

HENDERSON SETTLEMENT WORK CAMP

Work Camp serves two purposes in conjunction with our ministry here in the Laurel Fork Valley of Southeastern Kentucky. First (and primarily) it serves as an opportunity to educate the church in the area of missions in particular. Loving and serving are mission concepts that work more effectively when there are faces and names to go with them. When stereotypes and prejudices are broken down; when we realize how fortunate we are; when our world and culture collides with another, a different world that is just as real and just as valid emerges. Loving and serving quickly replace sympathy and pity when there is personal, intimate contact. Come to learn, to love and understand our people.

Secondly, work camp often serves as the bridge between dreams and reality for mountain families. A roof that doesn't leak, floors without holes, running water, hot water, steps, decks and porches for entry access and a way to escape the heat from the house during the late afternoon, windows that keep out the cold winter wind . . . all these and more problems that many have and no resources for which to deal with. Work camp extends this vital service to the community through adopting projects and raising the money to purchase the materials over and above registration fees for the week. Projects on the Settlement campus can also be adopted and funded to enable us to accomplish what needs to be done within a very limited budget. The key words and concepts for our Work Camp are serving and learning – learning by serving.

Let me tell you ahead of time what we are not. We are not a Christian Coney Island or Disneyland with attendants at every ride to supervise your every activity and ensure a “good time”. We are not a summer Youth Camp where recreation is a priority (although our facilities provide ample opportunity for volley ball, basketball, tennis, hiking and horseshoes). We are not a “spiritual retreat” in terms of organized Bible studies, group discussions, or structured classes.

Your week here is a chance to experience a different culture and its people and hopefully gain insight into the definition of mission. **We are here to accept the community people as they are and minister to them within the context of their culture and needs.** This is not to imply that we are rigid and heavy-handed with the program. We enjoy different, sincere questions meant to gain understanding. We are open to suggestions --- many of our recent changes have been based on input from groups. Our emphasis here is on the attitude you have. We offer learning by serving. Learning comes in many forms – through good times and bad, frustration and joy, success and failure, questions and answers (incomplete answers sometimes), trusting and giving of yourself. We don't plan pain and frustration for you, but sometimes it happens, whether it's the heat or rain or the family you adopted or the food or whatever. These are still opportunities to learn about your mission agency, the community and you. We welcome you as you come to learn through serving.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

We welcome youth, adults, college, intergenerational, district and conference groups. We discourage groups from bringing children under 13 (unless prior arrangements have been made). Accommodations permit us to house up to 200 people per week. Most groups average 15 – 20 people. Larger groups may be scheduled as long as there is adequate space available.

IN PREPARATION FOR MISSION WORK

Please prepare yourselves for the week you will spend here. The ride on the way to Henderson Settlement is NOT soon enough. You may want to read books on working with cross cultures and/or discuss missions. (NIGHT COMES TO THE CUMBERLANDS by Harry Caudill is excellent reading on Appalachia.

MISSION JOBS AT HENDERSON SETTLEMENT

Of course the main job to be done at Henderson is repairing homes and we will need people that want to work on construction. Additionally, we need a team leader for the construction project, someone with experience to build and lead the team to finalizing the project

If you are not able or not wanting to do construction, other possibilities would be working in the greenhouse, the baby pantry, the thrift store or the food pantry.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The key to community involvement is to adopt a project in the community. People in the community come to Henderson Settlement to fill out applications for work to be done on their homes. We develop a project list of work to be done in the community (and also on the Settlement) which is then posted on our website. Groups “adopt” a project, raise money for the materials, then come and complete it. While not all groups can do community projects, many can and it is the best way to experience the wonderful people here. Please consider your project in light of our real life situations. A mobile home trailer with 8 – 10 years of life left doesn’t need a 20 year roof. We don’t have 1-2 foot snows and thus don’t need to frame to those specs. Consider the budget of the project --- funds are limited.

Nevertheless, do your best. Part of poverty, other than waiting, is having to make do with what you have. Do as good a job as you would on your own home even if it isn’t the way you’d do it. An important part of our ability to do missions work and serve as a ministry within this community are the facilities which exist here on the campus of Henderson Settlement. These programs and facilities depend heavily upon work camp groups, which choose to minister to the community through improving or repairing facilities here on campus. We recommend that first time groups (with regard to work programs) take a serious look at this option in their initial year.

FREE DAY

Wednesday is our FREE DAY. Options include a tour of Henderson Settlement facilities and a host of local parks and recreation areas. A list of area attractions is available. Any group leaving Henderson Settlement must return before 10 PM. Breakfast is served to work campers on Wednesday. A tally board in the dining hall is provided for you who will be eating lunch and supper that day.

WHAT NOT TO BRING

DO NOT BRING alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, or fireworks. Electronics and other personal devices used with head phones are acceptable. DO NOT PLAN to do laundry while at Henderson Settlement. Adequate water and laundry facilities are not available except in emergencies. We do not have public washers. Plan to bring an adequate supply of clothing or visit a Laundromat in Middlesboro (30 miles) on your free day.

WHAT TO BRING

Sleeping bag/bed roll, linens, pillow, towels, washcloths, soap, shower shoes, trash bags, etc. Work clothes (enough for a week of dirt and sweat), boots (work shoes), gloves, rain-gear, jacket and swimwear. (Please bring only modest clothing.) Bibles, notebook, pencil, cameras, film, flashlight, musical instrument, if desired, insect repellent, large thermos, plus materials for singing and devotions.

HAND TOOLS

If you adopt a special project a tool list will be provided so you can come equipped. Many groups have chosen to donate their tools when they leave and you may wish to consider this too. If adopting a Community Project, it is requested that you bring pickups or vans for transporting people and materials to your work site. If this is impossible, please let us know well in advance. Charter buses are not much help getting you to a site on a back road.

NOTE: You may bring your own tools/equipment at your own risk. Henderson Settlement is not responsible for theft or damage of your personal items.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Appalachian Mountains extend from Canada to Alabama so there can be no single culture or stereotype of the mountain people. Stereotypes and prejudices fall apart when individuals, families and communities are experienced personally. As unique as snowflakes and as everyday as old shoes, you will find real people wherever you visit.

We have roads, stores, cable and satellite dishes, school, and even have Nintendo! We also have mass unemployment, water problems, minimal healthcare and isolation. Lack of opportunity to pursue and achieve goals taken for granted elsewhere hangs over the mountains

like the morning mist. Many of the people here are descendants of the original settlers and are fiercely proud, yet are in great need and living in terrible conditions. **Often the “poor” are seen as somehow inferior, as though their personal worth determined their “net worth”. Shedding that point of view is sometimes the hardest thing a VISITOR has to do, much harder than pouring concrete or bailing hay.**

We hope that work campers will go home with the understanding of both the diversity and the commonality of all people and a fresh perspective on their own life situations.

If you are interested in joining in the Mount Comfort Mission Trip, you can do this by signing up on the church website or you may find lists in the lobbies of the church.

The trip is planned for October 12 – 18, 2025. Sunday, October 12 will be a travel day to Henderson. Your arrival time is to be anywhere from 2 PM to 6 PM. Everyone needs to be there for an Orientation at 7 PM.

Then we leave Henderson Settlement on Saturday, October 18 after breakfast and travel back home.

There will be upcoming meetings to disseminate information, a chance to ask questions and further planning of the trip.