



GRAEBER RD TRIP REPORT

LEWISTOWN, PA



3/12-16/2015

Day 1 – Thursday March 12

The Graeber Rd. Lewistown Traveling Team had an early start since the best available non-stop flight on Southwest had a 5:30AM departure. We had seven travelers (John Batchelder, Roy Ross, Rebecca Christopoulos, Tracy & TA Laman, and Clay & Lauryn Tidwell) that needed to be at Hobby in time to check bags, get through the TSA, and get to the gate by boarding time of 5AM. Despite the overnight rain, slick roads, and intermittent showers on the drive to the airport, everything went as smooth as silk until Clay got kicked out of the TSA – “PRE” line and had to wait several extra minutes in another line only to endure enhanced screening before rejoining the group.

Our plane lifted off into the early morning sky and that was the last we saw of rain for a few days. The flight was smooth and short for most of us who were sound asleep until touchdown in Baltimore ten minutes earlier than was planned. That was helpful since we waited ten extra minutes at the wrong baggage carousel for our luggage before finally figuring out we needed to move. The shuttle bus ride from BWI to the offsite car rental lot was an experience not soon forgotten as all rental car agencies used the same bus and they have mastered the art of filling the bus to beyond its normal capacity. The gentleman standing in front of us was apologizing for almost falling into our laps but we reassured him that if he did fall, he would not go far. Soon we had all seven passengers and luggage loaded into the rental van, GPS coordinates programmed into the Garmin, and we were on our way to Lewistown – almost.

We were reminded that before heading out we should have a prayer which we did in the rental car parking lot. Isn't it great when Christians keep each other on track!

Once on the road, someone noticed and commented that all the buildings – both residential homes and businesses -seemed to be painted light colors. Why this is no one seems to know and to this day we are all haunted by this question.

Traffic getting out of Maryland was moderate to heavy and we saw the potential for construction delays on the opposite side of the highway – a good thing to consider for the return trip. Soon enough we were out of the Baltimore area and crossed the state line into Pennsylvania.

We stopped for a break about halfway up Interstate 83 and got a coffee and some much needed leg stretching. We also used this stop to decide on a lunch place and chose a local grill on Chocolate Avenue in Hershey, PA. Somehow that sounded better than McDonalds. Hershey is just east of Harrisburg which is the capital of Pennsylvania. After lunch which was provided for by a generous donor from Graeber Rd., we walked across the street for a quick visit to the local museum for some history about the area and about the Hershey Empire. We were to meet our eighth traveler (Bob W.) at the home of our hosts, Bill and Donna Garrett for an early evening meal and then head to the Lewistown church building for our first workshop and devotional period.

After a quick stop at the church building in Lewistown, we arrived at the Garrett farm in Belleville, PA about 4:30PM. We enjoyed the delicious smells of roast beef and gravy, potatoes, fresh rolls, corn, lima beans, and assorted pies and goodies from the local Amish bakery while we got a tour of the house and our room assignments. If you look up hospitality in the dictionary don't be surprised to see Donna Garrett's picture there. After dinner we headed out to Lewistown for the workshop.

We had a total of 16 attending this first session including the new preacher and his wife Don and Esther Rorabaugh and some of the membership. John presented an introduction to Bible Teaching and despite John being a little rubber legged by the end it was well received and set a positive tone for the remainder of the time together.

We heard some good feedback about some of the challenges that smaller congregations face and the difficulties of growing the church in the Northeast US. There is a lot of work that needs to be accomplished in order to spread the gospel across Pennsylvania and lots of room for preachers at several congregations. We discussed challenges like Bible classes with all levels of students from baby Christians to mature Christians and discussed some strategies for addressing these. We sang together and closed our first session as we had opened it - with prayer.

When we returned to the Garrett farm most of us were ready for bed and didn't need anyone to rock us to sleep!

Day 2 – Friday March 13

Bill was up early as he needed to go in to work and the rest of us must have had a variety wake-up calls as we made our way in stages to the Garrett kitchen for fresh toasted breads or pastries from the Amish bakers, Honey Crisp apples, fresh apple cider, and a variety of cereals. Tracy had a moment of panic when she couldn't find the cinnamon raisin bread that ~~we~~ John had hidden in a cupboard but recovered soon after we got her blood sugar levels up to Pennsylvania Dutch standards.

