

Youth Mission Sunday Testimonies

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Bobby Balliette's Testimony from Blueprint in San Antonio

Hi, my name is Bobby Balliette, I've been a member of TUMC all my life, and recently I went on the middle school mission trip to San Antonio, to work with Blueprint ministries. What Blueprint does is fix houses that are under code, and then bring people like us to go work, and bring the houses up to code.

Our homeowner was Ms. Herzig, and she uses a wheelchair, but despite that, she was still super happy and welcoming to us. Our group installed sheet rock and painted. And believe me, it was a really hard job. Another great thing about blueprint is that they send in teams before and after us to keep working, and build a stronger relationship with the homeowner. Each team had one member of the blueprint staff come along for some of the work, the staff were very helpful, and nice to us, even when some of us would plop down on the couch and watch some TV after a couple hours of work. After all the work was done at the end of the day, we went back to the blueprint facility, which was very big and had plenty of things to keep us entertained. After we had some free time and dinner we went into worship.

The theme for Blueprint this year was "We Will Run". It taught us how to keep a relationship with god our entire lives, instead of giving up earlier than that. It taught us to run a marathon, rather than a sprint. This impacted me because it taught me a new aspect to think about religion, God and life in general. The sermons were given by a local pastor, and I thought they were very good. One night he gave his life story, and told us how he got himself out of that situation using god, and the scripture and that story was really cool to hear and reflect on.

On the last day, all of the teams and the leaders went up and talked about how that week had changed their lives, and it was cool to hear what everybody else had to say about Blueprint, God, and service.

In short, Blueprint was a great experience to connect with god, serve people, and have a bunch of fun.

Philippians 3:14-16: I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

George Nesbitt's Testimony from Blueprint in San Antonio

Hi, my name is George Nesbitt and I had the opportunity to go on the middle school mission trip to Blueprint Ministries trip in June. I've grown up in Tarrytown and I went to CDO and have gone to TUMC for all my life. You may have seen me at VBS or at Sunday School when I was younger, or at the Pumpkin Patch, or Garage Sale since I've been in the youth group I'm hard to miss. I was very excited to have a chance to go on the Blueprint trip. Blueprint Ministries is a non-profit organization in urban San Antonio that provides servant leadership training for youth and adults while restoring homes for elderly, disabled and low-income residents. Their mission is to become part of the San Antonio community by sharing Christ's extravagant love, hope, and grace.

I have to admit that I was having second thoughts at first. I would rather have been playing golf or swimming at the pool, but after the first work day, I was glad I went and remembered why we were there. My group worked on a house whose owner's name was Ms. Hersik. She has had both her legs amputated and has a hard time moving around on her own. One day we invited her to go to dinner with us at Blueprint. She declined because she had to call and get a special wheel chair accessible bus to pick her up in advance just so she could leave the house. She was incredibly nice and grateful toward us. We worked in her living room where she watched TV and every morning when we walked in she would be watching CBS. We would be drilling in the sheet rock and then take a break and watch The Price is Right or The Talk with her.

One of my favorite things about blueprint itself was the speaker, Pastor Josh, that came. He shared so much personal stuff about himself. I know there is no way I could share that much stuff about me. He was very good at delivering sermons that kids could and relate to. He told stories from his childhood and from when he was in college on the football team. The stories he told were interesting but they were also examples of how God pursued Josh even though Josh was trying to get as far away from him as possible.

When I started working on this speech with Zac we looked at two different ways that people look at the world. The first way being Scared Selfish and Separated, and the second being Courageous, Connected and Compassionate.

On the first day when I walked into Ms. Hersik's house I was scared, selfish, and separated, but when we got working, I started being more Courageous, Connected, and compassionate

Often, in these situations we feel like we are the ones who help and the one we are serving are in need of us, but that is not always true. They are helping us as much as we are helping them. Through Mrs. Hersik I saw more of the grace of God and how he helps us through every challenge. In many of Josh's stories he was feeling scared selfish and separated but God wanted Josh to be more connected courageous and compassionate.

It is very easy to walk into any situation feeling scared, selfish, and separated, but we should all try to walk through God and with the three c's instead of the s's.

1st Peter 1:8 it says

"Although you have not seen[a] him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy."

Even though God wasn't physically there on that trip, I definitely felt his presence.

Tyler McHorse's Testimony from ZOE in Zimbabwe

I am Tyler McHorse and I'm going into my freshman year at McCallum High School. I recently got back from a trip to Zimbabwe to learn about the ZOE organization.

I was driven to go on this trip when my grandparents gave me the opportunity and I couldn't pass it up. Going to Africa was something I never dreamed I would be able to do so I was quick to say yes.

