

WITNESS

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This past summer I was privileged to be part of the first international Teens Actively Serving Christ (TASC) event ever sponsored by Reformed Missions Services. On July 28, 2018, eighteen representatives from four United Reformed churches gathered at San Diego Airport and began the four-hour drive south into Mexico's Baja Peninsula. We were headed for the small village of Uruapan for a week-long service project doing construction work at the Mount of Olives Childrens' Village (an orphanage) and to organize and run a Vacation Bible School hosted by a conservative Presbyterian church in a nearby town.



While I have gone on numerous such trips in the past, this one was easily the most memorable that I have attended. It was memorable because the group worked hard on the various construction projects causing many aching muscles by the end of each day, yet it was also gratifying to be used of the Lord to be a tangible blessing to the orphanage as they care for "the least of these, my brothers." It was memorable too because of the teachings, crafts, and games conducted during the Vacation Bible School time because through these a blessing was brought to the children who attended, allowing them to hear about the Creator God, the redeeming Savior, and the salvation that Jesus alone brings. Through this VBS the local children and their families were also introduced to this Presbyterian church which is present in their community.

Most memorable for me, because this was a TASC event, each day began and closed with the group being in the Word of God. This spiritual emphasis is a standard feature of the TASC experience;



and the Bible study, singing, and prayer time caused us to grow closer to the Lord and to one another. To watch these high-schoolers grow in this way was a great blessing to me.

If anyone reading this has ever contemplated bringing your group on such a trip, I encourage you to contact Rob at Reformed Mission Services to find out how you too can grow closer to God and to one another in this way. These trips reveal that Christ's Church on earth is bigger than just your own

four walls and that your group can be an important link in bringing



the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. Our group put feet to their faith on this TASC event, and they were richly blessed because of it.

~ Rev. Ed Marcusse

"...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 1:8b

Seven years ago my fellow youth group leaders told me we were going to start going on mission trips organized by Reformed Mission Services (RMS) called Teens Actively Serving Christ (TASC). I was not happy. I was actually downright bummed. I wanted our church to plan mission trips for our group alone, something just our teens would go on, and we could all draw closer to God and each other. Now seven years later, I have been on seven TASCs, two of which I served on the leadership team along with my trusty sidekick Sara.

I went into my first TASC skeptical and cranky. I had just pulled an all-nighter studying for my grad school class, but that was only half the reason I was cranky. I told my fellow leaders I would give TASC a try this year but made no promises that we would ever go on one again. I grew up loving mission trips and was excited to start being a leader working with teens on mission trips but going with people I didn't know? Huh, no thank you.

What happened over the seven days of my first TASC could only be described as God's plan and loving hand. This small church, whose building could fit comfortably inside the sanctuary of my church, welcomed us with open arms focusing on loving us, those we served with our work, and God. Each day was such a blessing that I didn't want to fall asleep at night and couldn't wait to work the next day.

Being able to worship, serve, and fellowship with Reformed Christians from NY, NJ, and MI was awesome. We had theological discussions where the teens wanted to join in, songs that sang of the glory of God and not our own talents, and work that was done out of pure love and joy for God.

After the week that I thought was going to be a bust, I went home, walked up to my fellow leaders and said, "We have to do TASC here." I went on one more TASC before I felt I could encourage the rest of our church to host one.



This past summer was the second time our church hosted a TASC. I like when we hold a TASC in



our hometown to give our teens a chance to host others from around the country and see where they can serve the Lord in their own backyards. It is also an excellent way for our church at large to love on fellow Christians and focus on the work God has put right around us.



Each TASC is a week that has brought teens closer to God and closer to fellow Reformed teens. If you question that, I will have you know that a group of teens, who have served together more than once and now live hundreds of miles apart, came together over the weekend just to spend time together.

Thank you all who support this mission and send your kids into our care for a week.

All praise to our Lord!

~ Angela Alsum

“TASC was such a wonderful, life-changing opportunity! We made so many friends and unforgettable memories.”

~ Student



“I loved TASC, and I would encourage teens to do it. It's an amazing opportunity to help people who are in need. You get to learn about Christ in so many different ways.”

