we knelt by the cross filled with sand. Other people would put their hands on you as you prayed. After you were done, you would light a candle. By the end of the service, most- if not all- of us were crying. It was a really meaningful moment. There were so many hugs, it was a very special time.

On this trip I learned to love, share, and grow. I learned to love more by supporting everyone, no matter what. If they needed to talk, I was there. I grew in many ways as well. I grew in faith, and got closer to God. I loved doing small group devotionals, it was very meaningful. I also grew in friendships. I made so many new friends that I can’t wait to hang out with more. They were always there when I needed them most. I grew through service as well by helping out at the Homeless Garden, Food Bank, and on-site work at Mount Cross. I hope I showed all I met the love of God and that youth can make a difference too. I also shared in many ways. I shared sunscreen with those who didn’t have any to help them stay protected- even though I got badly burnt myself. I shared water so nobody became dehydrated. I also shared my hair-washing skills by washing my best friend Cadie Bonneau’s hair in the sink! That definitely was a memory to remember. I also shared my talent of music and my positive attitude that benefitted the whole group.

I would like to thank all the sponsors so much for giving me the opportunity to go on my first mission trip here at Sheridan. Without you, we couldn't have done all of this. Another thanks to all the adult leaders that came on this trip with us. They all provided us with support, love, and guidance. Special shoutout to Michelle Denker who took amazing care of my blistered sunburn! Thank you all again, it means the whole world that we had people supporting us. I'm so pumped for next year!!

Cambry Waddell

This week has been a life changing experience that truly made me feel more connected with God. Being in a family that is constantly moving, it is easy for us to forget what is important. This week in the Redwoods showed me just how much I'm missing. The Lord is everywhere, but nature is one of the best ways to see his creation. Often this week, we hiked through the forests to see these huge, powerful and almost indestructible trees. At night you could just sit there in silence and hear every little creature come to life. Just sitting such a beautiful place opened my eyes to the infinite detail the Lord used when creating the earth. But almost more incredible was the ocean. While yes, it did try to attack us while we were surfing, the wide array of blues that you could see were stunning. You could sit on the beach and know that you are connected with the rest of the world. Across that ocean was a whole different person with a story of their own. It was an incredible feeling and truly made my faith stronger. It just shows how much the Lord loves us to give us such a beautiful place to live.

Nature is a beautiful creation, but an even more powerful one is us. This week I met a plethora of people from different backgrounds. I spoke with a man at the Food Bank while we were packaging meals. He spoke of his life and even told me a story about his short trip to Nebraska. I saw God within him as he told me of the services he does and how he's tried to help people. As a group we also spoke with a man who has devoted his life to being a servant. He was addicted to heroin for a large portion of his life. But one day when he was closest to death, he decided to turn his life around. I believe the Lord showed us this man to prove he is always forgiving, and will love you no matter what. I saw just how powerful our Lord is and how the holy spirit can light up all different parts of your life. I have been truly blessed on this trip to meet so many new people within our Church.

This past year I really wanted to be a part of the Church, and realized I had slowly fallen out of a relationship with God. I had heard of youth group but feared I wouldn't be accepted because I'd be joining so late. I was reluctant to go, but Ian, being the powerful convincer he is, never gave up on me, and I came when I could. I even went out of my comfort zone a little and came on this trip. Fearful I wouldn't know anyone, I was terrified to go. But, I met some of the most beautiful people inside and out on this trip. People I know I can trust and I know can help my faith grow. Some of the people I would call very close friends. This was the most meaningful part to me: to see all of these people I barely knew accept me and make me feel welcomed, that I could rely on any one of these people to have my back. Even though we just met 8 days ago, it feels as if it has been a lifetime. I felt as if God sent Ian to our Church for people like me. For those who fear acceptance, because he showed me that the Church will always accept you no

matter how long you stray away from it. And not just that; without all of those text messages, I never would have had the courage to come on this trip. I really needed this trip to show me the power of God and to remind me that his love never leaves.

In California I had the opportunity to work with Habitat for Humanity. Here I met an incredible man who at age 85 continues to work with this organization about three times a week. My heart grew working with him and his other volunteers. We shared stories from Nebraska and then California. We spent 7 hours building a house and just talking. It was incredible to her about their lives and connect with them. Overall, I have loved this opportunity I was given and felt my love of God and relationship grow immensely. I am so thankful for all the donations given and time spent in preparation of this trip. Thank you!