ZOE is an organization in Zimbabwe and other African countries that empowers orphans and at risk children to be able to have food security and sustain an income. Their goal is not to provide relief but to help these kids gain skills to prosper for the rest of their lives. In the three-year program, ZOE provides the kids lessons on health and hygiene, training in certain fields of business like agriculture or contracting and gives them each a micro loan to start an income generating project. ZOE then steps back and lets the kids work to help themselves, instead of relying on relief.

One of the ZOE graduates we met whose story stayed with me was Farraih's. He was enrolled in ZOE when he was 18, a few years after his dad died of aids complications and his mom ran away. ZOE gave him a chance to pursue his dreams and start a project of selling scones using his enthusiastic spirit and breeding and selling rabbits. He was able to go from being an outcast beggar to being a thriving entrepreneur with help of ZOE.

ZOE is important because of the countless life changing stories like Farraih's, it gives kids who have been put down so far by society that they can't even dream an opportunity to become a strong and successful person through their dreams in just 3 years. In Zimbabwe, a country where 1 million of the 13 million people are orphans, ZOE is giving these forgotten kids a chance they never would have been given and helping them not only survive, but thrive.

Matthew McHorse's Testimony from ZOE in Zimbabwe

Hello. I am Matthew McHorse. I am going into my freshman year at Anderson High School. I recently went on a trip to Zimbabwe to learn about ZOE. I found out about ZOE because my brother went to Zimbabwe last year and my grandparents invited me to go this year. Although I had seen the photos and heard the stories from last year's trip, I had no idea, the impact that taking this trip would have on me. As I was preparing this talk, this verse shared by one of our travel group members came to mind it is: Acts 4:20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

ZOE is a nonprofit working in 7 countries around the world to help orphans using a 3-year program that does not just give them fish, but teaches them how to fish. The program instructs them in areas such as health and hygiene, disease prevention, agriculture, business, child rights, and they can receive specific training on an area of work they are interested in. About 4 months into the program, they are given a small grant of about \$100 to start an income generating project, often poultry or buying and reselling items, and they are given 25 kilograms of corn seed and 50 kilograms of fertilizer to start a source of food. If their harvest is good enough, they can sell some of it. They are given a larger grant to do a project as a group about one year into the program, which is often a large garden to sell the vegetables or a large amount of poultry.

We met with many groups of orphans. For each group, we went to one of the member's houses to learn their story in more detail. The Better Life group, which started this past April, is sponsored by Tarrytown. When we visited them, we met an 18-year-old named Obert. He was enrolled in ZOE because his parents died when he was 14, and he and his younger sister had been struggling to get food. He was only having 1 or 2 full meals each week. They also didn't have enough blankets for themselves. In Zimbabwe, it is culturally unacceptable to sleep in the same bed as a sibling of the opposite gender, so his sister had been sleeping with a neighbor at the cost of him having to cook dinner for the neighbors a few nights each week. After starting the ZOE program, Obert had started selling small clothing items in a flea market each week to earn enough money to get food. This was not what he wanted to be doing for a long-term job.

He enjoys cooking and wants to be a caterer for the community. He eventually will be able to do work he enjoys through learning the proper skills in the ZOE program.

Before being enrolled in ZOE, Obert was noticed by a group of ZOE orphans in their 3rd year. They wanted to support him and his sister so they gave him corn seeds and fertilizer to help him have enough food. Most of the children in his group were still struggling to get food because the growing season had not yet started, but he had enough food for a full meal 5 times a week. Obert has a good path set before him because ZOE found him. Meeting Obert and hearing his story struck me because I am the same age as he was when he lost his parents. I can't imagine being in that situation and having to care for a younger sibling with no help.

ZOE is important because they give everybody a chance to succeed in their communities. In many African countries, orphans are ignored, neglected and seen as a burden to the community, but ZOE helps them be leaders in their village and the surrounding area.

Zimbabwe seems like it is a world away, but the people there are our friends and neighbors. They are not all that different than us. I challenge you to pray and learn more about how you can help others both near and far. Helping just one person can have a greater impact than we can all imagine. You may not be able to travel all the way to Africa, but you can begin your mission journey by remembering these words from:

Jeremiah 29:11:

For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and plans to give you hope and a future.

