

Sabbatical Stories: Part 2

Rev. Patrick Notley, Barrington Presbyterian Church, August 2016

Not So Simple Plumbing

The plumbing project is not as simple as it sounds. Due to the age of the mobile home that the bathroom is going in and how little clearance there is underneath the home and the fact that the old bathroom floor was about to give way and collapse, the best way to make the final hookups was to remove the old bathroom floor and use it as the means for getting under the mobile home. This apparently proved to be both easier and harder to do all at the very same time. Easier because the floor was so rotted that tearing it out was more about grabbing up chunks of rotted plywood and shoving them in contractor trash bags, and harder because of the remaining metal sub-structure that was used thirty some years ago to tow the home into its current place.

Much of the day was spent cleaning up the mess from the floor and trying to figure out how to plumb up the new bathroom with these large metal beams in the way. Work will continue there tomorrow with a hoped for higher rate of success.



This is a view of the old bathroom that is right next to the new handicap bathroom that we installed. Below the rotted out floor are the pipes that run under the mobile home. Ron Stacy - one of the project leaders - is standing on the dirt underneath the mobile home capping the old pipes off and attaching the new drain and supply pipes for the new bathroom. The final work was putting in new rot resistant floor joists and sub-floor structure and then putting in a new vinyl floor to convert the old bathroom into a storage area.



How do you turn an empty room into a handicap bathroom? Put up some drywall and paneling and then a new floor. Add a shower, sink and toilet and voila new bathroom. Obviously there is more work to be done but we will be finished with this project by Tuesday at the latest. The toilet tank is currently covering the hole in the floor where the toilet drain will be to make sure no unwanted guests come in...

A Study in Contrasts

The Hampden-Gilbert area in Mingo County West Virginia is a study in contrasts. There are very large and expensive houses or compounds of houses owned by historic mine owner families surrounded by the aging and dilapidated single wide mobile homes of mining families. Most of the mines in the nearby area have been abandoned and are being closed down due to either low grade coal that is too expensive to mine given the limited use and low price it would fetch or the fact that the mine owners have gone bankrupt or that the mine itself is no longer safe to enter because of high water, high methane levels or too many cave ins. This means unemployment is high and all of the many ills that go along with such a setting are present.

It is an area with a thriving tourist business based primarily on RV Camping and a labyrinth of four wheeler and dirt bike trails. Each day we have seen caravans of four wheelers all decked out and ready for the day heading up the road to the nearest trail crossing. So prevalent are the four wheelers in this area that local town ordinances are clearly posted with times when four wheelers are banned from the roads - mostly overnight because they are rather loud and many have no head or tail lights.

It is an area full of churches. Most are non-denominational like the church that is home base for the next several weeks with pastors who are either current or former miners who, in many cases, “got religion” while in the midst of some mining accident. In the very short six mile drive from the Freedom Full Gospel Assembly House of Prayer to our current work site in Gilbert, WV we pass by seven other churches, all of whom, according to Pastor Cab, are “thriving and sharing the good news in town and in the mines.”

This in many ways is a good thing because this area also has one of the highest rates of Opioid drug abuse and alcoholism in the state. In one of the other towns not far from Gilbert there is a mostly abandoned shopping center whose only open business is a drive up dispensary that offers “one stop shopping” for receiving both a prescription and the medication without ever leaving one’s vehicle. The business has been closed down numerous times only to crop up again and again in different locations.

This is also the historic home of the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s, with signs and markers all over the place attesting to this history. Our travels through town take us by both the Hatfield Cemetery and the McCoy Cemetery and at least two of the current clients we are assisting are direct descendants of the Hatfield Clan.

While there remain some traces of animosity that built up between these two families, later years have brought them together in joint ventures that have reaped benefits for both families. A major portion of the four wheeler trails run through Hatfield and McCoy ancestral land that is leased by the state for recreational purposes and both families own equal share in a legal moonshine distillery that draws in visitors for tours and tastings.

In sum it is an area that has a backwoods history that also struggles to present a more modern identity. It is an area of both extreme wealth and extreme poverty where the “enemy” is not the local mine owner who has the big house and fancy cars and extravagant toys but who also builds the local church, completely funds the local Y building and programs and heavily supports the local schools but rather the out of state multinational corporation that is buying up and then closing down the mines because the profit margin is not large enough. It is an area filled with faithful people who attend church regularly, participate in weekly Bible studies and help any who are in need with amazing generosity but who also struggle with drug and alcohol addiction.

It is an area where family is very important where one will find little “mobile home parks” situated on small strips of land that are really four or five generation extended family units but where single mother families are the norm where siblings may all share a common father or mother but not necessarily share another parent in common and where teen pregnancy is on the rise not the decline. It is an area full of run down mobile homes and brand new vehicles. And it is an area where the natural beauty of Spring and Summer gives way to the desolate destruction that is strip mining and clear cutting for timber in the Fall and Winter when there are no leaves to hide the view and where pristine looking streams run through the middle of town beckoning the unaware to jump in for a swim or a kayak adventure but have posted warnings listing the dangers of heavy metals and other toxins that are present due to overflowing or leaking mine waste ponds and the dangers of raw sewage coming from the many compromised or just nonexistent septic systems.

But in the end it is a place where people are in need and others come to help. Please pray for us all.

Final Sunday in Hampden

Today is the final Sunday that I will spend at the Freedom Full Gospel Assembly House of Prayer. This coming week is looking to be a little better in the weather department. Today was mostly rainy, but that is actually a good thing because it has now brought down the temperature and the humidity is supposed to follow going down as well.

Work for the week will mostly be finishing up several projects that are very close to completion, but there is always the possibility of new projects being added into the mix as the needs change. I am joining a group of folk from the Lake View Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL. Many of the group have been here more than once and have a decent idea of what is needed and how to respond. I look forward to working with them and making some new connections.

As always I will update as I am able and as long as the internet access continues to plug along even if slow and clunky.



Home away from home: Freedom Full Gospel House of Prayer.