Melissa Abele

It was a few days before we were to leave for California. I sat in my living room, watching TV late at night, ignoring that there were preparations to be made. I had not yet packed a single item. I had not yet purchased a new sleeping bag. I had not yet memorized all the youth's names. I was completely overwhelmed. There was still work to be done at home, another daughter to spend time with, a husband left with all of the burdens I was leaving behind. I signed up for the mission trip last Fall with the aura of excitement still reverberating from the Youth Gathering. I knew it was a great experience, but in the haze of fear and anxiety of what would come over the next week, I had forgotten. It was time to be reminded.

We arrived in Omaha, a herd of youth and adults. Parents eager to see their kids off so they could return to their beds at home. The quiet din of excitement reverberated around the airport, and suddenly I remembered. I remembered the connections, the depth of conversations, the broadening of our faith and the shared experiences that would be communicated. There were small pockets of kids and adults sitting around the gate, some were talking as if they knew each other. Others were glancing sideways at others as they struggled to come up with conversation (or maybe struggled to keep their eyes open). The clusters were based on who they knew already from school, youth group, or confirmation groups. These were faces I recognized, some I knew pretty well, others (because I failed to memorize all the names three days ago) I was trying to place. We arrived in San Jose as strangers small-talking our way West.

It would be easy to go through our schedule and point out every time I noticed something specific that was special. As many people know, our group from Sheridan is an outstanding group of youth. I heard Pastor Michelle repeat it time and again, "We have awesome youth." One of the criticisms I heard early on, "I just want to get started on our service." And boy did that happen! When we were finally called into the game, our youth mobilized and it was an awesome thing to hear. At the Food Bank, the manager of the packing line told us how much it meant to have our group there the day before: "Because you were able to get so much done, I was able to spend the evening with my granddaughter. It was her birthday and I thought I would be working and not able to see her, but you got so much done I was able to spend time with her. Thank you!" That was a God moment. But the kids just thought they were doing what they should be doing, it wasn't above and beyond.

At the Habitat for Humanity Restore, the youth who worked in the shop had assignments to do things, and they completed them quickly and efficiently. Sometimes the time went slowly, but that is because our youth know how to work and how to do it well. Time and again, we heard from the volunteer coordinators: "your youth are such great workers." And they are, and it was great to see that. But that wasn't what really hit home for me this year. After last year's trip, in my reflection, I remarked the following: "After 3 hours of scrubbing, raking, and cleaning they wanted more time to help. They wanted this because that is what we do at Sheridan, we help because we know we have been given so much. We give because God's role in our lives have changed everything for us and we want to share that change with others." And I experienced seeing that again this year. It was another great reminder.

We discussed at every pre-trip meeting: "This is not a mission trip clique. We won't come back and isolate those who didn't go with us." And that is true, we cannot isolate ourselves. However, this group of 55, we have been through something together. When we look across the worship center on a Sunday morning, it takes just a few moments to recognize those we were with. A look confirms, "Hey, look at us encountering each other in the real world." The morning after we got back, I happened to be at East High in the hallway working on something as a parent volunteer. I heard a voice behind me and one of the youth was there for band meetings. We hugged. Then another youth came through, and we did the same thing. A third youth from the trip walked through and we talked a bit. In all, I spoke with 4 youth from the trip that morning. The other parent sitting with me said, "Boy, you really did build something on that trip." And we did; it shows, and now we want to NOT keep that excitement to ourselves, but spread it. I think we grew even closer together this year than last. Might have been the van rides, or the lack of enough shower facilities, or the shared grumbling about the stiff mattresses (really, they were good mattresses for a camp!). But when we see each other, it's like we have a secret handshake, and we aren't leaving people out, but trying to draw more people in. We want to teach more people the handshake.

Our first day at Mt. Cross camp, we broke into bible study groups. Eventually one of our group decided to blow grass blades like a whistle. The siren song spread throughout the Sheridan group. The counselors seemed at a loss as each of the small groups seemed to be communicating through grass-blowing shrieks. It was like a call to each other across the field. "Hey, Sheridan, we all here?"

