

“HEAVEN ON EARTH”

(April Lesson; can be used as Mission Prep Lesson)
For The Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta
By Sally Ulrey

Key verses: Revelation 7:9-12

Objective: To prepare for heaven while still on earth by building community with those who are different than we are (specifically with those of other cultures and ethnicities) NOW.

The Set up: Minimal

The Plan:

- **Hook:** Cultural Awareness (10 mins)
 - Show about another culture as an introduction to those who are different than we are
- **Book:** “Every nation and tribe and people and language” Rev 7:9-12 (10 mins)
 - Heaven will be a diverse community. Let’s start bringing a taste of heaven to earth NOW
- **Look:** Stories of Missions (20-30 mins)
 - Using stories of youth who have had experiences in other cultures, look at what it means to build community with those who are different than we are
- **Took:** Draw the Circle Wider (5 mins)
 - Get to know someone who’s different than you!

The Supplies:

- Copy of lesson
- Bibles (or verses projected or printed on handouts)
- Whiteboard/Flip chart & marker
- StreetFood video, pictures, and a way to show them

Cultural Awareness (Hook, 10 mins)

In this section, we will introduce another very different culture. If you have people that have actually been to another country, and they'd be willing to get pictures together, or even come and share, you could do that, too. If not, check out these videos from an American who lives in China. He has a vlog ("Street Food") about the food and culture there. They're all about 5 mins. Pick your favorite.

Here's one about transportation and weird stuff he's eaten (like fried scorpions):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nK4EWALKD7s>

Here's one about a wedding he went to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mWpoucRX6I>

Here's one about what Chinese women say about their role in society:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zph1C7o7pX0>

Here's one about eating rabbit heads (it's a little bit gross, so preview it) and other interesting cultural facts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7G5izA8pnY>

Discuss:

- What did you see that was different than what you are used to (food, customs, way of life, way of thinking, etc.)?
- What was your first impression of those differences? Did you think those differences were good, bad, neutral?
- If you put on your Negative Nelly Glasses, how could you see the differences as bad?
- If you put on your Positive Polly Glasses, how would you see the differences as good?

Transition: Often we assume that "different" is wrong or bad, but just like the crazy flavors of all those foods, "different" makes it flavorful and not bland, and "different" is the way God intended it. We're going to read a passage from Revelation about what heaven will be like. Heaven is where God puts everything right that's wrong. Heaven is when everything is as it's supposed to be, so let's take a look at what that looks like.

“Every Nation (and tribe and people and language)” (Book, 10 mins)

In this section, we see that God’s perfect plan is NOT for us all to be the same, but for all the “flavors” of the world to be one in Christ. Different but one. Different but together.

- Read the passage. You can read it, or have someone or several youth read the passage out loud, taking turns by verse. You can read the whole chapter if you want, or focus on verses 7-12. You can have them read from a Bible, project it, or make copies of the verses to hand out.

The Multitude from Every Nation

⁹ After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Scripture from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Go over some of these statistics:

- 195 countries in the world
Source: <http://www.worldometers.info/geography/how-many-countries-are-there-in-the-world/>
- 7,000 languages in the world (give or take, depending on whom you ask)
Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/23/the-worlds-languages-in-7-maps-and-charts/>
- Between 11,500 and 24,000 people groups (generally meaning they have the same language and culture)
Source: https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/how_many_people_groups_are_there

Here are some pictures of faces from different cultures around the world (and that’s only 48 pics):

http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/your-faces-of-the-world-photos/#/mursi-man-ethiopia_39901_600x450.jpg

Transition: Heaven will be a diverse community. Let’s start bringing a taste of it to earth NOW. We don’t have to wait for heaven in order to experience a taste of that beauty and perfection now. We can bring it to earth by building community, by building bridges, by drawing the circle wider to include those who are different than we are!

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Stories of Missions & Discussion (Look, 30 mins; 15 for sharing stories; 15 for discussion)

In this part, you can invite youth who have had a cross cultural experience or mission experience to share about it (I would recommend prepping them about it beforehand rather than asking for volunteers on the spot). Cross cultural experience could mean going to another country, or it could be an experience locally or regionally with those who are from a different race, background, religion, income level, etc. The purpose is to show how “different” is valuable and beautiful, and we can learn from each other.

If you don't have anyone who can share firsthand, check out some of these stories of youth from last year's Diocesan mission experience in Harrisburg (see attached, below). For times' sake, you may want to pick and choose which excerpts you share, but I included them all for your review.

