

*(Reprinted without photographs from the July/August 2004 VOICE)*

**FAPC Mission Trips:**

## **An Unlimited Opportunity for Education and Spiritual Growth**

**Introduction by Tom Harley**

***Fifth Avenue's Mission trips have meant a lot to me over the years and have positively impacted my growth as a person and as a Christian. I look forward to going on many more in the future.***

***What is your idea of mission? I will admit that mine was extremely narrow: "witnessing" in remote areas of China or digging irrigation ditches somewhere in Africa, sleeping under mosquito nets and having no bathroom facilities.***

***What I found was that our mission trips have varied significantly in their goals. Some are work trips, while others are educational. I have been on a mix of both. One goal of our trips is to follow up on our benevolence grants, and build and strengthen Fifth Avenue's relationships around the world.***

***On my first mission trip, I had the joy of getting to know the Jamaican people and being welcomed into their homes for meals and fellowship. There was also the opportunity to visit sites supported by FAPC benevolences – an orphanage in the Blue Mountains, a school, and a skilled trade program in inner-city Kingston. We also had wonderful opportunities for worship each day.***

***Aside from the spiritual, mental, and physical renewal that I received on these trips, my world view has been greatly expanded. Two trips to Egypt gave me a perspective on the conflicts in the Middle East, on Muslim-Christian relations, and on the role and responsibilities that the United States has financially, politically and militarily in the world. It was amazing and inspiring to see the social impact and success that Christian non-government organizations (NGOs) are having in that country.***

***On a trip to Seoul, Korea last spring my world view was similarly expanded. It is largely forgotten here that the Korean War was indeed huge. While many of the younger Koreans protest the U.S. presence there, the older ones have not forgotten and are eternally grateful. Visiting the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and the Korean War Memorial was both sobering and eye-opening for me.***

***Following are impressions of others who have taken part in FAPC Mission trips over the past several years:***

***Vangie Acosta: When people ask me why I go on mission trips, I always answer that God led me to it. It has been an inspiring and humbling experience – something I will always treasure. Even though I come from a developing country myself, I was not prepared for what I saw, learned, and experienced during the mission trips I took.***

***The countries and people were beautiful. The poverty elicited strong reactions in the group. We admired the way the people accept and cope with darkness due to lack of money for lighting their homes when the sun goes down, the lack of sanitation facilities, medical facilities, schools, etc. It was an honor to witness the joy and laughter they find in simple things. We met friendly and warm-hearted people, with sincere welcoming smiles everywhere we went. What struck me most was their respect for their elders and a deep faith and***

**willingness to serve God. They walk to remote villages to evangelize and with what little they have, there was always money to help build their church.**

**These experiences have strengthened my faith in God and have made me mature spiritually, more compassionate and more aware of the world around me. I have gained understanding of humanity, and how other cultures observe their faith and religion. I've learned that we can only do so much – help by supporting with money and equipment, and inform others about the needs of the country and its people. But the most important way that anyone can help is through prayer – I truly believe that God answers those prayers.**

**Marianne Farrin: I have been privileged to be a participant in four FAPC mission trips – to Guatemala, Romania, South Korea, and Madagascar. Our wonderful world, diverse human family, kaleidoscope of colorful cultures, and oneness in Jesus Christ that we share, abides and bursts forth in joyful celebration. “In Christ there is no East or West, no North or South in Him.”**

**I would go forth again tomorrow to the furthest regions of the world proclaiming, “Our Lord reigns, forever and ever.” There is no other good news. Seeing how others live and worship reinforces my faith and reconfirms for me the larger community of God. Mission trips with this church are always an inspiration, and give me a sense of the community, the people, the country, that I would not be able to get on a secular “vacation.” They also give me a unique bond to and lasting friendships with other FAPC members. I am never the same after a trip and would not be the least bit surprised to have one of them be the “spark” for a calling and new vocation.**

**Ena Malone: The mission/study trip to Ghana was the first non-vacation or business trip that I had taken to another country. As such, my hopes and expectations were different. I found myself listening with extra care to try to understand things we were told about the history and culture of Ghana by the people we met. I also listened carefully with the hope of understanding what Ghanaians thought of the USA.**

**Still, I was surprised to learn, during a women-only discussion, that the women we were talking to were sure that we did not have a certain problem in the United States – domestic violence. They were shocked that a country “as rich and well-educated” as the United States still had this problem. It came as a great surprise to them that money and education were not the cure for family abuse. This particular experience sharpened my awareness that the United States is truly perceived as a place where there is no homelessness, hunger, abuse of women and children, etc. We are not seen as having many of the problems that afflict less industrially developed countries. I have since found myself taking extra care to explain in detail to my friends who are immigrants why I take an interest in the particular outreach and volunteer activities that I participate in.**