There were things I would think about as being difficult or a strain, but as I reflect on the week now, I can't seem to remember what they were. The trek to our cabin was laborious. It was a personal trainer's dream and a nightmare for those attempting it. The final leg of the hill was a stereotypical symbol of the difficult climb we all must overcome. Imagine a person standing atop the craggy mountain holding his hands up in victory. That's how it felt every time we reached the cabin, once we caught our breath to appreciate it. But even that hill, in the end, was something we kind of missed. I never thought I would come to appreciate it, but I did.

I texted home and told Jeff (my husband) a few of the things we did. Personally, I drove at 15-passenger van through the mountains, in the city, took it on a u-turn AND parallel parked it. I did not think I would be able to do that. One of the final nights, another adult encouraged me sleep outside with others under the trees. I hate bugs and really needed a good night's sleep. So after dragging my feet, I did sleep out there, under the canopy of the redwoods, with chill of the

air tickling my nose, with a symphony of sounds hurtling into my ears. But there I slept, probably the best night of sleep the entire trip. Jeff's comment on both things, "Boy, you are really going out of your comfort zone." But here's the thing, it didn't really feel like that much of a stretch, but the support of the group made it easy. It didn't feel like a majorly daring event, because when I laid my head down on the tarp with 6 others near me, we were in it together. We were supporting each other to try something new and it wasn't as scary with those behind us.

One of our last nights, we gathered outside the church where we were staying for "Prayer Around the Cross." This is a moving tribute to each other and the power of prayer. There is a small ceremony and lighting of candles, then the graduated youth share a message with the group. There are a few in this class who are new to me this summer, and there are a few who have made a sizable impression on my prior to this year. I was prepared somewhat for what would be said, but the interesting thing about that night is that in the dim light flickering from the candles in the sand, fear and anxiety about speaking dissipates. What we are left with is a solid shared connection around the group and confidence to share our inner thoughts. Eight days earlier, we were glancing at each other, trying to identify who they were, what they were about. We were small-talking strangers. Now we were gathered around candles sharing our innermost thoughts, supporting each other with gentle hands through prayer. I could identify these strangers who had become family by the sound of their snuffles.

It's cliche to say, possibly, that this experience taught me to be even more trusting in the future because we have strong youth. It might be cliche, but it's true. And I was reminded of that again this summer in California. It's cliche to say, possibly, that this experience introduced us all to each other more closely and left us with a greater strength in our relationships with each other and the church. Its cliche to say that this experience had the youth teaching me more than I taught them. They might be cliches, but they are true.

We gathered as a herd of strangers in the Omaha airport at a ridiculously early hour, but we departed from the Omaha airport a week later a family. I said it during the waning light of the cross and I will say it again. A part of my heart was shared with each of those on that mission trip. And when I look across the worship center, I can look at one of those other 54 youth and adults and know, know that we were there together and we were changed, even if it was just a little. These are faces I now know and names I now know and stories that go with those faces and names. And I saw God in every single one of them. It was a great reminder that God was there, every step of the way, even up the steep mountains to the cabin, and through the pulsing winds in the Marin Headlands, and through arguments and missing sunglasses. God was there when one of our youth put his arm around one of the young campers as we were worshiping, and when Rachel felt the ocean water lapping at her toes for the first time. God was there when two women from the church woke us up with homemade Mexican Hot Chocolate and pastries for breakfast and when they greeted us again in the evening with more delicious food for dinner. God was there when Chandler took over the counselor's guitar and led worship singing on the beach and when the counselors were later picking at the strings and trying to remember the words to the songs we sang so they can introduce them to next week's campers. God was there every step of the way and it was a great reminder.

Thank you to all of our donors, all of those left in Nebraska. We are excited that you were there with us in California, every step of the way. You were there with your thoughts and

prayers, with your monetary and morale support. The impact that is made by our youth (and adults) from the California Mission Trip would not have been possible without the selfless giving provided by those who didn't have the opportunity to see first hand these life-changing experiences. Thank you.

Cathryn Breutzmann

Sometimes stepping away from the familiar daily routine helps us open fresh eyes to see God around us. We saw God in nature, in the organizations we served, in the community we built, and many other places.

The first place many of us saw God was the unique natural environment around us. We forget that wide-open fields are a beautiful gift from God due to it being a daily sight, but the new sights of California were eye opening. There is something about the crashing waves of the ocean, the clouds floating over the mountains, and the giant Redwood trees spanning all the way from earth to the heavens that reminds us of the beauty of God's creation.

