

us there have really stayed with me. All we did for them was visit their church and sing a few songs, then they invited us to share in their New Year's Eve. We were able to dance with them, play dominos, and they served us a cake. One of the women made each of us a paper flower, even though we'd never met her before. I thought this was amazing: she took the time and energy to make 19 beautiful paper flowers for people she'd never met. That night was not only fun, but also, it gave us an opportunity to learn more about the Cuban culture.

Another thing I loved was the music. In church, people got so involved in singing and dancing to the music that it made our church services at home seem pretty dull. At the Methodist church in Matanzas, two younger girls came up to me during the last praise song to dance with me. As soon as the song started, they came right over and took my hands, something I was surprised by because I tried to avoid strangers when I was younger.

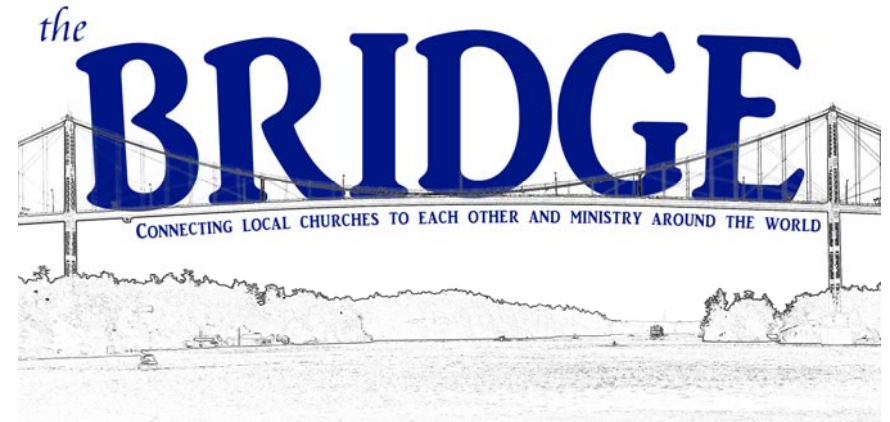
Visit <http://bit.ly/MadelinesMOP> story to continue reading Madeline's story.



The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world.

www.unyumc.org

The Upper New York Conference is seeking nominations for the Harry Denman Evangelism Award Learn more at: <http://bit.ly/UNYdenman>.



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

A look inside!

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Mission of Peace—An amazing experience for youth

Mission of Peace (MOP) is an annual journey of discovery and shalom to nations in our global community sponsored

by the Northeastern Jurisdiction Council on Youth Ministries. The most recent MOP trip was to Cuba, Dec. 28, 2017-

Jan. 12, 2018. Fourteen youth went on the trip, of which four were from Upper New York. Next year, MOP will be going

to the Philippines. Read in their own words, what two Upper New York youth experienced in their MOP trip to Cuba.

My faith transformation during my Mission of Peace trip to Cuba

By Gavin Hill, Eden UMC

The day before we left for Cuba, I felt super scared and I made this prayer that was inspired from Psalm 91:1-12. I wrote, "Lord. My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. I ask that you deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. I ask that you cover me, and I will find refuge; your faithfulness is a shield and buckler. I ask that I not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day. Thank you." This prayer made me feel very comforted. And this, was only the beginning of my faith transformation

Upon arriving to Cuba, I was nervous because we walked out of the airport and a crowd of people were staring at us. I immediately had a bad feeling. Then, we walked to the parking lot and my emotions completely changed. Our transportation was a painted school bus with writing that said, "Love," and "End the blockade on Cuba."

On the way to the house of Farfan (the place we stayed), I saw the immense beauty God had created in Cuba with the vast fields and palm trees. Also, the crystal clear blue ocean. When we arrived, the owner, Ricardo, made us popcorn and told us about the house. He was so friendly, and right then, I knew that Cuba was a place of community and love.

Throughout the trip, we visited pastors and churches.

One of the days, we were visited by a professor by the name of Daniel Montoya. He told us about the history of Christianity in Cuba and asked us a very deep question. He started by quoting the Rev. Martin Luther King Junior. "I have a dream but with open eyes." He then proceeded to ask, "what is your dream?" I was completely stumped. I thought my dream at that moment was to go to the Olympics for track and field. I was then proven wrong over the course of the trip. My dream is to go to the Olympics when I am a senior, so I can show people



the great things God has done to me. However, that is not the end of my dream. God has been calling me to be a pastor for quite some time and this trip helped me accept it. I hope to go to the

Olympics one to three times; however, my true dream is to be a pastor and change people's lives.

Visit <http://bit.ly/GavinsMOPstory> to continue reading Gavin's story.

Reflection of my Mission of Peace trip to Cuba

By Madeline Klein, Baker Memorial UMC

I didn't quite know what to expect from the Mission of Peace to Cuba. A few people I know had traveled to Cuba not long ago and from the descriptions they gave me, I envisioned dirty streets, people dancing, old cars, and colorful houses. While most of these expecta-

tions proved correct, there is so much more to Cuba than what they saw as tourists. They saw the outside of Cuba, the beautiful colors of the country's cities and beaches, but our group was able to dig deeper to see more: the incredible people and their culture.

Before going to Cuba, I thought the

language barrier we faced and the divisions between our governments might prevent us from really forming bonds with the people there. Despite these differences, we were united under our common belief in God. Through that, I was able to make friends that I'll always remember, both Cuban and American.

One of my favorite places we went to was the church of Carlos Rojas. We visited once to meet the pastor, then again on New Year's Eve to see their preparations for the New Year's celebration. The love and generosity the people showed

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