~ Student



“As the kids had opportunity to serve widows and widowers, single moms, as well as organizations...they were challenged to show and grow in the fruits of the Spirit; and they all rose to the challenge! They worked as working for the Lord, and although the work was hard, hot and tedious at times, they were patient with each other, loving and kind to those they were helping, and amazing joy was evident every day!”

~ Sponsor



If you are interested in hosting a TASC event for 2020, contact Rob Brinks at rob@rms.org.

2018 by the Numbers

1

International
TASC Site

5

Total
TASC Sites

127

Students &
Sponsors

New Board Members



“My name is **Kyle Grassmid**. I am an active member at Faith URC in West Olive, MI. I was and am still responsible for the setup of the sound system and technology needs there.

By trade I am an electrical engineer at Consumers Energy. The biggest benefit of my trade is it allows me to experience multiple mission trips with RMS every year. As I do not yet have any dependents, I find my family on such trips. In the picture you can find my brothers (left to right) Doug Field, Rob Brinks, myself, and Steve Hill from my most recent trip to help the people of Puerto Rico.

On a more personal note, I could list hobbies like boating, camping, disc golf, and motorcycles, but I have been finding more enjoyment from serving others: in church, Love INC in Allendale, and RMS.”



“My name is **Walter Nop**, but everyone calls me Wally. My home church is Hudson Valley United Reformed Church in NY, and my wife Stephanie and I have been members since its inception. I am an electrical engineer, and I work in a group that designs microprocessors for mainframes.

My wife and I both grew up on dairy farms in VT, and we met after college. She works as a bookkeeper and loves

gardening and canning. I like to do a bit of woodworking and love to grill. I have a wood-fired pizza oven, and I make a mean thin crust pizza.

I met Rob Brinks in Pantego, NC on Mark & Carla Van Essendelft’s rebuild after a tornado destroyed their home. I saw the bulletin announcements looking for carpenters & resisted until I saw they were looking for an electrician. The RMS experience was a great one.

May the Lord bless the work of RMS and use it to grow young Christians into mature Christians and use RMS as a witness to what Christ has done and to bring people into His church.”

“My name is **Brett Watson**,

and I am currently serving as an Elder at Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, MI. I am a CPA working for Hungerford Nichols CPAs + Advisors in Grand Rapids, MI. I have been



in public accounting for 7 years. However, I have not always been in public accounting during my professional life. I also have a degree in Historical Theology from Westminster Seminary California and worked for the White Horse Inn and Modern Reformation magazine prior to going back to school for accounting.

I have been married to Sara for 13 years, and we have two children, Owen (10 years old) and Emma (6 years old). As a family we love to read, to travel and be active (Owen ran his first 5K with me this past summer!).

My favorite food is definitely at Chipotle. Rarely can I pass up a trip there.

I am honored to be serving as a board member for RMS, and I pray that the Lord continues to bless this important organization.”

UPCOMING TRIPS

January 8-17, 2019 - Dominican Republic

We will be working in the Sabana Grande de Boya region of the country. Our work will include maintenance on the ministry center, construction of a home for a local pastor, and the start of construction for church restroom facilities. The registration for this trip is closed at this time. You can still be a valuable part of this trip by praying for the group as they travel, for safety on the worksites, and that through the work accomplished there, the gospel will go forth through this important ministry.

February 9-16, 2019 - Maneadero, Mexico

Every three years the high school youth group of Trinity Ref. Church (URCNA) of Lethbridge, AB travels to the Mount of Olives Children's Village to work in and around the area helping those who are in need. To make preparations for the work that is to be done by that group, RMS has been asked to assemble a team of volunteers to make sure everything is ready to go. Some of the work that the RMS team will be doing is pouring concrete pads for a couple of homes that will be built for two families and canvassing the neighboring villages to promote an eyeglass clinic and a VBS event in Maneadero. We will also be doing some maintenance work at the orphanage where the group will be staying.

March 30 - April 6, 2019 - Cape Coral, FL

The church building and parsonage of Trinity URC of Cape Coral are in need of repairs and updates. RMS will be sending a team of volunteers to assist them with some maintenance and improvements to the facilities. Trinity is a small congregation, so the volunteers will be asked to raise some funds for the materials needed for this project. More details for this trip will be coming soon!