We served a food pantry and homeless garden that did amazing work feeding their community. We were inspired by the stories of how they had grown their organizations and about the many volunteers that make their mission possible. We engaged with Habitat for Humanity volunteers helping make affordable housing for others despite the high costs they pay themselves. We spent time with the Bible Camp staff that give up their summers to share God's love with youth from all over.

We maybe saw God most in each other- in our Sheridan family. Stepping away from the comfort of our own families taught us that we are all God's family, and we can rely on each other for a hug, encouraging word, or shared snack when our normal home family is far away. Watching the youth work hard in the dirt or lifting heavy containers of veggies with no complaints- and with a smile- was inspiring. The youth were enthusiastic about serving their neighbors in California and are ready to bring what they learned back to teach and serve God's people here at home in Nebraska.

Michelle Denker

I didn't know what to expect when I volunteered to be an Adult Leader on this year's Mission Trip. I never had the opportunity to go on a similar trip when I was in high school. My daughter and I initially both signed up to go because it sounded fun; we could do it together and it worked in our busy calendar. However, what we gained from it was so much more than I imagined!

I had been my daughter's Small Group Confirmation Leader the past 3 years and knew only a few of our youth in the church, and very few adults from the congregation. I thought that it may be difficult to get to know so many youth, and I was uncertain if I'd mesh well with not only the youth, but the other adult leaders attending. I have to say that one of the best things about this trip was the friendships made, laughs had by everyone, memories that won't be

forgotten and a bond that I feel will hold strong for years to come. It was a blessing to see so many youth make new friends, relate to one another and work as a team/family in so many situations. They were there for one another, supported one another in good and difficult times and encouraged others to be their best and help to their fullest. It was truly a blessing to watch my own daughter come out of her shell and be more comfortable with new people around her. She had such a great time that when information about the Lock In came up, she didn't hesitate to sign up for what she knew would be a grand time with so many new friends.

The God Sightings of the hard work from our church youth were amazing. No matter what groupings you put together, the youth seemed to come as one and work as a team/family. It was neat to see the way they socialized and acted with other volunteers from the various organizations we went to. Personally, I enjoyed hearing them break out in song at any given moment and not be afraid to be leaders. Not to mention, the scenery was beautiful and breathtaking throughout our trip.

While I've helped volunteer in the past at various things, this trip opened my eyes to know that there are so many opportunities here in our own community that could use help. It was so satisfying to know that we impacted so many lives in our short time in California, and if we took even half of our enthusiasm here to Lincoln, we could involve so many people to make our community even stronger than it is now. It's so much fun volunteering when everyone is there for the greater good and is excited to help out. I know that my daughter and I are excited to involve our whole family in a few things here in Lincoln!

One of the things I loved about the trip was getting to know the youth better; interacting with them, laughing with them, building relationships so that they knew all of us adult leaders were here for them when they needed us...whether we were on a Mission Trip or back home. It was great to meet other adults from our congregation that I likely wouldn't have met otherwise. They have become great friends and I hope that we can all join in on more activities and Mission Trips in the future!

There were really too many meaningful moments to talk about, but something that I keep thinking back on was the Prayer at the Cross. It was mind blowing to see so many youth emotionally impacted and sincere about what they were praying about, who they were praying for, etc. Faith and love can change someone's lives, and I honestly believe that everyone experienced an amazing feeling of love, hope and trust throughout our trip and time together. It was an honor to be able to attend this year's Mission Trip, and I am looking forward to more in the years to come. Thank you for letting me be a part of this opportunity.

Jerry Fricke

Dressed to serve! I was a little hesitant at first, thinking about being one of ten adults outnumbered by 45 teenagers. Thoughts of tired and crabby kids fighting with one another and rebelling against the adults ran through my head. Ian was making it sound so great and rewarding and heart filling beyond comprehension. I was thinking he should be in sales! But I thought to myself, it won't be all that bad, right? I mean, I hear of these mission trips all the time and I rarely, if ever, have heard of a person talk down about it. Being skeptical I was thinking

those people were just trying to make light of the horrible decision they made to be a youth leader on such a trip.