**Lane Maurer: The best thing about a good mission trip experience is that it changes you, sometimes radically. The Guatemala mission trips that I've been a part of have given me a heart for those who are not as fortunate as I am.**

**Working hand in hand each day with those wonderful people in San Felipe was an experience I will never forget. Rather than seeing them as unwilling to “lift themselves up by their bootstraps,” I now see them as people who have been given little or no opportunity to “help themselves.” And what that means is that “to whom much is given, much will be expected.” (Luke 12:48). In other words, it's our responsibility to reach out to a world in need. It's just not OK for so many people in our world to be hungry and homeless.**

**Jeff Olin:** *Having lived in Europe for six years, I've done a lot of tourist traveling for which the agenda includes seeing famous buildings, beautiful sites or works of art, or attending big events. The mission trip experience is so much more personal, in that the focus is the people with whom we partner: I will never forget the camaraderie of working with Juries during my second trip to Guatemala. Juries was a normal prankster of a 17-year-old boy, yet had a deep, abiding faith. Every hour it seemed we were cracking up over some joke that he was playing on me, or that I eventually learned to play on him. At the end of our trip, I left him a token memory of me – my Cal Bears cap, but he left me with a lifelong memory of conversations with him about our lives, his playing the guitar at our final joint worship service, and just laughing together as we built a bridge over a stream.*

**Mission trips are horizon-expanding experiences in that you can go where you normally wouldn't go on vacation. But they're also personally deeper experiences because you get to know the people and the country better by working, dining and living side-by-side with them. Guatemala to me is Juries, Antonio and Carlos – not just the statistics we had learned beforehand of 47% unemployment or \$60 per month wages earned. And hopefully we embodied to them a different view of Americans – other than just the action movie stars they had seen like Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger. You gain a deeper appreciation of the worldwide body of Christ when you worship along side people who share the same belief in God, the same concerns about family and life.**

**Barbara Swarhout:** *Travel to any destination offers countless opportunities for growth that I have embraced enthusiastically on college alumni tours and work assignments in places such as Greece, Turkey, New Zealand, Japan, Russia, Scandinavia and the U.K. A plethora of sights, sounds, and scents bombarded my senses – different languages, foods, art and music, currencies, historical sites and the history they represent, churches and architecture, native dress, beautiful flowers, unique animals and birds, climate and weather, customs and culture. All have been incredibly fascinating and fulfilling for me.*

**FAPC's mission trips to Jamaica and Ghana also had these components of tourist travel, but I didn't experience them as a tourist! Instead we were visitors seeing through the eyes of hosts who opened their hearts and homes to us because of our common faith in Jesus Christ. Traveling about the country, engaging in dialogue, sharing meals and worshipping together added untold richness and depth to our visits – “the faith dimension”. These mission trips enhanced my spiritual growth in amazing ways that this “experienced” traveler could not have imagined or anticipated.**

**Kevin Taylor:** *I have participated in two trips sponsored by the Mission Trip Committee. The first was to India, and the second was this year's trip to Madagascar. The two countries are very different in a number of ways. Yet, in reflecting back on my experiences, I see a thread that connects them, and that thread connects this church as well. The worldwide bond of Christ and His church unite Christians wherever we are. This realization can be a moving and awe-inspiring experience.*

**On a personal level, I often find myself easily taking my faith for granted. In contrast, a modest, plain cross on a family doorway in India proclaims to all passers-by that those who dwell there are Christians. Similarly, a physician in Madagascar puts his faith into action by working with lepers, or a teacher works with young children to teach math and reading skills. The strong faith of our sisters and brothers in India and Madagascar is striking. My interaction with them and my observations of their faith taught me a lot and, in turn, helped strengthen my faith. I became aware of ways in which God has touched their lives and I am able to better**

***see how God has touched mine. In both India and Madagascar, Christians boldly proclaim their faith and live it out daily. That is now my goal, as well***

***The Future: The Mission Trip Committee is entering a new stage in its development for the next few years: to try to integrate the congregation's sense of mission as expressed through education, travel, benevolence, and volunteers in mission service. The emphasis will be on trips abroad to countries with which we have already begun a relationship and where there are church or development organizations that can do the staff work of planning and leading the trips. These will include Egypt with Hands Along the Nile in 2005 and Madagascar through Synod of the Northeast in 2006.***