

Daytona Beach Florida



ABBY VISSER

ABBY IS A FRESHMAN AT OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY MAJORING IN DIETETICS. SHE IS FROM OAK FOREST, ILLINOIS AND ATTENDS ORLAND PARK CRC.

Twelve of us participated in the RMS trip called SEED, which stands for Serve, Engage, Evangelize, Disciple. Monday all the participants, ages ranging from 15-65, from across the Midwest and Canada, traveled to Daytona Beach. Tuesday through Thursday we attended evangelism classes taught by Dr. Eric Watkins and were graciously hosted at their home. I loved every second of the classes and learned a lot. The weather was gorgeous throughout the trip, much better than the Midwest temperatures! We even got to have Tuesday's class on Evangelism and the Heart of God outside! As someone who grew up in a Reformed church, Wednesday's class was probably my favorite. It was titled "Evangelism and the Reformed Tradition", addressing many misconceptions about the evangelistic practices in Reformed churches. Thursday's class, "Evangelistic Paradigms and Practices" gave practical tips for evangelism that we could use on the trip and bring back to our home churches.

Our afternoons consisted of service projects in the area. We served Habitat for Humanity by painting a halfway house, assembling furniture and organizing at Restore, and laying tile and grout in a newly built home for Habitat. Members of the group also went to the home's of locals to assist with yard work there. On Wednesday, I along with four others, went to the new Habitat for Humanity home. Despite it being our first time laying tile, we did well and enjoyed it.

We were staying in condos right off the beach in Daytona Beach, so after our service projects we would head out to the beach. Armed with tracts written by Dr. Watkins and business cards for his church plant, Salt and Light Church, we split up into groups of 2 or 3 and walked along the beach or boardwalk and evangelized. The week we were in Daytona Beach was their annual Bike Week and so there were thousands of motorcyclists in the area. And that, along with many people on spring break, gave us great opportunities to evangelize. As an introvert who had never really done something like this, I was a little nervous to approach strangers and share the Gospel with them, but as a result I grew so much. Evangelism isn't something strictly for extroverts. The SEED team had some great conversations with people who were receptive to the Gospel. Not every person was receptive, but we trust the Holy Spirit will use that encounter to plant seeds in their life.

For our "day away" we went to St. Augustine, Florida. It's the oldest city in the nation and it was very cool to see the historical buildings and Spanish architecture. Another fun experience was surfing on Saturday morning. The coaches said the waves were perfect for beginners like us and I had a blast!

It was my first time participating in an RMS trip and I had an incredible experience. I hope to attend many more RMS trips in the future. I grew in my faith and evangelism skills and really enjoyed the trip. If you have the opportunity to go on a SEED trip, I highly suggest you take it!



"So do you go to a church?"

"Well, I go to church on Easter and stuff. My grandson is really into religion and that sort of thing. Which I think is great because I raised my kids to go to church on Sundays, and now they do the same." One woman told me in between puffs of smoke.

"You said you used to go to a church, so do you know what the gospel is, or have you ever heard of it?" I asked.

"No, I can't say that I have."

This is just a glimpse of one conversation I had with a woman on the boardwalk of Daytona Beach. Most of the people I encountered had stories similar to hers. Some people claimed to be Christians, but lived their lives like pagans. Others had heard of Christianity, but wanted nothing to do with it, or completely misunderstood it. And then there were those, although they were few and far between, who knew nothing about it.

They had never heard of the one whom we know as Savior. They knew not of true forgiveness, compassion, and love. Freedom was foreign. They were trapped by their sin, and although they knew deep down that they were broken, they had no idea how to become whole. Most attempted to fill this void with temporary fixes and drown their sorrows in things like alcohol, drugs, and other worldly pleasures. These were the people whom my heart broke for the most. It still breaks for them.

Now to some people, it might seem like I'm exaggerating, or being overly dramatic, and maybe I am. But to a girl who's grown up in a conservative Christian community, and lived her whole life in a small-ish town, seeing a grown man wander around with his arms in his shirt like a small child, visibly sweating and muttering to himself, is jarring. And this person was not alone. There were tons of people just like him. These people are lost. They are slaves to their sin and dead in their trespasses. They NEED Jesus. They need him just as much as you and me. All of them. Who are we to deny them the truth?

During our week in Daytona Beach, our goal was simple. SEED. Serve, Engage, Evangelize, and Disciple. And that's exactly what we did. Every day, from Tuesday to Thursday, we would wake up, go to our class on Evangelism, eat lunch, and then go serve in the community. Then, after that, we would all load up, and head back to the condo for our Evangelism Practicum. Although we didn't have time to properly engage in discipleship, we were able to see the fruits of it through the labors of Pastor Eric Watkins.

Before I came to Daytona, I didn't fully grasp the importance of each of these steps. In my mind, the service part was a little unnecessary. I know, it sounds really selfish, and lazy. But it wasn't because I didn't want to get my hands dirty, or work hard, I did. I love painting, and I love working hard. There really isn't anything quite like going to bed exhausted, sore from yesterday's work, and aching from today's. It also helps that by the time your body fully sinks into the mattress you're out like a light. However, I didn't really understand why we were cleaning and organizing furniture when we could be on the Boardwalk telling people about Jesus. Now I think very differently.

After spending three days serving in a community that I was otherwise unfamiliar with, I felt a strange connection to it, and the people I served with. I hadn't realized the opportunity I was missing in my own community until serving in Daytona. You see, when you're voluntarily working hard with people, you begin to respect them, and they you. I found myself wanting to know more about the people I was with, and conversations flowed smoothly. I was even able to talk with some people about Christ and what he has done for us on the cross. As Christians, being willing to serve non-Christians shows people that we truly believe what we say we believe. We actually believe that we are to take up our cross and follow Christ. (Mathew 16:24) We truly believe that we are called to serve others in humility and value them above ourselves. (Philippians 2:3-4, Galatians 5:13, Mark 10:45)

I learned that evangelism doesn't have to be planned. You don't have to have this great speech memorized, scripted out so that in this perfect scenario, you will be able to cover every key doctrine and principle of Christianity. Because in reality, the other person isn't going to follow the script. Evangelism isn't about proving that you're right; it's about showing how wrong you once were without Christ. It's not about us. It's about him. Knowing that made evangelism so much easier. I found it wasn't all that difficult to talk to people about Jesus, after all, there was nothing they could do to me. I have already been brought from death to life, I am a new creation.

I wish I had the time and paper to explain everything that I learned, but if I did that, we'd be here forever, and my hands would cramp up from typing, and you'd probably get bored and stop reading. So let me just end with this: Evangelism isn't that hard, it's just like any other conversation, and it's far more important. It's not something we need to fear. I found that the hardest part was just choosing to walk up to someone, and start the conversation. After that, everything just sort of happened.

I loved this trip, and enjoyed every second of it. It was wonderful to get to have communion with my fellow saints and learn about Christ together. I would do it again in half a heartbeat! If you ever get the opportunity, take it. It's a great way to get out of your comfort zone and start evangelizing, and to grow in your relationship with Christ.



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