

Sabbatical Stories: Part 1

Rev. Patrick Notley, Barrington Presbyterian Church, August 2016

First Day in Hamden-Gilbert, WV

Drove down to Gilbert from Charleston yesterday. Pretty drive to South-West West Virginia through dense forests, along winding streams on just as winding small roads. Passed a great number of abandoned coal sites only to come upon large wind farms on the next rise. Interesting juxtaposition of energy sources...

It is Monday morning and my two partners for the week, Gary and Ron, await the arrival of our construction boss who will take us to our first assignment. We will be working on finishing up a handicap bathroom for a gentleman who lost both of his legs in a mining accident a number of years ago and who has struggled ever since with such basic tasks as taking a shower. More commentary and pictures will follow.

Day 2

The start of the second day of work. Like all things in life there is a lot of adjustability in the schedule. Day one became working, in the morning on the roof of a local house before the afternoon heat and rain set in and then working on siding of another home until the rain came. All of the projects are needed and all of the recipients are in great need and thankful for the helping hand.

I am taking pictures that I will post at some time later when I have better internet connections.

Please pray for all whom we meet and all who live and seek to survive and thrive in this region.

Not So King Coal

Each day we are reminded that the largest employer in this portion of West Virginia was coal. All around us are the signs of abandoned coal mines - signs on the road point toward the entrance to a once active site, or direct trucks to use another road for loading. Two of the homes we are working on currently, two old single wide mobile homes situated on a small sliver of land in between the stream that runs beside the main road and rail road tracks about half way up the hill behind them, are right beside a tunnel entrance that leads to one of the now abandoned mine sites. Two signs on the tunnel caught my attention the first day we came to work on the houses. One states "Danger Blast Area" in two foot high letters with a series of instructions about what the horn blasts before detonation mean; the other simply says "Ambulance Entrance" a mute but constant reminder of the challenges the challenges of the work of mining.

Ronald and John, our two site foremen, are both former coal miners as is Cab Wolford, the Pastor of the Freedom Full Gospel Assembly House of Prayer. All left mining because of injury and or Black Lung. Many of the folk we are assisting are also former miners who lost their jobs when the mines shut down or when they became disabled and no longer allowed to work in the mines. It is a stark reminder to me of the safe and comfortable life.



At left, an ongoing roofing project. Corrugated metal or “tin” roofing is the preferred choice in the region. We can only work on roofs for a couple of hours in the morning before the temperature gets above 90, but it is also the time when the grass is still wet from the overnight dew making it very slippery on the slick metal. At right, another ongoing project - rebuilding the porch, including all new roofing and ceiling and skirting to cover up all of the underneath area.



Just one of the many, many cats around. I felt bad waking this little one up, but I needed the shovel...

Week One Done

My first week in Gilbert, WV has come to an end. The work has been hard and the weather hot, but in the end we have accomplished a good bit. Over the course of the week we were able to put some finishing touches on a mobile home roof, add skirting around the base of that mobile home to make it look a little better and keep out the many stray cats and other animals that wander the area, start on a handicap bathroom remodel, fix a broken water line, and work on the roof of another home for a bit.

Next week we will hopefully finish up the two mobile homes we have been working on, completing the bathroom that needs remodeling and or repair and doing some last minute fixing of duct work and other such items. We hope also to finish up the remaining roof work on a house near the church - look for the pictures with a red roof - and then go and look at three other projects that have come in this week that include replacing the rotted out floor in a mine widow's kitchen (the floor is only supported at the moment by aging floor vinyl), replacing the front porch on a mobile home that is about to completely collapse and replacing some windows and trim in another mobile home that are held in only by the exterior siding.

Next week it will be just Ron Stacy - the project boss - and myself since there are no other groups coming in until August 21. We work well together so it should be a good week of hard but useful work. There is much to do here and so little time, but those who have been helped do what they can to help others so that in the end more can be aided in living just a little bit better.