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Flowers, raindrops, and poppers...oh my! This month, I'm sharing a trip that several have gone on over the years, and one that many people ask about. I am speaking of the winter holiday SoCal mission trip. For many years, congregation members of IDW and other districts have been gathering in late December to trek out to "warm and sunny" California to spend time connecting with people in many different spaces.

The last few years have been quite a learning experience for the team members who have gone on the trip, as well as for me. It has been a time of going from meeting as strangers, for the most part, at the airport, to coming back a week later with a new group of friends. We have been taken from admiring the beautiful floats on our TV screens to getting up close and personal with all of the tiny, incremental maneuvers that create the scenes we ooh and ahh over. And you will discover an interesting love/hate relationship with glue.



It has also been a time of beautiful growth in relationships with people who live far away and whom we don't see on a daily basis. It is the ongoing connection to our "parade spot savers," Jason and Sharelle—a story that started with my predecessor Ellie and Jason's dad meeting in a store many years ago. The connection stays year after year and has grown even closer with their family. Sharelle even worked on floats with our crew this year. This year, they were definite troopers, checking on the site through the entire night of rain. And yes, we did have rain—the first in 20 years—for the beginning of the parade. It didn't seem to dampen

anyone's spirits, seeing the floats 15 feet in front of us and listening to amazing marching bands.

Another amazing path that God has linked and continues to grow is with the staff, teens, and families of LOT318. We continue to spend a shift decorating, working side by side with teens (some returned this year for the third time!) and a few adults. We get to hear about the ways their life journeys are growing, the outreach and mission work they are doing with others, and their college, military, or work plans. We continued the connection by watching the parade together and then spending a day at the LOT318 block doing a variety of activities with the younger children in the families, as well as some physical jobs that need to



be done on the property. The last two years, we have wrapped up our work time with a Happy Noon Year party with food, sparkling apple juice, and holiday noisemakers.

On the final full day of the trip, we visit one of our LCMS universities—Concordia Irvine. I am a proud alum, and it's always exciting to see the intentional growth of the actual campus and to hear how so many lives are being touched through post-secondary Christian education. A huge shoutout to Dr. Kent



Schlichtemeier and campus guide Spencer for our tour of the gorgeous campus. We heard about the history of the school and how God is growing so many people—church workers and lay leaders in all sorts of career paths. If you have a family member who is approaching college age, or know someone who wants to return to school, our Concordias offer some great financial packages, and IDW also provides scholarships for those schools. Following the campus tour, we grabbed lunch and then headed down to “dip our toes” in the brisk waters of the Pacific Ocean.

If you are interested in being a part of this annual trip, watch for information that gets sent to each IDW congregation in late August, follow IOWAY on Facebook, or check in on the IDW website.