I did think it would be a good time to do a little bonding with my step daughter, Lydia, and a good journey to spend with my wife, Janel. Whatever it was, it was just enough to put aside my fears and to pull up my pants, tighten my belt, and be a strong yet encouraging and inspiring adult to youths entering the vastness of adulthood. Little did I know that the experience that lay ahead of me was one that would open my eyes to God's beauty and that I would be the one at the journey's end who was encouraged and inspired.

I was amazed watching how the kids quickly learned to adjust to the sometimes exhausting schedule. I marveled at their patience. One glorious example was at the beginning of the trip when we were all struggling a bit getting organized. We fumbled with the luggage; it took us time to pack and unpack and rotate the shower schedule. Yet, not even one of the youths got frustrated, was impatient, or copped an attitude. Instead, they all quickly adjusted to the schedule. When faced with an obstacle, they adapted and overcame the situation. They asked fewer and fewer questions, taking the initiative to solve problems on their own. Watching them in action was like watching a bunch of working ants all silently communicating in their own way, fine tuning the processes, and by the end of the week we could shower 55 people in about an hours' time. We could pack the luggage into the vans tighter and tighter, making room for the extras that each person was collecting to bring home.

I would have to say that one of my proudest moments was when Dylan, the site supervisor at one of the habitat builds told me that these kids were one of the hardest working groups he's ever had. He continued saying that if he had the same amount of California kids, half the amount of work would have been completed. I told him he should bring some California kids to Nebraska and detasle!

The kids worked hard and had so much fun! I don't know where they get all the energy. It was truly a joy to watch them all. They left as kids and returned young adults.

Janel Fricke

When I first agreed to go on this trip, my goal was to be supportive of my daughter's activity. This was her first youth mission trip and I wanted to help make it possible by filling one of the required adult leader spots. I knew it would be a great experience for her. But I never expected it to be a life changing experience for me.

There are so many comforts in life that we take for granted...our plush mattresses, morning caffeine, daily showers, electronic devices, etc. In addition, we allow our calendars to control our days as we try to juggle raising our children, working, and managing a household. The mission trip forced me to STOP. Slow down. Live in the moment.

When our schedules are too busy, we often miss the moments when God is speaking to us. When we aren't paying close attention, we often miss seeing God working through other people. By leaving Lincoln and all of the distractions that fill my days, I began to clear my mind of my usual worries. I slowed down and began to focus on the here and now. I also began to notice God working in so many amazing ways.

I was able to see God in every single person on our journey. I saw God in the way the youth helped each other, the way they harmonized during evening worship, the way they shared stories and laughs, and the way they supported each other during challenging times. I saw God in the way the youth trusted each other, the way they cared for each other as well as strangers, the way they respected the adult leaders, and in the way they put so much effort into their service project work.

I saw God when all of the luggage miraculously fit into the cargo van. I saw God when everyone made the best out of the less than perfect sleeping accommodations on the first night of the trip. I saw God in the manager at In-N-Out Burger who greeted all 55 of us with a smile and worked hard to ensure that we received excellent service and enjoyed our lunch. I saw God when Sheridan youth helped each other carry luggage up the huge hill when we arrived at Mt Cross. I saw God in the youth who volunteered to make lunches every day for those who were not able to stay at Mt Cross Lutheran Camp. I saw God when Sheridan members interacted with the other volunteers at the Santa Cruz Food Bank. I saw God in the YMCA workers' faces as they welcomed us directed us to their shower facilities. I saw God as Sheridan youth braided each other's hair, taught each other how to weave bracelets, and showed each other how to whistle with a blade of grass. I saw God in the friendships formed and the strong sense of community that developed among those who began this adventure as strangers.

I saw God in nature's beauty. The mighty redwoods, the sandy beach, the powerful waves, the morning fog, the blue skies, the unusual banana slugs, and the brief sprinkling of rain that gave us a break from the hot sun while we pulled weeds at the Homeless Garden.

There is one moment in particular that I find myself continually reflecting upon. While at Mt Cross during the high ropes course, I witnessed how powerful encouragement can be. This high ropes course was an individual challenge- only one person is on the high rope at a time. In many ways, this made the challenge much more difficult and pushed many people out of their comfort zone. Some were pushed further out of their comfort zone than others. I honestly believe that some individuals would not have finished the course if they hadn't felt encouraged and heard the cheers and words of encouragement from the group below. There were a few participants who clearly gave up on the challenge in their minds...you could see it in their face. Some even verbalized, "I can't do this." But when they were encouraged by the Sheridan youth on the ground, they were able to find the strength to continue and successfully complete the course. This showed me the significance of community and how much we really need each other's support to make it through the challenging times in life.

