

Testimonials Are Us

It is an exciting time in the life of our church with so many members dedicating their time to serve in God's name. Here's what a few of our Lord's Servants have to say about ministering to others.

Sydney Lawson:

"I have a heart for people not as well off as we are. In fact, I feel a little guilty to be as blessed as we are." Sydney turns her guilt into a blessing for others in more ways than you can count on one hand.



Helena Kruer, left, and Sydney Lawson on a recent pilgrimage to Red Bird Mission in Beverly, KY.

She helps prepare and serve meals at God's Kitchen, helps send those birthday cards we get each year from Centenary, bakes our communion bread, prepares/hosts our fellowship time between worship services and Sunday School, substitute teaches for Sunday School, helps at Kids Korner, and alternates with others for Children's Moment. And if that hasn't made you tired yet, she is a District Lay Speaker, active in CUMC's UMW work, and she finds ways to help with Quilters, "even though I don't quilt, by ironing, or whatever they need" She adds, "I'll do anything I'm asked to do to help others. I

don't have family that needs my care and if I'm not helping, I get bored."

However, in all her service, Sydney has developed a special heart for Red Bird Mission. On her first trip to Red Bird, she was hooked. Happily, Sydney explains, "It was a fantastic drive (through the mountains of Eastern Kentucky). The Redbuds were in bloom. The mountains were gorgeous. We stayed in an old dormitory. I was struck by how generous and gracious everyone was (people of poverty giving abundantly their love, thanksgiving and assistance). Red Bird's history, the extent of the ministry work."



Centenary members joined others in a Red Bird Mission trip not too many seasons ago. Look who is having the most fun.

Sydney has made numerous trips to Red Bird. Some trips as a member of work camps doing house (trailers) repairs. Recently, she has worked in the warehouse that receives donated items from clothes to furniture where she has been assigned sewing duties to mend clothing. "I sew anything from missing buttons to zippers to repair the clothes."

"I love the ladies I've worked with (local residents, Red Bird employees)". Despite their poverty and difficulties, "they have

such wonderful stories”. Sydney recalls one lady near 90 who has been working for Red Bird for over 15 years. “She works from open to close (about 7 hours) – amazing. She works in the warehouse sorting items that are donated, cleaning toys, repairing, assembling, and finding batteries. There are usually five or six local women who work part or full time as employees in the warehouse (where donations are received from all over the country from visiting work groups or collections from area churches).”

Ask Sydney why such a commitment of service to the Lord and she diffidently offers, “I like to be busy.” Seriously Sydney, why, “Everyone is on their Christ walk. Some are further along than others are. As you find yourself led, you pick up the slack for those who cannot. I have a lot of reward from all this, thank you cards and often I get, ‘Oh, I’ve heard of you.’”. Then, Sydney, there’s that truth of casting your bread on the water, for you will find it in many days. Thank you, Sydney; you give without expecting that return.

Helena Kruer:

A partner in passion for service with Sydney is her good friend, Helena Kruer. The District UMW



Helena Kruer works in the warehouse sorting clothes for sale in the Community Store.

President remembers the beautiful drive she had about nine years ago to Red Bird. Like Sydney, that first trip stole her heart. She remembers praying, “Lord if it is in your plans, I would like to come back.” After her husband, Bob (whose care, was a commitment of love), passed away she applied and was accepted as a Red Bird volunteer allowing her to return on a regular basis. She has been to Red Bird three times this year. Helena serves as a UMW representative on the KY Conference Red Bird Mission Board. In her role as a Red Bird Emissary, she speaks to churches and other groups about the good work and great need of Red Bird Mission.

Why Red Bird? Helena says, “God spoke to my heart and Red Bird called. . .I fell in love with Red Bird and have so much respect for the staff, the administration, volunteers and what they are trying to do. The need is so great. It never eases.” As coal jobs are eliminated, there is no other employment available. Families’ homes and cars are repossessed as men suddenly find themselves, for the first time, with no means to provide. Red Bird is often their only hope.

Helena also serves on CUMC’s Mission Team, Greeters and Membership Care teams, KY State’s Wesley Foundation, the Conference UMW Mission Team, and the District Leadership Team and is on track to become a Lay Speaker. (She serves at Kavanaugh, too, but we forgot in which role. Ask her and you’ll learn more.)

Helena is also being called to another critical ministry, addressing the growing menace of human trafficking. She is coordinating a district forum to help educate UM (women’s and men’s) organizations on how they can help stem the tide of human trafficking. This illegal, involuntary

movement of women, children and even men for forced labor or other exploitation has even been found in Shelby County.