April 11-19, 2019 - Peru

This is a mixed trip of construction and evangelism. In 2015, RMS assisted in the construction of a church building in Lares, Peru. Since then the church has been meeting there with just the shell completed. The RMS team will assist the local people with the installation of the flooring in the sanctuary as well as other finishing touches. The group will also be distributing audio bibles to the people living in the villages nearby. They will visit members of the churches in those villages to encourage them in their worship and walk with the Lord as well. The cost for this trip would be approx. \$800.00 per person plus the airfare to and from Lima, Peru.

Coming Soon: Summer 2019

Cambridge, MD: VBS & Remodeling Project

Guinea, West Africa: Science Camps

Ukraine, Croatia, Hungary: English Camps

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I didn't really know what to expect when the American Airlines flight touched down in Port Au Prince on Tuesday morning, October 30th. I had never been on a foreign mission trip before. In fact, I had only been out of the country on two other occasions. When I was in college, I spent a little over a week in Ireland, and a couple of years ago, I drove to Lake Ontario in Canada for a couple of hours with some friends. That has been the extent of my international travels.

As we began our three-hour drive through the mountains up to the Central Plateau where the Haitian American Friendship Foundation (H.A.F.F.) campus is located, I began to wonder what I had gotten myself into. Haiti doesn't really have speed limits or observable traffic lanes. Driving through the city is basically a free-for-all.

When the van finally pulled to a stop on the H.A.F.F. campus, the missionaries who live there came out to welcome us. Several of our team members were on their eighth or tenth trips to Haiti and H.A.F.F., so these long-time friends greeted one another with big smiles and long hugs, picking up right where they had left off.

We spent the rest of the afternoon getting settled and touring the 40-acre campus. Fruit trees grow abundantly at H.A.F.F. - banana, plantain, mango, passionfruit, avocado, and star fruit among them. All sorts of flowering plants from hibiscus to poinsettias are scattered across the landscape as well, and when you walk onto the street, you can see a beautiful view of the hills and mountains that we wound our way through to reach our destination. It is a beautiful country, but



that beauty stands in sharp contrast to the impoverished people and homes that line the roads. Buildings throughout the city of Port Au Prince are crumbling, lying in disrepair after the earthquake in 2010 as well as the most recent ones this past fall. Several homes along the road that H.A.F.F. sits on have been partially demolished as well to make room for a new highway. Some families had built additions onto the other side of their homes to replace the rooms that were lost in the name of progress, but many had not.

That evening we went on our first home visits for the week. The purpose of these visits was to encourage Haitians who were suffering from illness, disability, loss, or other hardship. Many of those we visited were stroke victims. Almost all of them suffer from high blood pressure and/or diabetes as both are chronic health problems in Haiti.



We began our visits by singing There is a Redeemer in English. One of the Haitians would then translate the lyrics into Creole so that the families could understand the song. After we sang, a member of our group would read Psalm 23 in English, pausing after each verse so that a Haitian could read the verse in Creole.

One man we visited was recovering from hip replacement surgery. As the psalm was read, he mouthed the familiar words that he had likely memorized long ago. We would follow up our Scripture reading with a couple of our group members praying for the individual or family that we were visiting. We paused after each sentence or phrase so that our prayers could be translated into Creole by our interpreters. We would end each visit by giving the family a bag of rice, a bag of beans, some chicken bouillon cubes, and a bottle of cooking oil as a blessing.

We had gone to Haiti to be a blessing. The most tangible way I could think of to do that was to help the staff at H.A.F.F. with their wish list of projects. Many of the buildings were in need of some TLC, so there was plenty of work to do: classrooms to be painted, desks to be built, and gutters to be cleaned, among other things. Later I realized that the primary purpose of our trip wasn't about what we were accomplishing. What mattered most to those we were serving was that someone cared enough to come.



It's hard to fully appreciate the life and work of our missionaries from a distance. We can read newsletter updates and look through pictures, but we can't quite grasp what their lives are really like until we "walk a mile in their shoes." Our little week in Haiti probably wasn't quite walking a mile, but it did give us a brief glimpse into their life and work.