Our mission statement at Sheridan states that we are called by God to love deeply, grow spiritually, and share abundantly. This trip gave me opportunities to live out the mission statement in every way. To begin, I agreed to be an adult leader out of the love for my daughter. Of course I have love for my own child, but I also grew to care for and love all of the youth on the trip. I played the role of Mom to anyone who needed someone to listen, needed some encouragement, guidance, or simply a helping hand. I kept them in my prayers throughout the week of the trip and I continue to keep them in my daily prayers.

I grew spiritually in our small group discussions, our evening worship at the campfire, and our worship at the beach. The discussion questions in our journals helped me connect the work we accomplished each day with our hands to the thoughts and feelings I had in my heart.

I shared both my time and my talents by leading my small group, taking photos of our experiences, pulling weeds at the Homeless Garden, shoveling dirt and rock at the rock climbing wall, scraping old paint off of the deck, making sure everyone was always included, reminding youth to reapply sunscreen and bug spray, keeping track of the youth on outings, and filling any role that was needed at any particular moment. Most importantly, I shared my positive attitude while working and shared words of encouragement to those around me.

I am amazed by the community that was formed by this trip. And I am so impressed with the Sheridan youth! This experience is helping to mold them into the leaders the church needs to continue to grow and reach out to others. Now that we are back in Nebraska, I hope and pray that we all find ways to continue to reach out and serve our neighbors.

Ian Hartfield

Thank you for
being a blessing
to so many and
for building the church. Thank
you for the memories. It is the
honor of my life to serve as your
youth director.
You are always
in my prayers.
Peace, power,
and joy!

Matt Kasik

The alarm rang at 2:15 AM on a muggy July morning. With hardly any sleep, I packed a few remaining items, loaded luggage, and spent a few minutes saying goodbyes to our unsuspecting dog. When the rest of our carpool arrived, it was official: The mission trip has begun. No turning back now. Time to flip the dial from ‘apprehension’ to ‘façade of confidence’.

To an outside observer, the apprehension is understood. For the next nine days (204 hours) I will be embarking on an adventure like none I’ve ever done before. I will be one of ten adults shepherding 45 kids to a far away land in what our fearless leader Ian has previously described as a ‘Life Changing’ experience. “Life Changing” can mean so many things. Like, if you are a kid on this trip and we forget you at the airport, or we leave you at Alcatraz that would surely change your life. I was determined to keep things positive knowing so many parents were counting on me.

If you are a parent of someone who went on this trip, you have a lot to be proud of. God is present in your children; they could not have represented your family, congregation, and state any better. To put it another way, ‘the kids are alright’.

I witnessed kindness. Whether it was helping another youth, an adult, or anyone on our service projects, the youth exhibited an abundance of kindness. For example, one youth give up his seat on the airplane and sat with complete strangers so that a mother could sit with their child for the almost three hour flight. Kindness was present in discussions. I overheard three of our youth talking about one of their senior pictures. "I wasn't pleased with how they turned out," she said. "I'm sure you were beautiful in them," another reassured. "I saw them in Ian's office and they *were* beautiful," the other confirmed. Kindness was also present in actions. One youth lost his sunglasses on the trip. Three other youth offered to buy him a replacement. One actually did buy him a replacement pair. The kindness I saw was genuine and sincere.

I witnessed acceptance. When we arrived at camp, our young adults faced a harsh reality: We were going to have to share our space with kids. Young kids, like 7-10 years old. To many, this was a slap in the face. I'm pretty darn close to being an actual adult; why are we at a summer camp for kids?!? Yet, as the week waned, our youth gained an appreciation for this company. The hokey prayer chants and hand symbols, and the kids bop style worship songs all became enjoyable. Our youth actually played games and had a dance party with the younger kids half way through the week. They accepted that instead of being 'one-of-them', they served as a mentor and someone the younger kids looked up to. During our service projects, our group work side-by-side with complete strangers. A few of the other volunteers were completing sentenced community service hours. Other volunteers were homeless. Still, our youth did not judge and treated each individual with dignity and respect. They talked to them and learned their stories. Instead of instantly judging, our group was open minded and accepted all of those around them.