Donna volunteered to be our tour guide for the morning and we all piled in the van after breakfast. We visited several local sites including Swarey's Orchard store for some apple butter and beeswax, the Purple Martin Bakery for discount bread and baked goods, and Peachy's Furniture and Repair Shop where we had a discussion about how much handmade furniture and how many wooden toys Bob could haul back to Texas in his Explorer. At one point in the tour we stopped at the top of the mountain for a view of Big Valley from above and encountered a hang-gliding club assembling their gliders and preparing to jump. We all wanted to stay and watch them take off but Roy kept talking about paying one of the guys to let him take a turn and we felt it best to get out of there before we had a big story to tell.

We stopped at the local Amish general store – not a usual tourist stop but where the locals shopped for their own. We came out with some homemade coloring books and a few other assorted items. Lauryn and TA were taken by the glass dishes in a variety of colors that Donna said were selected by the Amish girls as wedding gifts. They had to choose between blue, pink, white, or clear and once chosen they were “all in”. The Amish merchants were very nice, gentle people and were happy to see a van full of eager “English” shoppers showing up out of the blue.

We met Bill for lunch in Lewistown at a favorite local restaurant and enjoyed a hearty lunch of sandwiches, burgers, breakfast food (served all day), and Pennsylvania scrapple which everyone tried and enjoyed. I call it Pennsylvania Dutch boudin – no casing, different spices, no rice - but a base of cornmeal and the same porky goodness you will find in a proper Cajun boudin. Ok maybe it's not really like boudin after all... but it is good.

The group shared a couple of slices of pie for dessert – one of which was a traditional mincemeat. Lunch was provided for again by another generous donor from Graeber Rd. Thank you!

After lunch we got everyone back in the van it was off to a couple more stops until finally reaching Pieght's the Amish grocery about a mile from the Garrett farm to pick up some provisions for our Saturday lunch with the church. Tracy and TA decided to walk the mile home and we didn't tell them about the black bears that were common in the area and that the unseasonable warm weather might encourage them to wake up from hibernation early.

We enjoyed an early supper of Sloppy Joes and chips with Rotel cheese dip and then it was off to the church building for our evening workshop.

Clay led the evening session and did a great job presenting information about teaching styles and methods and different kinds of learners. There were 23 participants and we ended up having some good discussion with several members of the Lewistown congregation. We all have discovered the genuine warmth and love that exists here and although challenges exist, the future looks bright for Lewistown. The arrival of the Rorabaughs will bring new energy and opportunity for growth and the relationships we are forging on this trip will continue to bring us all closer together.

After our workshop we returned to the farm and did our best to consume the ever increasing pile of goodies that seem to be multiplying and morphing into some form of narcotic that we couldn't seem to get enough of. Roy topped his day off with two tablespoons of yellow mustard before retiring for the night. Who knew this was a little known remedy for leg cramps? The things you learn....

It's probably fair to note at this point that the Garrett's do not have a guitar which is probably for the best. John decided to share some of his recorded ballads and Rebecca has used so many tissues that the paper mills are working overtime to keep up.

Tracy has been enjoying the farmhouse kitchen and decided to make a bread pudding for the potluck planned for Sunday. Her bread of choice – the homemade iced cinnamon raisin bread. That is of course after she made cookies and assembled deli meats and cheese from Peight's for our lunch at the church building on Saturday. One local treat is "Sweet Lebanon" bologna. Let's just say for the record it is more than pretty good. Somebody stop her! The ladies keep fighting over who is going to do the dishes and the guys are doing our best to provide them with plenty of dirty ones over which to fight.

Day 3 - Saturday March 14

Today is our big workshop day. We were all up early downing lots of coffee, toast with apple butter, leftovers from yesterday's lunch, and anything else that didn't move fast enough to get out of the way.

Donna's familiar "FIVE MINUTES" order went off soon enough and we were ready to get moving.

Some left early to stop and pick up more supplies for lunch (mostly bread and baked goods) and the rest loaded up in the van for the short trip from Belleville to Lewistown. Our sunny weather seems to be over as it drizzled all night and continued for most of the day. This area is mostly rolling farmland and wooded ridges with some rocky outcroppings. Most if not all the trees here are hardwoods and are leafless this time of year and with the majority of snow either melted or dingy dirty some could say that

it isn't exactly a beautiful spot. But the foggy clouds covering the tops of the ridges, the rugged hardscrabble landscape, and the dark sentinels of trees have a picturesque character all on their own. God's creation is beautiful even if it seems stark and different.

The workshop continued with Clay providing some practical applications of Bible class curriculum and resources. We were interrupted with a text from Eddie about Lacey's transplant and we stopped and had a prayer together. Our group is so thankful for God's blessings and His answer to prayers on behalf of Lacey and her family. We also prayed for the donor's family and recognized the circumstances that make transplants possible.

