

YOUTH MISSION TRIP 2026!!!

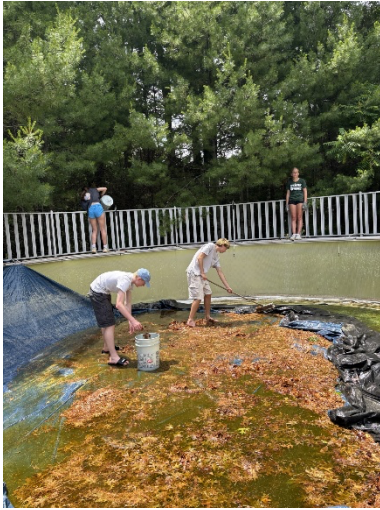


Our 2026 Mission Trip was unique from the get-go! When we started planning our trip in the fall of 2025, Reverend Bill proposed a **“6 states in 6 days”** trip. The plan was to go to each of the 6 New England states, stay in a local church, and do a day of service in each state. The group was excited! Then the blizzard of 2026 happened in February, school was cancelled for a week, and all the make-up school days in June cut our planned mission trip week very short. Instead of departing on June 21, we left after school let out on June 25, **turning our trip into “2 states in 2 days.”**



We began our service work at a Pilgrim Church member’s home right here in Duxbury. The family is facing some crises, so our group of 9 high school students (8 rising sophomores, 1 rising senior), veteran chaperone Greg Hunter, and me took our t-shirt motto to heart – we were **“Bringing Hope”** to this family

that could use some. We appreciated the God-wink “HOPE” sign (complete with the anchor that was also on our shirt!) that was hanging in the homeowner’s kitchen!

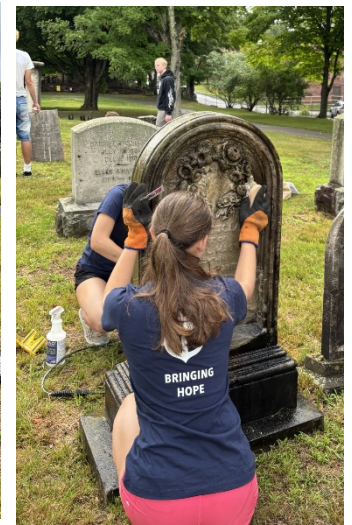


There were several jobs to do – cleaning and removing a collapsed pool cover, reinstalling the lining, weeding and mulching a walkway and flowerbed, and untying hundreds of knots from a winterized boat so it could be water-ready. The steady flow of homemade lemonade and watermelon from the homeowner, along with these kids’ fantastic attitudes, made for a productive afternoon!

After some quick showers, we then headed out to **Slatersville Congregational Church, UCC, in North Smithfield, RI**. We were greeted by Rick, the church moderator, who gave us a tour of the church buildings, then led us to their Fellowship Hall where church members provided us with a **DELICIOUS potluck dinner** – homemade mac ‘n cheese, chicken wings, pizza, meatballs and stuffed shells... YUM! WE were stuffed! But not so stuffed that we couldn’t eat the brownies and cake that were also made for us! We were blown away by the extravagant hospitality. We hooked up a projector to the internet, watched some FIFA World Cup soccer, played some games. Then the boys and Greg went to the cool downstairs Sunday School rooms for the night, the girls and I stayed in fellowship hall. Thanks to some quality blow up mattresses, we all slept quite well!

The next morning a breakfast of eggs, bagels and classic Rhode Island Wright Dairy coffee milk, we **met Kim Walker from the North Springfield Heritage Association** who is an expert at the preservation of historic cemeteries. Not only is she technically proficient, she also shared with us how important it is to remember and respect those who have passed. “They are more than just a headstone. They were a person who lived a life.” Her calm presence and instruction set the tone for a very special morning.





First we learned that harsh cleaners should never be used on old headstones, as they could damage the stone - often limestone or marble. We started with **rinsing the stone off with water**, which had a surprising immediate effect. Then we sprayed an **environmentally friendly cleaner** specifically made for headstones and gently brushed it over the headstone with a soft brush. We rinsed the stone again with water, then put one more coat of the spray to absorb into the stone. We saw other stones that had been treated last year and they were sparkling white! Who knew that was the original color?!? It's amazing what time and TLC can do!

The next lesson we learned was how to re-set a stone that is off-kilter. First, the stone must be carefully removed by digging out the soil around it, then it's placed upright in the hole using a level and lined up parallel to the adjacent headstone. Next, stone dust and gravel are alternately place around the stone, so it is stable within the ground. Finally, the soil and sod that was removed is put carefully back into place.