I greatly underestimated the amount of encouragement that the arrival of our team would bring to the missionaries and staff at H.A.F.F. as well as to the people in the community. I thought I was going on the trip to serve for the most part with my hands. Instead I found that our most important service came simply through our presence and words: words of encouragement, prayer, and the life-giving Word of God read aloud.

The word that comes to mind when I think back on my trip to Haiti is grateful. I am grateful for the little things in life that I so often take for granted: indoor plumbing, road signs, and grocery stores. I am grateful for my family and my home. I am grateful for the blessings that I enjoy as an American. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to go to Haiti, to see what life is like for the people and for the missionaries who serve in the country. I am grateful for the missionaries themselves, for the love that they have for the Haitian people, for the sacrifices that they have made to live among them and serve them. I am grateful that the unity of the body of Christ spans across geographical distances, across languages and cultures, to bring together people of all ages, shapes, sizes, and colors into one family, one body, one Church.

~ Madison Drew



New Employee:

Madison Drew is the Promotions Coordinator for Reformed Mission Services. She began her work in this role in September 2018, but her involvement with RMS dates back to 2009 when she attended her first TASC in Pompton Plains, New Jersey. She graduated from Cornerstone University in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She is a member of Trinity URC in Caledonia, Michigan.

A Word from the Chairman

My experience with RMS dates back about four years now. When I first was elected to the Board of Directors in 2015, we were maintaining TASC events, trips to Mexico, Peru, and responding to disasters as they occurred with relief efforts. Since then RMS has expanded the TASC ministry, extensively reworked and updated our policies and manuals, hired a promotions coordinator, and expanded our offshore missionary endeavors.

In 2018 our TASC program, in addition to its regular group of North American sites, expanded to include our first international effort. In late July groups of young adults from Oregon and Michigan went to the Mount of Olives Children's Village orphanage in Uruapan, Baja California (just a few miles south of Ensenada) and undertook several repair and upgrade projects there. In addition, the group conducted a weeklong Vacation Bible School event at the Christ Is The Way Presbyterian Church in the neighboring town of Zorrillo. While several of the US participants spoke some Spanish, conducting VBS in a foreign language is difficult. They dug deep and succeeded in presenting a worthwhile and meaningful program for a group of Mexican children that varied in number up to 25 or so.

As the number of RMS events increased and locations became more widespread, it was clear that we needed to review our procedures, policies, and manuals to adapt to the changes necessitated by this growth. We instituted a background check procedure for all leaders, sponsors and other adults participating in RMS events. We completely rewrote and updated our Safety and Security Policy. RMS is committed to the strict avoidance of any injury or harm coming to any participant in its events, and the new policies and procedures will go far to ensure that our goals are attained.

As the activities of RMS have expanded, our Administrative Director has needed assistance in managing the day-to-day operations of the ministry. As of the fall of 2018, we hired Madison Drew as Promotions Coordinator. She has now undertaken her duties full time and is making a meaningful contribution to fostering excellent relations with our cur-

rent member churches and ministry partners as well as expanding RMS' membership and contacts among Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the US and Canada.

RMS has participated in disaster relief projects in Texas, Puerto Rico, Florida, and North Carolina. In addition, our Disaster Relief Committee has researched the possibility of obtaining a shower trailer that can be moved as needed to disaster relief sites so that relief workers and victims can have an opportunity to get cleaned up as many lack basic utilities like water and power following a disaster. The committee has chosen an appropriate vehicle and began fundraising for its purchase.

We now enjoy missionary contacts and interests in Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Nepal, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Ukraine, and West Africa. We were able to visit the majority of these sites this year and participate directly with missionaries and local Christians in their development projects.

We are truly grateful for God's blessings on our organization this past year, and we look forward to the growth and opportunities that the new year will bring. We thank you for your support through your time, your resources, and your prayers, and we would ask for your continued prayers for the organization in several areas for the coming year:

- Please pray for all those who have been displaced from their homes due to recent disasters across the United States.
- Pray for our upcoming trip to the Dominican Republic in January, for safety in travel and work and for our group to be a blessing to those we serve.
- Pray for our fundraising efforts that they would be fruitful and that all our financial needs would be met.
- Pray for Rob Brinks & Madison Drew as they carry out their daily tasks for the organization.
- Pray for our continued growth as an organization.
- Pray that we may be used for the furtherance of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

~ Doug Field



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