Amanda Thompson's Testimony from CSM in Boston

Hi, my name is Amanda Thompson and I will be a junior at Anderson High School this year. My whole life I have grown up in the TUMC family and have attended everything from CDO, VBS, and countless mystery and mission trips. This summer I was given another amazing opportunity to join the youth group in Boston and serve with a program called CSM. For those of you who have not heard of this group, it stands for Center for Student Missions and they have many locations in cities all around the United States. Naturally, I jumped at this opportunity because of the way that I was raised in the church, the many friends I have here, and because I was (and still am) determined to attend every mission trip that is been offered within this youth group. Five years ago, in 7th grade, I travelled to Houston with CSM and served in similar ways with inner-city mission work, but the middle school experience that I recall was much different than the memories, lessons, and knowledge that I have brought back from this trip.

CSM's main goal throughout the week is to educate students on problems within an urban area and lead them through mission work to address these issues and spread God's love. To paint a picture in everyone's head of a what a week with CSM might look like... Most of our days consisted of waking up around 7am, grabbing a quick breakfast, and heading out into the city around 8 or 9 to perform some kind of service. This was followed by a sack lunch then, we jumped straight into an activity that CSM put together to deepen our knowledge on the city and force us to step out of our comfort zones and dive into culture. The night usually wrapped up with dinner, which was a different cultural food every night, then a devotional- lights out at 11. One of the most interesting service opportunities that I took part in through the week was at a food and nutrition program called Community Servings. Their mission is to provide healthy meals to individuals and families that suffer illnesses ranging from diabetes to AIDS. This organization shocked me because of how smoothly it ran and how crazy neat, clean, and organized it was. The workers there cared about the quality of the food so much- I've never had to perform such an extensive routine for hand washing and putting on an apron, hair net, and gloves. I saw God's love shine through everyone as we worked in the kitchen bagging up meals with our fast assembly lines, poured cereal into bags, and shaved as many carrots as possible.

While the couple hours that we spent in this food kitchen were uplifting one of the activities that really shaped my experience was called the immersion.

You may not know that Boston has a very large homeless community and one of the main places that this group populates is the Boston Commons- an enormous green park right in the center of the city. The immersion was a task where me and four others were given 2 dollars each and were challenged to live as if we were homeless in The Commons for 4 hours. We were advised to talk to all kinds of people roaming the park, including the homeless, find out as much as we can about Boston's history, and buy dinner for the 5 of us plus another person in need of food that night. Naturally, I stepped back and let Murphey Heal take the lead on this one, as she's very out-going and strikes up conversation easily.

This challenge also scared me a little because of the fear of sounding condescending to a group of homeless people that would not be picked up from the park after four hours- this was their reality and I did not know how to fill those shoes at the time.

A common bible verse that has been shared with me before I adventure on mission trips is Luke 10 verses 25-37- the story of the Good Samaritan. These verses share God's message telling us to go out and be like the Good Samaritan and bandage the weak's wounds, help them get back on their feet, and look after them.

This is a very broad message though, and many of us wouldn't know where to start and how to go out and serve. David shared something with me the other day though that helped put my point of view from this trip in perspective. He read a book talking about two different ways that people go out into the community to serve- either with three S's, scared, selfish, and separated or three C's, courageous, compassionate, and connected.

Looking back on this experience I realize that I went into this immersion showing strong signs of the three S's. I was scared to try to fill someone's shoes that I knew nothing about and also scared to try to learn about those shoes because of fear of sounding superior or offending someone. I was selfish every time I looked at the clock thinking how many more hours until my beloved white van would come pick me up not even considering the thoughts that go through someone's head that sits in this park day after day. All of this caused me to separate myself from the people we first talked to and the stories that they shared. As the time passed and we talked to more and more people I noticed a shift in myself. I no longer worried as much about sounding condescending and superior.

Instead, I let God lead me as I listened to the many different stories people had about the life they live in this park and listened as they laughed with each other in this tight community they had built between each other based off so little. This was the sign of my first C- courageous.

Compassion soon followed when me and the rest of the group passed up the common idea of a loaf of bread and jar of peanut butter for dinner, even though it would feed many mouths. Instead, we decided to settle for a family sized box of fruit loops and bought a deli sandwich and yogurt for someone really in need of a meal that night. All of this led to connection not only with the people that we conversed with in the park, but with each other. I felt so much more connection with my surroundings and found so much more happiness in little things, like the man walking around the park blasting 'Wagon Wheel' on repeat after we sat in a huge rain storm.

One of the main differences that I noticed between my middle school experience with this program and my most recent one, is the depth of the work that I performed and knowledge I received. As a high school student, many of the problems that occur in an urban area became much more real to me as I could understand them better and they weren't as sugar coated. They were presented to me in more of a "these are the flaws in our community - step out of your comfort zone and do something about it" way this time around. This trip forced me to look into the community and notice the many flaws that every area has. It challenged me to serve God while representing the three C's. My challenge to all of you is to do the same as me and step out of your comfort zone and share God's word and his everlasting love more courageously, compassionately, and more connected.