- Share stories about what was learned and where God was present in experiences with those who are different
- Discuss questions below

Discussion Questions (10-15 mins)

(These can either be done with the entire group while you facilitate, or the questions can be printed up ahead of time as handouts or projected, and they can do this in small groups)

1. Share a little bit about an experience you had getting to know someone who is different
2. What were some of the differences that stood out and what were your first impressions of those differences?
3. If those first impressions were negative, did they change as you got to know the person better? Were you able to or are you able to now look at those differences in a new, more positive way?
4. What things about the experience pointed you to God?
5. What were some differences that were creative, beautiful or unique? What kind of good “flavor” will those differences bring to our experience of heaven?
6. How can we bring a taste of heaven to earth by building community with those particular people who are different than we are?

Draw the Circle Wider (Took, 5-10 mins)

This is the take-away challenge, what they need to DO. If you are going on the Diocesan mission experience, here's your chance to talk about preparing for that. If you aren't, you can still plan a local experience with those of a different culture or background...a local soup kitchen, Church of the Common Ground, a local food bank, or a Boys and Girls Club or nursing home, or even a synagogue or mosque visit. Giving the youth some tangible pre-planned ways for them to act on this would be helpful. If not, the challenge is for them intentionally get to know someone who is different than they are.

- Explain the follow-up activity (whether it's a pre-planned diocesan or church trip or just a challenge to get to know someone who's different).
- The purpose is to draw the circle wider, to build bridges with those we wouldn't normally relate to or talk to. So go bring heaven to earth!

Close in prayer, thanking God that He will make all things right and perfect in heaven, thanking God that that involves people from EVERY place and people, thanking God for the beauty in diversity, and asking for God's help to bring a taste of that heavenly perfection to earth NOW in preparation for heaven.

God Blesses Us

6/29/2015 By Ava Bernardino, Freshman at St. Columba's

I was so excited for the mission trip the minute it was announced. My church has done three mission trips, however, this was my first time. I had a few expectations, and, wow, they were turned way upside down.

The first day, my group and I were sent to a food pantry to bag potatoes and box oranges for distribution the next afternoon. We also made cards and delivered them to a senior living center for seniors with disabilities. I still remember this one lady, and she talked with a mumble and looked very sick, but she still believed in God. I will never forget the smiles we got when we handed out a card and talked for only about five minutes, yet, I could feel how we helped those people.

The next day, we returned to the food pantry and bagged more food, and then, after lunch, I helped in the distribution of the food. When they first enter, they are given a token. They go through the line and pick up what they want, and when they reach the end, they give the token to the person at the end and bring their food home.

I was in charge of collecting the tokens that afternoon. I still remember this one man and his wife came up to me, and I asked them if they had their token and made a little small talk. The man pulled out his token, and he said " Lord, thank you for this token" as he kissed the token and dropped it in the token bowl. They then walked off, and he patted me on my back, and he said " God bless you."

From that moment on, I knew I was making a difference in this community. Even though I did something small, I knew that the effect would last a lifetime.

Turned Upside Down

6/28/2015 By Meriah Grove, Senior at St. Patrick's

In the weeks prior to the Harrisburg Mission trip of 2015, I was bursting with excitement. I could not wait to spend a week with some of my closest friends doing my favorite kind of work. (I honestly could have done without the 4 AM wake up call the Sunday we embarked, but that is beyond the point I am trying to make.) I had never been on a mission trip before, and thought I was ready to conquer anything this trip could throw at me. God, however, proved to me that He had plans to completely turn my world upside-down.

Early on a bright and sunny Monday morning, my work group was given our work site for the next two days. We were told that we were to help an elderly handicapped couple that desperately needed cleaning around their home. Their names were Doug and Deb, and for me to say that they were the some of the most amazing people I have ever met is to understate them entirely. We were charged with the job of clearing out their garage and shed, leveling the shed, and helping them throw some stuff away to make room for them to pursue woodworking. Sounds simple enough right?

Well, the garage was filled floor-to-ceiling with stuff that they had collected over 20 years, the shed was too full to even walk in, and the entire foundation of the shed was so rotted that it could have given out at any second. Obviously, we had our work cut out for us, and I must say we rose to the challenge. We set to work immediately, picking up boxes and moving them from the garage to the backyard, clearing out the shed, ripping out the old foundation, buying new wood to completely rebuild the foundation, and finally putting the shed back on. Doug and Deb were so moved by the work we had done in the first day alone that they teared up and gave each of us a huge hug. And the honest truth was, we could not have been happier to do the work! Each one of us came to adore Doug and Deb so much; we would have happily stayed with them all week. But even in this first day when we got so much good work done, we never actually got to throw any of the stuff away.

