

CAPUCHIN APPALACHIAN MISSION (CAM)

“If happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, then we must be happy for all that comes into our life, because even misfortune blesses us if it builds our character and strengthens our faith in pursuing what is great.”



This quote is by far the closest I have to explaining my experience on this trip.

For my first year on the Capuchin Appalachian Mission, I volunteered in the manual labor ministry. We were charged with constructing porches, replacing bathrooms, building additions, and laying down new floors in mobile homes.

After my group's first project was complete, we joined another group to build an additional room onto a house. The family who resided there was headed by a man named Sam. He lives with his wife and their five adopted children, the latter all under the age of eight. Sam and Cookie had cared for these children from the time they were born providing them with all the love they could ever need. This love was so prevalent that when you walked into the home, you could physically feel it. Sam always found time to spend with them and never shooed them away when they asked for him to pick them up or talk with them.

However, they lacked basic childhood toys, like sidewalk chalk or even a soccer ball. Once we realized this, we asked the director if she would mind picking up some for the children. The next morning, my face lit up when I found several boxes of sidewalk chalk were sitting in the corner of the kitchen. I sat 4-year-old Natasha on my lap and asked if she

wanted to open a present. She shrieked with joy to learn that she was getting more than just a new room. Seeing the excitement on her face as she started drawing gave new meaning to the quote stated earlier. Despite the fact that Natasha lives in one of the poorest places in the United States, she is so content with what she has. It was at that exact moment that I recognized appreciation leads to happiness. It is satisfaction for the life we live and for all that it brings to us that makes us happy. I realized I am happy; whether I am waking up in my own bed or rolling off of a barely blown up air mattress full of bugs and dirt, I am happy. I experience the typical struggles of living as a middle class individual, but it is incomparable to what Sam and his family go through every day.

With that in mind, I have learned to value what you have and that happiness is not something that just happens, you must have appreciation for what you have and faith in what is to come. This trip was by far one of the best experiences I have had and I cannot wait for the years to come.

~ Marissa Aldieri

