Friends of Penn Central Conference Testimonial: Bethel, Spring Grove and Redeemer’s, Littlestown

Earlier this year, members of three churches Bethel UCC, Redeemer’s UCC, and St. Mary’s UCC, from two conferences (Penn Central and Central Atlantic), began to meet to plan a mission trip for this summer. Their shared vision became a reality during the week of August 6th to August 12th. Twenty-four volunteers from the three churches shared their love for God, their skills, and their willingness to help others by working in cooperation with the Appalachian South Folklife Center (ASFC) in Pipestem, West Virginia. The volunteers split into two teams. One team of four women stayed at the center each day to prepare meals including lunches to take to the worksite and they also cleaned the center’s facilities.

The majority of the group was sent to the Wade Center in Bluefield, West Virginia, which is located in one of the most impoverished areas in the entire United States.

The Wade Center was started in 2005, by a nonprofit group that raised funds to purchase and renovate the former Wade School building, which was closed in 2000 as part of a school consolidation effort. The Wade Center is comprised of two separate buildings, which contain a gym, a large cafeteria and an auditorium. It also includes 20 classrooms which are being used for computer labs, art rooms, tutoring facilities, music lesson rooms, offices and more. They had a list of projects that included items that needed replaced, repaired, stained, or cleaned. The volunteers from the three churches split into smaller teams during the five days they were at the Wade Center. In five days they were able to do the following projects.

Some volunteers tore out the tile and subfloor in the entrance way of the cafeteria and replaced it with new subfloor and tile. Other volunteers repaired holes in the walls of the Gym and did dry wall work and masonry wall repair.
Some volunteers cleaned and reorganized the library and then murals were painted on two of the walls of the library as well. Other volunteers cleaned and reorganized the art room. They also painted the tables and added murals to the walls of the art room.
Still other volunteers cleaned up classroom and stained doors. Two other groups of volunteers finished two major outdoor projects that been in progress all summer. The first project was completing the coverage of a deteriorating concrete wall with wooden paneling and staining the paneling. The second project was staining the unfinished underside of an outdoor pavilion which had been donated by a major corporation and assembled by a previous volunteer group working at the Wade Center.
The Wade Center invites all volunteer groups who do work at their center to leave a mural in one of their hallways and we were honored to do so. As we brainstormed about the mural we also developed the name we will use for all our combined church missions in the future, “321 Mission.”

We are hoping that more members and friends from each our three churches will join our original group of 24 (pictured below) as we look for more opportunities to do mission and service in our own communities.