It was in the second day when I truly found God in the mess of stuff. Deb expressed to me how difficult it was for her to get rid of anything because of the connections to the past the stuff provided for her and Doug. But in a moment she called two other people and me into a prayer circle where she prayed to God, begging him to finally give her the strength she needed to let the past go. This is where I felt Him. I felt the epic release and the immediate strength she so desperately needed flow through our hands into hers. I felt his love surrounding us in ways I had never known, and from that moment on, she was finally able to throw things away. The progress we made that day was almost unbelievable! We ended the day with two whole cars and twenty trash bags full of stuff to be taken to the dump, a refurbished garden with new flowers and a freshly mowed lawn, and a far cleaner garage with enough space for them to pursue their passions.

All in all, this trip was life changing for me. It was challenging physically and emotionally and nothing like what I expected it to be, but it was exactly what it was meant to be. God turned our beautiful diocese of youth and adults upside-down and I could not be any more thankful that he did. We are definitely stronger for the work he did through us in the Harrisburg community and in our own community. Truly, His love held us together in ways we never could have imagined.

Thank you Harrisburg, you will always have a special place in my heart.

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God Pushed Me

6/25/2015 By Jesse Adkins, Senior at St. Patrick's

Coming off of two straight weeks at Camp Mikell and only 12 hours at home, I found myself barely awake in the St. Columba's parking lot watching the sunrise as I prepared to embark on the Diocesan mission trip last week. I had been looking forward to this mission trip for months because I would get to spend a week with many of my best friends doing what I love most, spreading the love of God. After the 12 hour bus ride, when we arrived in Harrisburg, all I wanted to do was go to sleep! I was exhausted from camp, and feeling sick from all of the Mikell Mold contaminating my systems.

The next day, as each group went off to do their own projects, I was a part of the group helping at the camp in Allison Hill that Cole talked about in his post. Since I have counseled a number of times and specifically counseled Emmaus House for the past two years, I thought it wouldn't be too bad to work with these kids all week. However, this was assuming that I would feel better than I had, but I felt even worse and had no energy to be fun with the kids. If you know me, you know I'm usually a very happy and energetic kid, but not so much this week. It was at this point where I had a decision to make. I was on this trip to specifically show these kids how much they are loved even in the terrible conditions that they live in. I had to decide whether I was going to be miserable and grumpy all week or if I was going to let go of my personal issues and dedicate the week to serving these children to give them an experience that they don't normally have in their daily lives.

This was where God took over for me. No matter how hard it was to get up each morning and go play with the kids who seemed to have endless energy, God helped me push through by working through me. God loves each and every person so much, no matter what their background is, and I believe that for some of these kids, it may be hard to see that because of the conditions they live. I realized that God put me there with those kids for a reason, so that he could work through me to show the kids how special each one of them was and to put pure joy in their lives by playing with them for hours each day. God also put me there to learn something about myself. He showed me that no matter how hard life can be sometimes, he is always there to help you push through to accomplish your goals.

The mission trip was not at all what I went into it expecting it to be. It was an amazing experience that was not easy, but so rewarding. It is in those unexpected ways that God often reveals himself the most and will teach you about your own life and those around you. I am back at Camp Mikell counseling right now while I write this blog post, and the experiences from last week's mission trip are allowing me to be a better counselor for the kids here this week. I know that no matter how stressed out or tired I may be at times, God is with me and working through me to give these kids the best week possible.

Peace and Love

From the Diocesan Youth Blog: <http://www.eycdioatl.org/blog>

Just Playing with Kids

6/24/2015 By Kara Struble, Junior at St. Matthias'

I recently went with the EYC on a mission trip to Harrisburg, PA. This was my first mission trip and I was the only one from my church. I had no idea what to expect.

We were divided into small groups to go out into the community at different work sites. My day group worked at a Day Camp held in a church in a community called Allison Hill. During the week with the kids, we played lots of dodgeball, played lots of games in the game room, and spent lots of time in the park. I really enjoyed spending time with the kids and getting to know them.

A favorite day is when I was able to spend some time with a little girl who had been in trouble. She asked me to help her make a puppet and play chutes and ladders. We spent a couple of hours together talking and playing until other kids joined in. It really seemed to turn her day around and I felt happy to make her feel better. Another special moment happened when our group brought instruments to the Day Camp. It was like bringing Camp Mikell Morning Singing into the Allison Hill Community. At first the kids looked at us like we were crazy as we were singing "Pharaoh Pharaoh", but the more we sang, the more they joined in. By the time we got to "Fireworks", everyone was singing and dancing. It was awesome!! Father Tripp even told us later that night that he heard two of the kids singing "Thuma Mina" as he was walking back to the van.

Mr. Bill, the man in charge of the Day Camp, told us when we first arrived that even though Allison Hill is a very poor community, they are rich with the love and life of the community. I found this to be true through my interactions with the kids and I'm thankful that I had the chance to get to know them over the week.