After the morning session we had lunch and time to visit. Two brothers, Bill and Randy Morrison, brought homemade soup and we attacked it and the deli trays like a hungry pack of wolverines after a long winter. I think we are trying to counteract all the carbs from the Amish baked goods.

As the workshop continued, Roy led a discussion and used the church at Philippi and the story of Lydia to bring it home to Lewistown. We had some great discussion and encouragement about the future of the congregation and opportunities to grow. Everyone was upbeat and encouraged and then Bob stepped up to the plate. Bob had earlier created a grid-like picture on a flipchart and proceeded to scare the attendees by telling them that indeed he was an engineer and had worked for 36 years perfecting his craft and most recently had been using Excel and PowerPoint almost exclusively. He quickly put the group at ease and in a typical Bob-like manner did a masterful job of creating a cryptogram (word find) from a series of Scriptures in his grid which eventually displayed the word USEFUL which was the result of his assigned topic on Taking Ownership.

We concluded the workshop with a short session on Developing Leaders led by John and talked about organization, establishing elders, and what to do if there are no qualified men. We also discussed the different roles of men and women both in the home as well as in the Lord's Church and gave some practical suggestions for the future.

The entire day was beneficial to all who attended and it reinforced how much can be accomplished by fellow Christians who work together to encourage and share with one another. Coincidentally we also demonstrated what Clay was teaching about different styles and methods. We had high tech colorful slides in Clay's presentations with great handouts and lots of support and discussion, medium tech slides in John's presentations with mostly text and lecture style delivery, low tech with Bob's homemade spreadsheet, and no tech with Roy's open discussion and feedback session. All were effective in their own way and all produced the desired result – we communicated information and shared knowledge and experiences together. It was a successful workshop and I can easily say that we received as much as we gave and everyone was blessed by being together.

Some quotes from the workshop:

“How old should one be to get baptized?”

Bill said, “Read Matt 28 the Great Commission and ask – ‘are you ready to teach others?’”

“Just Show Up”

“How do you teach your prepared lesson about the flood if a person comes to class that has never heard of Noah?”

“A thirteen week lesson plan can easily change to a 26 week plan depending on who shows up and what gets covered.”

With the workshop completed we returned to the farm for the evening and Bill invited those who were interested to visit some of the local Amish neighbors in their homes. Cows were milked by some of our younger travelers and Tracy took it upon herself to teach some young Amish sisters how to play the stacking hands game. She was so taken by how cute these little girls were that we had to check all her bags to make sure she wasn't trying to bring one back to Texas with her.

After the visit to the Amish farm it was stated by some in our group that:

“Some of us smelt like cows”, “Some of us felt like cows”, and “Some of us looked like cows”

‘Nuf said about that.

I think there was a visit to a local bread baker to pick up “a few” loaves of fresh bread to take home. Let's just say that if the plane should land prematurely, we can survive for days on the stash. I think I heard someone say, “Let's throw out these clothes – they are dirty and smell like cows anyway. We can buy new ones later. There'll be more room for bread”.

Ok maybe I made that up but it could have happened.

Some of us skipped the farm and bread tour and studied the inside of our eyelids for a brief time until being awakened by a familiar sound of “FIVE MINUTES!”

What? Where are we going next?

Why its dinner time of course! One of the Lewistown members had generously invited us all out to eat at the best (only) Italian restaurant in Bellville – Richies OIP (Original Italian Pizza). Our hosts Ken and his wife Mona were not able to join us but another couple who had attended one of the sessions - Butch and his wife Sandra were there. This lovely couple are in their eighties and are lifetime residents of the area. They entertained our end of the table with stories of their family life in central PA. One of the best was when one of their grandchildren came for a visit and saw the Amish for the first time they remarked, “Hey Grandpa look at all those Pilgrims!”

The food at Richies was BIG and delicious and did I mention it was BIG? Folks in this area have quite an appetite and as I pushed my unfinished plate of Italian sausage & peppers over rigatoni pasta away I noticed that Butch's wife had polished hers off with gusto including a couple of major sized hunks of homemade Italian bread and a salad. I give!

We were joined at dinner by Savannah a young lady from Milton, FL who has been visiting Lewistown and helping prepare a children's class, prepare the bulletin, and other tasks while staying at the Garrett's. After dinner we received a text update that Lacey was heading to surgery, we had a prayer in the van. We then returned to the farm with lots of to-go boxes and settled in for the evening. Before long some were involved in a hot Nertz game, some were watching a basketball game, and some were just chilling out or preparing for tomorrow's worship service. Pie was eaten and someone who will go unnamed brought out a new flavor of Whoopie Pie for us to try. “Have you tried the raspberry? – It is really good!”

