

Hi Mission friends,

A quick recap of our Friday bus trip to CWS in Maryland. We left Northampton by bus at 6:00 in the morning, having loaded up the bottom of the bus full of boxes of school and hygiene kits and emergency buckets. After a stop in Emmaus to pick up two people, we set off for CWS, a full bus of mission folks from about 8 or so churches, two churches brought a total of 10 or so youth members, 46 people in all.

A tally of donations were called out by each church, Union UCC, Neffs - 65 hygiene, 55 school, 7 emergency buckets (great job everyone at Neffs). Our total bus collection to CWS was 63 emergency buckets, 221 school kits, 287 hygiene kits, for a total of 571 packages.

A little over two hours into the ride, I felt the bus slow down, and then finally pull over to the side of the road on route 15, about 10 miles south of Gettysburg. The driver was able to start the bus and move a few hundred feet, a few times, and got us into a parking lot at an auto auction. We then were able to get off, use the facilities in their office, and wait until a new bus would come and take us to our destination. About an hour later, everyone pitched in to transfer all of the kits and buckets from one bus to another, and off we went for another fifty minutes to our destination.

We arrive around 10:45 and went right to work. The bus was divided into three groups, the youth and their leaders went to help in the SERVE area, about ten folks prepared hygiene kits, and our gang of 7, along with Phyllis Hamm, who joined through the conference, Barbara Jennings from the PNEC office, and two other folks prepared already made school kits for shipping.

We split up into three groups, each with a scale. We taped up new CWS boxes, and then box by box, the crew would inspect the already made and donated school kits, and fix or unpack items to CWS specs. Once ok, they were packed into the box, weighed, taped, and sent down the rollers for CWS folks to strap and put on pallets. Each box contained about 40 or so school kits, weighing close to 80 pounds.

When we arrived, there were five pallets loaded with boxes of all sizes, stacked about six foot high. I kept filling the three stations with boxes, and broke down all of the empty cardboard boxes and loaded on a separate cart for recycling. We worked for an hour, had our scheduled lunch in their cafeteria, and then went back and worked for two hours till 3:00. By that time our group had packaged 50 boxes full of school kits, about 3500 pounds, with over 2,000 school kits. We had about a half of pallet of boxes that still needed to be sorted, and we would have love to have finished, but the bus was ready for the return trip home. If we would have arrived on time, we would have finished all five pallets.

Walking around the warehouse, they are filled with pallets and pallets of buckets, and boxed kits, ready for distribution. I would have loved to have learned more about the logistics of how things operate, but at least got to help for those few hours. Our group worked well together, as did everyone, and the bus was full of energy with the kids singing Christmas songs, Let It Go, and other songs, plus two mission filled movies on board. A stop at Cracker Barrel on the way home provided more fellowship and food to finish our day.

One thing we learned in sorting all of these school kits, many churches do not follow directions well in regards to packing the kits. They could take lessons from Deb, Sue and their families, Julie and I on how to pack properly. Much time was spent in taking scissors, erasers, or sharpeners out of their packaging. Another item of interest was in all of the different bags used or made for the school kits. Every type of cloth, or pattern were used to hand make the majority of the bags, rather than purchasing simple bags as we did.

Then safely home at 9:00. A great day. Thanks are in order to PNEC, the two organizers, and their disaster relief efforts team.

Phil Wehr