Maddie Heal's Testimony from CSM in Boston

Good morning everyone. For those of you who don't know me, I am Maddie Heal and I am going to be a senior at Austin high school...class of 2018 woohoo!!! I have been involved in the Tarrytown youth group for a little over 7 years now. Throughout my years in the youth group I have gained so many wonderful friends and memories that I will cherish for a lifetime.

This summer the youth group chose to go Boston to work with CSM! For those of you who aren't familiar with CSM, it is a program that brings in groups such as ours and sets up different inner city service work through different organizations in the community.

Well, David wanted me to tell you why I chose to go on this trip and the funny thing is I didn't actually choose to go on this trip. My mom and David put their persistent minds together and somehow managed to "encourage" me and my sister Murphy to go to Boston. Well through that encouragement next thing I know I'm on a plane to Boston! Although I didn't exactly volunteer to go to Boston, it ended up being such a fulfilling trip, not only raising my awareness about the issues directly in Boston, but it opened up a global perspective and allowed me to help others through Christ.

Before this trip, I had always struggled when it came to mission work because I felt like I wasn't capable of being or doing good enough. I was scared. I felt that someone as little as me in this world wouldn't be able to make any sort of a difference. This trip completely changed my perspective. In Boston, we were blessed with the opportunity to have a bird's eye view of the city. Basically, we had the opportunity to work with many different organizations and encountered the different shades of Boston.

One specific activity that really changed my outlook on serving others was through an activity called Urban Plunge. We were given 20 dollars and were assigned to go out into the Boston Commons and find someone who needed help. The Boston Commons is a public park in the middle of Boston. The instructions were loosely stated so it allowed us to interpret the word "help". The direction in which we wanted to go was up to us.

In the story of the Good Samaritan a man who had been traveling to Jericho from Jerusalem was robbed and beaten and was left on the street and passed by many men. But a Samaritan passed by him and took pity on him and clothed him. He treated him as his own neighbor. Urban Plunge was our practice to walk in the shoes of the Samaritan. Stop instead of walk by.

From activities in the Boston Commons earlier in the week, our group had been able to form relationships with many in the homeless community in the area. Our group decided that since we would be returning to the Boston Commons for another activity, it would only make sense to reconnect with our new homeless friends. With our money, we were able to purchase a full meal for one of the sweet women there named purple and then got the rest of the group a community Slurpee.

Obviously, this gesture wasn't going to end homelessness but it helped us connect with others instead of passing them by and gave me some hope.

In the beginning of this trip I was aware that we were going to be serving in some way but I limited my thoughts to thinking that we would only be serving the hungry and the poor. Before this trip, I wasn't aware of the many other social difficulties that Boston was facing such as gang violence, sex trafficking and struggles within the education system.

One specific activity that really opened my eyes on this situation was through the prayer tour. The prayer tour consisted of our big ole' church van physically driving around the different parts of Boston and learning about each area and praying for the area and its people. I wasn't aware of the impact that this activity would have on me until I found myself praying for the students at a school in which we were physically standing. It's a simple juxtaposition, having one of the most prestigious colleges cough cough...(MIT) in the same vicinity where kids aren't going to school and in these schools the graduation rate being frighteningly low. This goes for in the Boston commons as well. Some of the most expensive real estate in Boston is right across the street from where a large portion of its homeless population lives.

David and I were talking about this experience and how difficult it can be to reach break outside of your comfort zone while serving.

He told me about a book that he had read where he learned a very valuable idea over the 3 S's and the three C's about how people approach the world. We can be Scared, Selfish, and Separated or Courageous, Compassionate, and Connected. He described to me how people tend to identify with the 3 S's, scared, selfish, and separated. I felt that I connected 100% with that comment...before this mission trip. Before the trip, I was scared of what was to come because I'm the type of person who HAS to know the plan, I was selfish because of the thoughts and interpretations I formed in my head of the people and places we had encountered, and I felt separated because I lacked experience among this city and wanted to connect. But through the experience of the trip and my faith, I was able to pull myself out of those 3 S's and was able to serve courageously through interacting with the Bostonians, compassionately through serving in the community, and connected by learning through the streets.

I think we all can find ourselves guilty when it comes to possessing the 3 s' being scared, selfish, and separated but what I urge you to take away from today is to find that faith and that passion and turn those S's into C's courageous, compassionate, and connected.

May you go into the world, ready to see God in everyone's face that you pass. May you approach them with courage, compassion, and the connection of grace. Amen