I witnessed encouragement. This trip pushed everyone to their limits. However, the encouragement that each youth provided to others in the group was awe inspiring. The high ropes course illustrated this better than any other instance on the trip. The group's ability to walk across a plank that was 20ft in the air with *no railing* was very broad: Some did it in under ten seconds while others were too terrified to even get to that point. Still, each youth (or adult) that was up in the air was comforted by the chorus of reassurance from the ground. "You are doing great" or "You are almost there" or "Keep your eyes up" were all commonly yelled as the person in the air pushed themselves to achieve something in the face of their natural fear. Much of what I witnessed on the high ropes course played out in our day-to-day life on the trip. Our youth would encourage each other at every critical juncture on the trip. Reassurance was given to a youth who had never flown before. Those who tried surfing were uplifted by those in the ocean and those on the shore. Hugs were given to some youth who missed home. The collective positive energy of the group was strong enough to power a modest electrical grid for months at a time.

I witnessed hard work. Every service project that we worked for all said the same thing: 'these kids work twice as hard as any group of *California* kids we have!' The sentiment was true. Our group accomplished a prolific amount of work. At the Second Harvest Food Bank, we accomplished so much that a foreman was able to go home early for the first time in months to be able to enjoy his granddaughter's fourth birthday party. On the Habitat for Humanity build site, the degree of difficulty was very high. Our youth dug, by hand, footings for a driveway, chiseling through rock and stone. A three foot drainage hole was dug as well as back filling of

an entire home foundation – again, all by hand. This type of work would have been handled by machines and contractors as most HFH affiliates throughout the country. It was refreshing to see that the stereotype of ‘lazy millennials’ was most-definitely false.

I witnessed the Holy Spirit. There were several instances throughout the trip in which I saw a higher power guiding our youth. During our worship on the beach, I witnessed our group lead worship, rejoicing and singing. To put it another way, I watched 45 teenagers singing church songs on public beach, unafraid of what anyone around them would think. Worship at the cross was the same way. The prayers and sentiments shared by the youth were so powerful I was left to wonder, ‘Why am I crying; I should be laughing after such a joyous week’.

Through these experiences, the notion of a ‘Life changing’ trip became clear to me. Not only was every youth affected in a positive way, but my own life has changed. I learned that I should never underestimate our young adults. They are smart, kind, and genuinely good people. Do not stand in their way; you will only limit what they are capable of. Each night, our small groups would discuss god sightings: Where have you seen god in the past 24 hours? Through this trip, I learned how to look for God, and I see God in our youth.

Kristin Palmer

As I drive down the street and realize that the antennae on my vehicle seems to be lacking something, I quietly chuckle to myself. The banana. The banana that someone had cut in half, and stuck on the Go-Go Van’s antenna, in quiet James Bond like moves, so no one even noticed it was there until we were cruising down the highway, in sunny California, towards our group dinner that evening. The dinner that everyone had been looking forward to all week. A time that we could all kick back, relax, eat, drink, enjoy each others company and reflect upon the week that we had growing, serving, learning, loving and laughing together.

I didn’t expect to come home to Nebraska with bumps and bruises, sore muscles and aches and pains but each one of them reminds me of the fun we had and the hard work we completed to help others. To say I was utterly exhausted would be an understatement. I was able to witness, first hand, 45 amazing, hardworking high schoolers whose love for each other grew throughout the week- and not only for each other, but for the people who we served in and around the Bay Area.

One of the first days in San Francisco, we had the opportunity to stay and worship in a beautiful church in the city. That evening, 3 of us adult leaders went on a “mission” to the local grocery store to buy drinks, plates and napkins for that evening’s dinner, along with enough muffins, granola bars, fruit, milk and juice to sustain these kids throughout the next morning. As we were walking through the grocery store with our flatheads affixed properly to our cart, a woman approached me and asked about them. I kindly explained we were on a mission trip from Nebraska and these were photos of some of the kids who were unable to attend but this was our way of making them feel a part of our group. The smile that came to her face was unmistakable. She reached out her hand to mine and simply said, “God bless you, all of these children and the work you are doing here.” From that moment on, I knew it was going to be an amazing week. And an amazing week it was.