Activist is not a label Helena ever thought she'd wear but as she works with the Shelby County Task Force raising awareness of challenges facing us, she says, "I know the Lord is leading me to be a voice" for those who do not have one.

Helena's involvement in these vital Methodist ministries came because she found a family of believers who welcomed her into their fellowship the autumn of 2000. Centenary restored her love for the work of the church after being disillusioned for nearly 20 years in her faith walk. She remembers noticing all the young people coming to church on Wednesday nights as she drove by Centenary on her way home from work. It motivated her to attend a Sunday worship service, her first in years, and she remembered choir director, John Gerding leading the congregation in singing, "Morning Has Broken", a favorite hymn. Members, notably Henry Cleveland and Buck Frazier, greeted her faithfully, encouraging her to join the fellowship of Methodists.

As Helena likes to attribute things, "It was a God thing." Although her husband Bob returned to his Catholic roots, it was motivated by the ministry of Centenary, including Pastor Mark Gibbons, thus blessing him with renewed faith as he met declining health. "I've never thought about leaving Centenary. We have so much love. The Centenary family (her Sunday school members and others) "have sustained me through 14 years. . .Someone was always there for me."

Centenary's Youth:



Centenary's Future is bright and exciting when you talk to our youth at work through the Lord. Left to right: Matt Bell, youth director, Jillian Gayle, Alexis Smith, Suzanne Gayle.

Want to have your faith restored, your hope renewed? Have lunch with a Centenary Youth member. They will excite you, motivate you, delight you, and stir you to jump up and do something to God's glory.

Doing something to God's glory is just what sisters Suzanne and Jillian Gayle did with Alexis Smith and 15 other Centenary youth and 7 adults did. They took

Vacation Bible School (VBS) to one of Louisville's struggling neighborhoods a few days

ago and watched the Lord making a difference in everyone's life, the served and servants.

Youth Director, Matt Bell, says, "Oh, I haven't come down yet from last week." The high Matt finds himself walking on is the God high you are blessed to experience when you see good works making a difference in people's lives. Especially the good works coming from young people who are motivated by a love for their Lord.

The Shelby County High students who talked over lunch said their work in the Backside Center of Churchill Downs and the restart church, Grace United Methodist, was a faith growing experience. Working with the children in VBS, Alexis Smith realized, “as the kids had fun with the games we gave them more attention than they had at home. We learned to gradually introduce the Lord, but also carefully. . . Faith can be bigger than what you expect it to be.”

When you say, “mission trip” there’s a tendency to think going to another country to serve, but Alexis was relieved CUMC’s mission trip was just down the road. “Knew it was local so if I got close to any of the kids we could just go see them.” One of the young people Alexis became particularly fond of was “Stevie who brought a new group of five or six children each night of VBS.” By Friday night there were over 30 inner-city children participating in activities, including worship. Alexis said, “seeing people I’ve known a long time, seeing how they are growing in their faith, as well as I am”, was one of the best things she experienced.

Suzanne admits her initial motivation to go on the mission trip was, “because all my friends were going. I didn’t think I was going to do much, but a lot more happened. I believe it helped me grow and it changed me a lot. It helped me realize that I can make a difference anywhere, far away or not.” VBS was a blessing to the children they served, “the look on the kids’ faces. They looked so excited to see us; to know even one person could do that” was revealing. Suzanne, who is in cross-country and runs with her sister Jillian, says, “running is difficult, but you learn to keep running to build endurance.” Not unlike serving the Lord.

Jillian says she loves playing in Centenary’s Youth Band and has “always attended church”. She knew that the mission trip would impact a few kids, she didn’t know it would change their lives, too. “A bunch of the kids accepted Christ on the last night of the mission trip. One girl was so excited.” Jillian can’t forget the child’s joy and, “the look in her eyes.” The other thing Jillian witnessed, “watching us change, too.” Seeing fellow youth members growing in their faith was wonderful, too.

Jillian learned, “it doesn’t matter what age you are. You can make an impact on someone, too.”

The youth agreed, “when you go on a mission trip, you not only impact the community you go to, you impact yourself. You impact (through God) lives anywhere. Not only foreign countries, you can work for God in your own neighborhoods”.

The Youth Director said, “I was so pleased, they took the mission trip seriously. They learned it is not about where you go, but what you do when you get there.”

Your Testimonial:

To share your testimonial, please send an email to centenary.testimonials@twc.com.