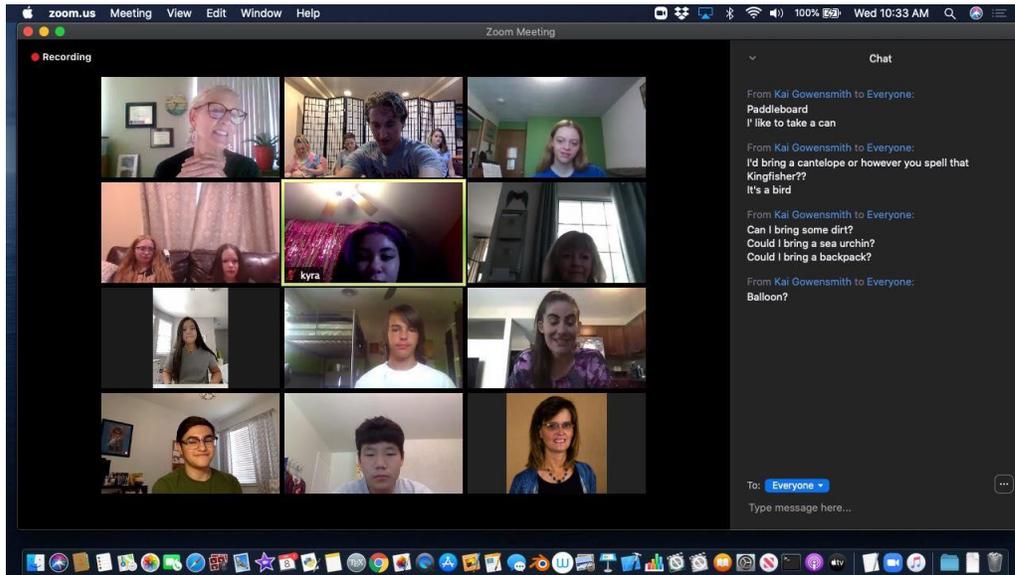


## 2020 Virtual Mission Trip - Sacred Doors a ministry of Bethany UMC

This year has been particularly challenging to find ways to engage youth groups in learning about marginalized folks and how we can work together to not only offer our help as we can, but also to put a face on those who are pushed to the sides of society. In order to offer some moments to gather as a faith community and to learn more about how we can learn about nonprofits who have taken on this mission, Sacred Doors offered a 4 day virtual mission experience.



Each day 14 youth from 3 different churches gathered via Zoom from 9:30 - 11:30 to play games, learn about one another, read and study scripture that connected with the particular speaker for that day, and then to process what the speaker had said. Each speaker explained their particular mission for about 30 minutes. The youth were invited to spend 2 hours in the afternoon on a mission project of their own. The three churches were Cameron UMC Denver, Simpson UMC Arvada, and Church of the Beloved ECC from Northglenn.

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**Tuesday morning July 7**, the topic of this day was Homelessness. Megan Gilbert, a volunteer from Habitat for Humanity, shared the history and the current ministry. Our group had heard about Habitat, but had not really known what they did. The youth were impressed that families put in sweat equity and the satisfaction in helping to build your own home was so great. In the afternoon the assignment was to draw a home for a first time home owner and put in the important things that a family might not only need, but would like to have in their home.

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On **Wednesday** our topic was immigration. In Leviticus 19 we read that we are not to mistreat the foreigner for we were once foreigners in a strange land. Sarah Jackson of Casa de Paz was extremely informative. Casa de Paz is a nonprofit that Sarah started as a sort of way station for those leaving the detention center and their new home is not in Denver. Folks can go to Casa de Paz to figure out the next steps in their journey to a strange land. We happened to meet with her on the morning of the day that she was presenting a webinar on immigration laws. We learned that there are 50,000 people on the border who must stay in Mexico with no

food, shelter, or medical care. Seeking asylum is a human right and we don't have to keep anyone in inhumane conditions. Anyone can seek asylum if they have credible fear of being killed in their own country. The detention center is Aurora, as with most detention centers, is a for profit company which makes money off of this situation. The asylum seekers are kept in large rooms of 60 - 100 people. Each of those large rooms have cells in which 6 - 8 people sleep. They are not allowed outside, and the big windows which could let in a glimpse of freedom are covered with dark paper. This illegal incarceration can be as long as a year. A year with no sunlight or exercise. Detention facilities are worse than jails in many aspects. Sarah just released her first book, "The House That Love Built."

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**Thursday** we were privileged to hear from Rev. Haley Andreades from Dry Bones which is a place for youth and young adults who are without a home to hang out for an afternoon to watch TV, play games, take a shower, and grab a snack. Our scripture was from Luke 3:10-11 in which John was asked "what should we do to help?" and John replied "Let the one with two coats share with the one who has none. Let those who have food do the same." But, Rev. Haley took us down another path when she explained about the story of "Dry Bones" in Ezekial. The youth did not remember ever hearing that story and Rev. Haley took them through the main idea in a way that the youth were very interested. The main point was that the bones were probably those from a great battle. With bones, no one knows who was from where or what nationality they were or if they were enemies or friends. Bones are bones, and yet as they started to come to life the realization of difference was not important. All people with a dried up faith can become alive when we share God's love and grace. The last day we were blessed with two speakers. One was Angela Bombgaars who is the executive director of Extreme Community Makeover. An organization that volunteers in 8 Denver neighborhoods to help people fix up their home or do lawn work. All of her volunteers only work outside of the homes and only a day long project. A few weeks before her group goes to a neighborhood to work, they knock on doors in that neighborhood and ask if they can help the people who live there to fix up their place. Then she schedules a day to help. Work days are once every two months in good weather and she has had up to 500 volunteers at a time. Our scripture this day was Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

The second speaker was Kevin Pettit from Phamaly Theatre Company. He suffered a severe brain trauma in the late 90's and soon learned about this Theatre Company which hires theatre artists with disabilities. From Guys and Dolls as their first production to Into the Woods to Chicago, this group of actors and singers perform at the Denver Center Performing Arts Center and other venues in Denver. This is the only Company like this in the world. Kevin was very well organized in his presentation and the youth were very impressed with this mission.

The afternoon of the last day, Elizabeth Fonseca - a local artist and teacher - helped the youth express their experience of the week through a self-portrait or an intentional collage. We closed with prayer and communion after processing the week. The most voiced comment from the youth was "I didn't think this would be fun, but I learned a lot."

As I anticipated this week I truly wondered if there would be a transformation with each person as I always see on in person mission trips. The first day was a little rocky because we didn't all know each other; the speaker was good, but not dynamic; my lame attempts at joking with the

youth hit the ground hard; and it was a new and different way to do things. By the end of the first day - in just two hours, this diverse group of youth were talking to each other and I saw the transformation begin. By Friday morning, they were chatting with each other; asking questions; listening to me more attentively; and having a good time. The afternoon was a little long, but they each did a great piece of art. I saw transformation in a unique way and was encouraged by each of their responses. This grand experiment went very well, and I am sure the Holy Spirit was present. Would I rather do Virtual Mission Trips rather than in person Mission Trips - NO! But, this new way of being able to reach out to the margins can be incorporated into in person trips.

Thank you to each of the speakers and if you would like more information on any of them, you can find their websites or email me.

Peace,

Pastor Denise