Stop it already! Somebody needs to lock up the Amish bakeries for the weekend.

Day 4 Sunday March 15

I was up at 6:00AM to make coffee and to try to get the last of the wheat bread before the rest of the crew. We were ready to leave for worship well before the "Donna Alarm" went off and arrived early enough to get the food and tables ready for the potluck that would follow our services.

Thirty-five were in attendance and the Graeber Rd. team conducted class for the adults and teens while Savannah taught the little ones. Roy brought the Bible lesson to the adults and Clay taught the teens. After class we had worship and John led singing, Clay preached, and Bob & Roy led prayers, served the Lord's Supper, and took up the collection. We all prayed for Lacey and the whole Smerek family thanking God for His blessings and answered prayers. It was wonderful to worship together and to deepen our relationship with the Lewistown church.

Following worship we enjoyed a covered dish potluck and visited with our Lewistown brothers and sisters. The food was great and the time of fellowship was priceless.

After lunch we had one more session to wrap up our workshop. We had originally planned for an evening worship time but decided to call an audible since most would not be able to return. We had some open and frank discussion about some of the varying expectations and experiences that the congregation has had in the past and some they face in the near future. We listened, offered some practical suggestions, and provided encouragement. We discussed what the essential elements they could focus on – regular, congregational worship times, effective Bible study, building maintenance, administration/finance, and fellowship. Areas like benevolence and outreach, missions and others are important and should not be neglected but in order to be effective they needed to strengthen their own core group first.

We acknowledged the reality that challenges still exist and some will likely remain for some time but the future looks promising for Lewistown. The new preacher and his wife will undoubtedly bring some energy and stability. Don is not a novice and has already proven that he can reach out into a community through interaction with the local businesses, hospitals, and fire and police departments. Justin Morrison will complete his two year training at Sunset International and is enthusiastic about running a campaign to identify new prospects for Bible studies and hopes to bring some of his team to PA upon graduation. We agreed to provide some tools like Safety Chain, Program of Work, and other organizational helps and to look at providing some study outlines and recordings of Bible classes. We are already talking about the next trip and the possibility of other interaction between Lewistown members and Graeber Rd.

We concluded our afternoon meeting about 3:30PM and returned to the farm tired but happy to have had the opportunity to work in God's vineyard. Plans for the evening include eating an industrial sized pan of lasagna provided by one of the Lewistown members, garlic cheese bread, and leftover pie. The girls went to Lewistown to watch a movie and the guys hung out continuing the conversation from the last session, telling funny work stories, or watching a basketball game with Donna. When the movie goes returned a big game of chicken-foot dominoes cranked up which chased some of us to an early bedtime. We are parting ways tomorrow and will have some time on the return trip to reflect even more on the value of this trip.

Day 5 Monday March 16

The return trip was in view as everyone got up early Monday morning. Bob was taking Clay and Lauryn with him for a long drive to Texas and the rest of the group packed up the van and headed for Baltimore. We were sad to say goodbye but ready to get on the road. There was a stop or two in Belleville to pick up bread, pie, and apples (the orchard was closed) then on to Hershey for one more stop in Chocolate World. We had some time to reflect on our visit and the great friendships we had made. We talked of Lacey and her amazing progress and how we all missed our families. We thought about how blessed we are to be part of God's family especially that we are in a strong congregation. I think everyone on the trip has a new appreciation for how difficult some things are that we take for granted.

The traffic on the return trip was light to moderate and we arrived in the Baltimore area in time to get a bite to eat before returning the van. We arrived at the offsite rental car return at 3:45PM and by 4:15 we were all through checking in our luggage and the TSA security line. This time Tracy was the only one had a "PRE" designation and she got stopped for enhanced screening while the rest of us walked on through. The plane was on time and we touched down early in Hobby only to hear that we had to wait until a gate could be cleared and for them to get a jet way ready for us. So much for being early! All the luggage made it and before long we were all home safe and sound.

Thanks once again to all for your prayers, donations, and support. The traveling team were the boots on the ground but we are aware that many people were praying for us and that several had generously provided for many of our meals.

I hope this report provides a sense of how the trip went and we are all available if you need any additional information.

Yours in Christ

John Batchelder (with input and edits from the group)

3/16/2015