

# Youth follows God's call to mission trip

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but "wherever I feel led I go."

When he preaches, Patrick says his nerves surface in the forms of a red face and sweat. But the longer he stands up in front of the congregation, the more he relaxes and feels the Holy Spirit work through him, he says.

When asked to speak, Patrick says the first thing he does is pray. When tasked with finding a sermon topic, he prays again.

"That's the best thing to do. Even though I'm standing in the church, it's God talking."

Before Patrick goes to bed, he puts on his headphones and listens to music — that is the time, he says, when God speaks to him the most.

"My mind is just going and going and I'm listening to what he's saying," the young man relates.

As he writes his sermons, he sits with his Bible open beside him and jots down the things he hears through Scripture.

Often, the teen's sermons go through several revisions as he reads and fixes and tweaks. Patrick says he sometimes even changes portions right before the service, afraid that what he wrote will not make sense to the people listening.

"One sermon I felt led to give was on the topic 'God in your church,'" Patrick says, retelling a story from the sermon:

A homeless man walked into a church in dirty, ragged clothes carrying an old bag. The pastor walked up to him and asked the homeless man to leave the church. The pastor told the man to pray and ask God what he would want the man to wear in church. The next week the man came back in his same old dirty clothes and headed for the front

pew. When the pastor walked up to him and asked about his clothes, the man replied, "God said he never was in this church."

Patrick says he used the story to make the point that congregations often get stuck in their traditions and make excuses rather than reach out of their comfort zones to minister to others.

After preaching that sermon, Patrick remembers a few people coming up to him afterward and saying, "That's what we needed to hear this morning."

In his role as the lay leader at Lake Park UMC, Patrick leads the call to worship, hymns, opening prayer and reads Scripture.

Generally, the services follow the Methodist lectionary, which recommends choices for Scripture, sermon topics and hymns, he says.

Patrick says he typically picks the hymns and his father chooses the Bible passage and sermon topic. Every Sunday night, Patrick says his father waits for him to get home so they can begin planning next week's service.

Working together at Lake Park has brought the Traxlers closer together, the son says.

Patrick says everyone notices how much he and his father look alike; and because they both have similar personalities sometimes there is tension, too. Since their combined ministry at Lake Park, though, the son says their relationship has grown a lot stronger.

"Dad and I are like two peas in a pod," he says, smiling.

Despite support from mentors like his father, pastor and church goers, Patrick says he does face a lot of questions from his peers.

The young man pauses for a second and thinks before recalling a party last year where a group of his friends discussed the topic of death.

"They all know I'm religious and go to church every Sunday," Patrick says. "Right away I start talking about heaven. I can't fathom what it will be like to get there."

A member of the Mifflin County Huskies football team, Patrick led his fellow athletes in prayer before the games. He also extended an invitation to pray to the opposing team.

Though his friends usually respect his beliefs, some still will look him in the face and tell him that there is no God, he says. They say church brainwashes people, he adds.

"At times I've thought what if they are right?" Patrick says. "But I see many times in my life when God's said, 'I'm here.'"

One of those revealing moments happened to Patrick in a dream right after his grandmother died.

Two weeks after his grandmother died, he dreamed that his family was back around his grandmother's hospital bed, weeping because they knew her time was coming. Then Patrick noticed a door at the end of the hallway, radiating with the brightest white light he had ever seen. His grandfather, who died when Patrick was 5 years old, walked out of the door to his grandmother's bedside. He took her hand, and she stood up beside him. His grandfather

turned to the rest of the family and said, "We will see you again some day." Then, hand-in-hand, the two walked down the hallway and through the door. When it shut behind them, the light was gone.

Patrick says the dream gave him and his family comfort as they mourned his grandmother's death. The young man says his dream reinforced his beliefs that there is a Heaven, and that he will see his loved-ones again someday.

"Gram and Pap were very close to me," he says.

Stories of heaven that others shared with Patrick also have helped to validate his beliefs, he says.

On the way to a funeral, a local funeral director told Patrick about his experience during a heart attack. The funeral director remembered being in a tunnel, moving toward a bright light that he did not want to turn away from; he got closer and closer, but then he woke up, Patrick says.

Others who have had near-death experiences tell similar stories, he says.

Now when friends say religion is just brainwashing, Patrick says he tells them that if he died right now he would be at peace.

"I know there is a heaven," Patrick says.

In January, Patrick added another experience to his resume — a mission trip. He joined Bread of Life Restaurant owner Greg Spece and others from the Newport area.

Patrick says he never used to feel any desire to serve on a missions trip; but during frequent meetings with friend and mentor Rae Huffnagle at the Bread of Life, he got to know Greg Spece and listened to his ministry experiences in India.

"I sat and thought he has a strong calling," Patrick says. "As he talked more, I felt God saying maybe this is something you should do, but I wasn't sure I wanted to go so far from home."

When Patrick later heard words to the hymn "Here I am, Lord," he says he knew God was calling him to serve in India. For the past year, he has been raising money to go on the trip.

"Most came from Trinity and Lake Park, and I thank them dearly for that," Patrick says. "I thank all who helped me."

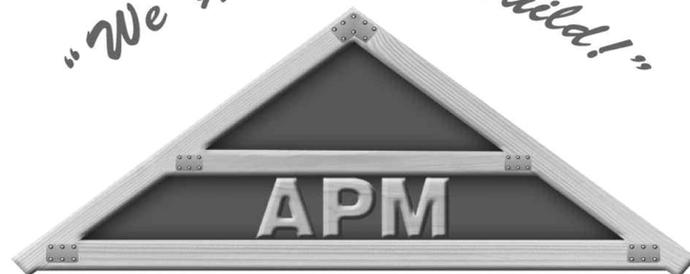
After he graduates, Patrick says he plans to attend the West Virginia Wesleyan College, where he was accepted. He is not sure what he will do to study as an undergraduate, but he plans to take the advice of another pastor who told him to learn a second career in case he needs something else to fall back on.

He also plans to take classes to become an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Eventually, he hopes to attend the Wesleyan Seminary or Drew University to become an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church.

"I'll let God lead the way and see what happens," he says.

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