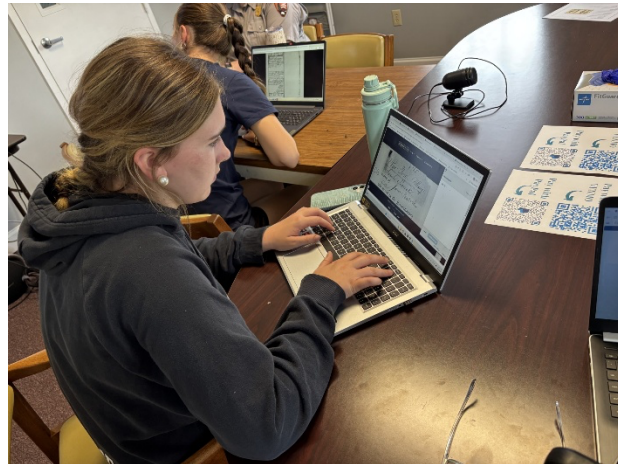
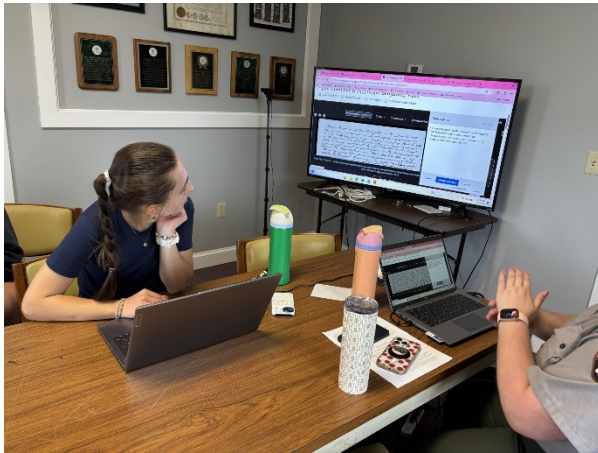


Our final lesson of the morning was learning how to find part of a headstone that has broken off.

First, we had to use a special probe to see if it was near the remaining half of the headstone. It was! Then we had to determine where the edges were so we could remove all the soil and sod to get it cleanly out of the ground. Once we had it out and leaning next to its bottom half, we replaced all the soil and sod. Kim said the repair work was quite involved, so she would do it another time. We were amazed at how well-preserved the soil-covered stone was!



Meanwhile, back inside the Heritage Association building....



Lily and Casey were **working with a National Park Ranger to transcribe historical documents into more easily-read text on a National Park website.** Most of the documents they worked on were pension requests from widows of fallen Civil War soldiers. Fascinating stuff!



We finished it all up with a group picture, including our teachers Kim and Gayle, specialists in historic cemeteries preservation.



Next up was lunch at the **CLASSIC northern Rhode Island restaurant – The Beef Barn!** Best roast beef sandwiches and burgers for incredibly reasonable prices! We highly recommend!

We followed up lunch with ice cream from the Pound Dairy Ice Cream stand right next door!

After lunch, Rich Keene, town historian and member of the North Smithfield Heritage Association, gave us a tour of Slatersville.

Slatersville, Rhode Island, was founded in 1803 by the pioneering industrialist entrepreneurs John Slater and his older brother Samuel Slater.



Known as **America's first planned mill village**, the settlement pioneered the "Rhode Island System" of manufacturing. This model went beyond just building a factory; it involved constructing a completely company-owned village surrounding the mill, including worker housing, company stores, a bank, and places of worship – the Slatersville Congregational Church, and the nearby Catholic church for the

French-Canadian workers. Fun fact about **Slatersville Congregational** – they had the **first Sunday Sunday School in the country!** And it's still running today! (Another fun-fact, our godson and his brother went through Confirmation there!)



After walking through the town-green and seeing how the whole community was centralized around the factory, **we walked down to the mill ponds that powered the factory.** Each group enjoyed the view in their own way 😊



We finished our tour with a visit to the Memorial Hall museum that was built after WWI in honor of fallen local heroes. The kids were fascinated with all the old devices – a washing machine, a stroller, even a rotary phone!

We learned that Rhode Island was the last of the 13 colonies to allow all (white) men to vote. Initially, only property-owning white men and eldest sons were allowed to vote. We all assumed that the suffrage flag was to support women's votes. It was eye-opening to learn that the "common man" had to fight for his vote, too!

We saw the Suffrage flag with stars representing each of the colonies, but one had a cloud over it and "RI" next to it. It was effective marketing, because eventually they expanded to ALL white men! Baby steps... Fortunately, we've made strides in the suffrage movement!



Our next service work involved helping remove dead branches from trees in the town green in front of the church. Greg Hunter came well prepared with an electric chainsaw and a pole saw. After he went up on the ladder to remove the dead limbs, the kids cut them up into smaller pieces, ready to be taken away.

The Slatersville Congregation was SO appreciative of this work. The dead limbs were a task hanging over their heads – quite literally!



Our short, but VERY sweet stay in RI concluded with a community event, sponsored by their local Scout troop. There was a bbq with hot dogs, watermelon, popcorn and drinks. There were games on the green, followed by a movie on a screen – Disney movie, Hoppers – we also highly recommend!

Our kids were awesome – they jumped right into the fun, including inviting many of the local kids to play with them – giant Jenga, Duck-duck-goose, and Spikeball, among others.



We concluded our stay with games, some heartfelt talk about what we saw and experienced, and a quick night's sleep. We woke up, cleaned up after ourselves, and **made our way back to Duxbury with our hearts full of gratitude – for the warm and welcoming Slatersville UCC community, and for the opportunity to learn and help others.** I'm also always so grateful for our amazing kids who bring the love and positive attitude, and for the families who have raised such great kids. And of course for Greg Hunter, who always brings his love of kids,



positive attitude, willingness to do anything, and corny t-shirts that never fail to amuse.

-Angelique Kania

Christian Education
Director