Trusting God

6/21/2015 By Andrew Pritchett, Senior at Christ Church Kennesaw

Hey y'all,

Last night, I got home from the Diocesan Mission Trip to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This trip was one of the most amazing weeks of my life

During this trip, I formed new friendships and strengthened old ones. I helped an elderly couple that had a hard time getting around clean out their house and garage. I became friends with a little girl who could not speak a single word of English. I took part in the most beautiful church service of my life. I sang songs and played card games. But even though I did all these things, I saw so much more.

I saw our Episcopal Youth Community come together. I saw just how much we care for each other. I saw us bring hope into the city of Harrisburg.

Some of us visited the elderly, some of us packed food at a food bank, some of some of us surveyed the poorest areas of Harrisburg in order to pave the way for help to come to those areas in the future, some of us worked at community gardens, but all of us brought hope. We, as a community, brought hope into a city in an ocean of fear

During a compline service Wednesday night and our closing Eucharist Thursday night, we sang "Oceans" by Hillsong UNITED. The song talks about how, even in oceans deep, we need to trust God and call out to Him. I had heard this song countless times before this trip, but it was during this trip that the song finally clicked with me.

On Tuesday night, I had another seizure. I was reminded of how these seizures could happen at anytime, this reminder brought me back into an ocean of fear. On Wednesday night, during our prayer stations, this community gathered around and prayed for me. During this, Father Tripp talked about how when we're in these oceans of fear, we need to call out to God together, as a community. So later that night, during compline, we sang "Oceans" for the first time and I remember crying as soon as I saw the song's name on the projector. This community gave me hope as I stood in an ocean of fear.

But I've gone on long enough about how what happened during the trip, it's time to tell you why this trip was one of the most amazing weeks of my life. It all comes down to our Episcopal Youth Community. This community is what made this trip amazing. This community is why I wrote all of this. Because of this community, in oceans deep, my faith will stand. Stay Awesome.

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From the Diocesan Youth Blog: <http://www.eycdioatl.org/blog>

Finding God in Harrisburg

6/20/2015 By Cole Ferguson, Senior at St. Columba's

It's my first day back from one of the most life changing experiences I have ever had. Going into this mission trip, I was just another lazy teenager who was really on the fence about his faith in God. I honestly had pretty low expectations going into the trip and just thought of it as a week with my friends in a city that I had never been before. I ended up being transformed and with a faith as vast and deep as the ocean.

My day group had the privilege of helping with a day camp at a church in Allison Hill, PA. Just a little background, Allison Hill is considered the "poverty pocket" of Harrisburg and is one of the poorest towns in PA. These kids came from broken families, awful living conditions, and a life that people like me would dread having. But Mr. Bill-the man in charge of the day camp- told me something the first day that was shockingly true. "Allison Hill is one of the poorest and worst places to live in this country, but we have a lot of life and a lot of love so, in a way, we are the richest" Mr. Bill told us, and wow was he right! These kids filled the room with energy and the brightest smiles all-day everyday from the second we arrived there! They were so overjoyed by our presence that they latched on to our backs and seemed to never let go! Seriously...I don't think I have ever given more piggy back rides in my life. There was one kid that really stood out to me though. He was a five year old boy named Anthony. Now when my group first got to the church, Anthony stuck out like a sore thumb because when all the other kids were peeking through the window trying to see us as we came up, Anthony was sitting on the step with his hands in his pockets and his head hanging low. As the day went on, Anthony gradually came out of his shell and by the end of the day was jumping/piggy back riding ball of energy. It was that kind of impact on the kids that stuck out to me this week. That though we couldn't change the situation they were living in, we offered them an escape. We gave them 5 hours of pure joy that they probably wouldn't have gotten at home. It's that kind of pure joy and kindness that I can really see God using me in. God is using me as a hand that reaches out and holds a kids hand when the cross the street or pushing them on a swing or even throws a dodgeball at them, all things that offer them a bit of happiness aside from what they are dealing with.

My experience with the kids was great and it definitely changed who I was as a person, my faith restoring/life altering experience didn't happen on a work site. It happened in the lobby of the church where we stayed for the week. Before that night, I had only believed in God as some spiritual ghost that I couldn't see or feel or hear but I just blindly believed in. But after that night, I can honestly say that I have seen and felt God in a way that opened my eyes to a love that I can't even fathom. The way that God took the program for the evening and pushed it in the direction that he wanted it to go, not what we had planned. I have never felt more love radiating from a room like I felt that night as the whole youth community on our trip prayed over our friend who needed us. It was moving. It was life changing. It was faith restoring.

Coming out of this trip, I have a faith stronger than ever before and a community that shares that faith. A community that loves me. A community that has shown me God. A community that is 'held together' by a city that is full of life and love despite its poverty. That's how I found God in Harrisburg, PA.

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