

Easing tension in Ireland

Written by Austin Benson
Thursday, 15 August 2013 14:04 -



Local youths help connect Catholics, Protestants.

On June 27, 10 Victory Assembly Church members from Gothenburg landed in Dublin, Ireland, to kick off a mission trip.

The group was part of an 80-member mission from all over the United States, traveling to spread the love of Christ.

“Our purpose was to unite the city of Deery under the leadership of Jesus,” said Annette Borchardt, one of two local adults who traveled with the teenagers from the church.

When the group landed in Dublin, they were looked at as outsiders to the locals, Borchardt said.

Morgan Williams, a teen who went on the trip, said they received some different looks as they all wore the same shirts and packed the same bags.

Soon they experienced some of the conflict between northern Ireland and the rest of the country.

“People asked what we were doing and when we told them, they responded with a certain tone,” said Wendy Williams, the other adult on the trip

There is a division between Ireland and northern Ireland religiously and politically, Borchardt

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said. In the north, many of the Catholics want to be aligned with their church while many citizens of “London” Deery, or the Protestants, do not want alignment, she said.

So much division that neighborhoods in Deery are segregated. If neighborhoods are mixed, Protestants are divided by fences, Wendy said.

Morgan said they wanted to know why people were so hostile towards each other.”

“When we talked to some of the younger people in Deery, they expressed more grace in their answers because they had been born into it,” she said. “Older generations were more frustrated with the division between Catholics and Protestants.”

This was a perfect time for the group to share the love of Christ, Morgan said.

“It wasn’t about sides or politics, it was all about Jesus,” she said.

Another teen who went on the trip, Jessica Stevens, said they did community service in Ireland that involved painting fences, doing yard work and street pastoring.

“We did that (street pastoring) from midnight to 3 a.m., serving love in a cup,” Wendy said. “It allowed people who were hurting to come over and talk with us. They were able to see the love of Jesus through us and they would pour (out) their hearts to us.”

Both Morgan and Stevens said they were excited and nervous at the same time while street pastoring.

Wendy said they were asked by a local why they were going into certain areas at night.

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“We’re a group of street pastors,” she replied to the man which she said relieved him and he told her street pastors have cleaned up the area from crime and hostility.

Wendy said it was amazing to see how young and troubled a lot of individuals in Deery were.



“A number of those troubled people talked to us while street pastoring and were broken down from relief of conversation,” Wendy said.

She said they expressed the love of Christ and another man told her everything about his life, the good and the bad, and was pointed back to the Lord.

The missionaries, along with an Irish Cornerstone Church, put on a couple events to bring together people from both sides of the conflict and ease tension.

They hosted a soccer game that pitted the Catholics against the Protestants in which the Cornerstone Church offered the winning team 1,000 pounds.

Borchardt said there was tension between the teams during the game.

The Catholics ended up winning the match and were given their money on the Protestant side of Deery.

Borchardt said the Cornerstone Church hosts services on Sundays in an outdoor theatre.

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In an attempt to unite both sides, children from multiple camps were invited to the church service by members of the Gothenburg team.

Five hundred people showed up to the outdoor service and celebration.

Emily Wardyn, also a teenager on the mission trip, said after the service, people from both sides of Deery went to city hall to paint.

The Catholics painted in blue and the Protestants in red.

Everyone then surrounded the building for prayer which was powerful, Wardyn said.

“It was a historical moment in Deery,” Borchardt said. “It was the first time ever that both sides had been united in prayer.”

When the Gothenburg group wasn't spreading the love and word of Christ, they took a tour of the Atlantic Coast about an hour away from Deery.

For almost half of the group, it was the first time they had seen the ocean and been on a beach.

“On our way, driving to the ocean, the land was just like a picture you would have seen on a card,” Wendy said.

Along the coast, there was volcanic ash that had been formed into hexagon -like steps for miles called the Giants Causeway, Morgan said.

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The group also attended a professional soccer match where the mayor of Deery thanked them for their efforts to unite the Catholics and Protestants.

Everyone was amazed that they had taken time and saved their money to travel to Deery to try and help people," said Alisa Roberson, another teen that went on the trip.

She said she felt God chose her to go on the trip because she had something to offer to people across the world.

At the end of the experience, the group was emotional and had to keep themselves from turning back because they didn't want to leave. Wendy said something stuck with her when they were leaving.

All the kids in the Gothenburg group agreed that if they come back and don't implement what they learned and did for Deery she said it was just a regular trip.

"But if they can come back and change things, then the lesson we learned from God was worth it," she said.

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