From the roller coaster with all the adult leaders, to the “rocking of the vans”, the frantic race to the other van while stuck in a detour trying to get a picture on the Golden Gate Bridge only to find out it wasn’t our people in the van, the playlists, the banana slugs, the laughs, the hill, “don’t forget your truddy!”, the hugs, the sunburns, the digging, the weed pulling, the letters, the sleepless nights, the precision loading of the luggage, the high ropes, the encouraging, the crying, the small groups, the cheering, the supporting, the prayer around the cross, the hard work, the learning, praying, worshipping, growing and serving. It all had a purpose. A purpose to grow each and every one of us in a spiritual, faith filled, loving way only God could lead us on.

One night at camp, we had the opportunity to sleep under the stars within the redwood forest. I was assured that the “mulch” we would be sleeping on would be far comfier than my mattress in the cabin. “Give it a try!”, they said. “It’ll be great!” As I laid there freezing cold, with a chunk of wood the size of a grapefruit wedged underneath my right hip, I thought to myself, “What am I doing?!? And, how in the world am I going to last out here ALL night long?” Around 2:30 in the morning it became very clear. I laid on my back with my eyes wide open. I had people that I had come to love all around me. I realized that God had laid out His perfect plan right in the middle of that redwood forest. I could see plainly one beautiful star that reminded me of Him and what He wanted me to do that week. He wanted me to love. He wanted me to love the people I was with and the people I would serve. He wanted me to love the hard work, the heat, the freezing cold, the hungry and the poor. He wanted me to teach others to love and He wanted me to know that He loves us as well.

The evening we had a cookout and worship on the beach was a night I will never forget. I watched as our youth sang and danced at the top of their lungs, leading the worship like we were the only ones on that beach. I watched as they sang louder and danced harder, as if no one was watching, yet everyone was watching. The pride that I had in my heart for these kids who were sharing the love of God to everyone who could hear was astounding. I witnessed God at work in this moment that will forever be etched in my mind.

I wanted to be intentional with the time God had given me during our week in California. I wanted to get to know our youth on a deeper level and have them get to know me as well. I watched and listened, hoping to learn more about them so I could help them deepen their faith throughout the week. What I didn’t realize is how much they would impact me. I watched as our youth reached out to one another when someone was upset by something. I witnessed kindness and patience when it may not have been the easiest or most fun route to take. I learned that taking the time to sit with someone and really listen to them can make such a significant impact in that moment. I watched hugs be contagious. I saw kids get out of their comfort zones and I watched them be uncomfortable with their surroundings yet still keep their chins up and encourage one another. I saw our youth cry, laugh, high-five, cheer, sweat, push harder, encourage and pray. I witnessed God at work in, around and throughout all 45 of these amazing, young human beings that I had the opportunity to work alongside all week. I could not be more proud of them and I am so thankful for the opportunity that I had to learn and grow spiritually right alongside them.

And it makes me want to put a banana on my antenna to remind me of how much God loves us all.

Molly Schmit

Wow, who knew that a youth mission trip would be such a powerful and enriching experience! This was my first ever mission trip, let alone Youth Mission Trip with Sheridan, and I must say, it surpassed all my expectations. I absolutely grew in my faith and grew in my love for our Sheridan family.

The presence of God and the Spirit was an everyday experience. From the teamwork of the group of 55 to their genuine love and care of one another, God shined through. We embarked on a weeklong journey with some friends, acquaintances, and even a few perfect strangers. Yet, in just a few short days, we were all friends and one big family. Through our faith journey together, we quickly became a close-knit group. It was truly remarkable to see relationships develop before your eyes.

One of the most meaningful moments on the trip for me was during our worship time on the beach. After the counselors finished leading, our kids just “took over”. They all led in songs and actions, and each and every youth participated with joy. It was incredible to watch these youth be true leaders right before our eyes. This is what I hope and pray for- that we are building up leaders in the church. They 110% stepped up to the plate and led better than any adult could have done. It was definitely a tear-jerking moment for me.

I can say this was one of the most meaningful and wonderful experiences I have had in my life. What a joy it was to travel with these young people and other adults. What an honor it was to represent our church. What a blessing it was to see God’s work right before our eyes. Thank you, Sheridan, for providing this opportunity for our young people to grow in their faith. And thank you for allowing us adults to “tag along”. I truly got more out of this trip than I could ever give back.