

## Northwood Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, Texas, served in Texas wildfire response

by Anne Little, volunteer work team member

A Northwood mission team went to Bastrop July 4-7 to help people who lost their homes in last fall's wildfires. Northwood has a tradition of multigenerational mission teams and we are happy that the tradition continued with this group. Our official total was 9 women, 4 youth, and 1 man for a day. There was some coming and going because several team members could only be there for part of the time. Everyone worked hard and accomplished a lot, but the need is enormous.

The Mission and Service Committee organized the trip through Faith Village, a consortium of four denominations including Presbyterians. A retired pastor and his wife, RJ and Gloria Mathews, were hired by FV; he supervises volunteer teams and she provides absolutely glorious meals— everything made strictly from scratch. Our meals were at Faith Village which is in the Baptist church in Smithville, a smaller town that's a few miles from Bastrop. One team member led a sharing and devotional time each evening. We slept on cots in the Smithville middle school gym after showering in the locker room. We also played games and enjoyed seeing the historic district of this beautiful little town.



Photo: Alan Ford



Photo: Northwood Presbyterian Church

The first day, we painted the new home of a family who had been given 30 minutes to evacuate last September. They are a couple and their 4-year-old daughter, and they will welcome another daughter in a few weeks. Their home which was totally destroyed along with all contents had been insured, but the amount was not enough to cover the costs of clearing the property, building a new home, and finding a place to live while those things were accomplished. They used part of their insurance money for a trailer that they parked on the property to live in. Because they met the Faith Village criteria, they were approved for volunteer labor with them purchasing all materials.

On the second through fourth days, the team worked to clear debris at another home that was totally destroyed. In that subdivision, homes on one side of the street were all ruined; those on the other side of the street were intact. An older couple had lived in the home we worked on, and they did not return until a few days before we got there. The man has had health problems since the fire, and they had not been able to face returning. It is important that the first pass through debris be done by hand, because people can find and salvage small items that may have sentimental value. In this house, there were some dishes and ceramics, most smashed but a few miraculously intact.

As always, team members returned tired but having received more than we were able to give. The summer heat was definitely a factor in making the work harder, and we hope to return again when the weather is cooler.