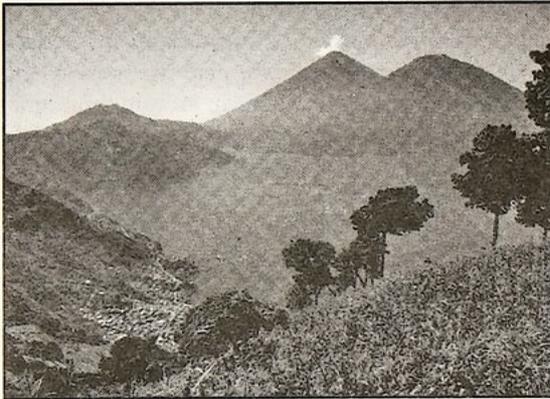


Students Set to Travel to Guatemala

By Lance Meyer



Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." In May, a group of 14 Concordia students will have the opportunity to do just that as they embark on an adventure to Guatemala and the community of San Lucas Toliman. The trip was inspired by the University of St. Thomas' VISION program and will be led in cooperation by Concordia Spanish Professor Justin Fleming and Service Learning Director Kelly Dotson.

According to VISION's mission, which was reiterated by Fleming, students will "experience the diverse beauty of the world's cultures, get to know people from across the University and the world, grapple with the issues of poverty and injustice, and reflect as a group on issues of faith and life."

For ten days, the group will work with a community development organization, the San Lucas Mission, and spend time with the people of San Lucas Toliman by serving them in any way they can. "We are there to serve the people of Guatemala, not to help," stressed Fleming. "To help is self-led whereas to serve is selfless."

However, the trip is not solely about service. Rather the group will immerse itself in five other components: simplicity, community, justice issues, spirituality, and cultural exchange. Because of these components, what started as a trip solely for Fleming's Spanish students has turned into a life-changing opportunity for students of all backgrounds to grow as individuals and broaden their cultural horizons. Fleming summed up the opportunity by saying, "We are going to Guatemala to look back at ourselves; we might like it and might not, but you have to have such an experience to know."

The components of community and cultural exchange are closely linked as the group will be interacting with the people of another culture. As Fleming said, "We have more as Americans to learn from them than they do from us...the whole 'green movement' that so many people are now talking about is how the people of Guatemala already live."

As for justice issues, the group will be forced to stare poverty in the face and reflect on what the term means. "People don't know poverty until you tell them they are in poverty," said Fleming who suggested that the group will have to "embrace the idea that the people of Guatemala have it better than we do." All prior misconceptions will likely be thrown out the window as students realize how simple and carefree people in a different part of the world live. As America continues to face the current economic crisis, people will have to find a way to take a page from the script of what we consider poor nations and find a way to get down to the bare essentials needed to live.

Finally, the group will have the opportunity to grow spiritually as it experiences the Mayan culture. "One can't deny his roots," said Fleming who added that such a cultural experience "can only help us to become stronger in our own faith." The group is not traveling to Guatemala to force its beliefs on the people there, but rather it will be seeking to understand and learn to respect people for where they are at.

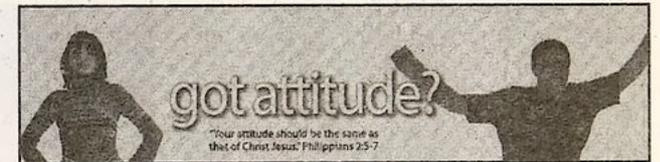
While the group will not know exactly what activities and service opportunities it will take part in until it arrives in Guatemala, activities could include helping with reforestation in the area, building a playground area for a school, and doing general upkeep on the local mission's properties. Past groups that Fleming has taken to San Lucas Toliman helped harvest coffee beans and worked on improving a local basketball court. Whatever the group ends up doing, such an experience promises to be rewarding.

As most people know, a group of Concordia students, faculty, and staff traveled up North recently to help with flood preparation. Many people stated upon returning that the experience was extremely powerful. "Those that participated not only learned something about civil responsibility, but they expanded their horizons in a way that can never be taken away," said Fleming who promises a similar experience will be had by those traveling in May.

While Concordia has not yet been able to establish a permanent department to organize and oversee off-campus opportunities, many people at Concordia, including Fleming and Dotson, have not let this stop them. Not only will Fleming and Dotson be leading the Guatemala group in May, but they hope to offer more and more opportunities as time goes on. In the meantime, Fleming encourages students to "get out and do something with their energy: volunteer in the community, study abroad, seek civil responsibility, or fight for foreign languages." If nothing else, become a more diverse person, and to reiterate what Gandhi said, "Lose yourself in the service of others."

Senior High Youth Enjoy Leadership Conference at CSP

By Kristi Heide



On April 4th, Concordia held the LCMS Minnesota South District Senior High Leadership Conference.

Approximately 50 teens and adult chaperones from seven churches attended this one day leadership conference in the BEC. In the past the conference has been a weekend retreat at a hotel; this is the first year that it was held at Concordia.

The theme for the weekend was "Got Attitude?" which is based off of Philippians 2: 5-7. The focus of the weekend was on one's attitude in Christ and having the heart of a servant.

During the afternoon, the participants had the opportunity to put their servant hearts into action by helping at Feed my Starving Children.

The key note speaker and one of the break-out session leaders for the event was Micah Parker, a motivational and leadership speaker from Houston Texas where he also serves as head master at Lutheran South Academy.

Danielle Tietjen who is a CSP alumnus also helped lead a break-out session. Tietjen grew up right outside of Detroit, MI and graduated from Concordia-St. Paul with a degree in mission and outreach.

I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with Emily Sigel, who is the Church Professional Recruiter here at CSP and was also on the planning team for the conference. "When the students left the event we wanted them to have a better understanding of what it means to have an attitude like that of Christ Jesus."

"We also wanted them to leave feeling more empowered to be servant leaders in their homes, churches, schools, and communities," said Sigel when I asked her what she hoped the teens would take from the weekend.

Other members of the events planning team included Amy Scholz, Andy Jones, and Kristin Schoon along with youth leaders from the MN South District.

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