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OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NEWS

From the "Ouachitonian": Mary Madison Tolbert



By Caroline Johnson

October 17, 2022

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Mary Madison Tolbert, a junior Christian studies and social justice studies major from Rockwall, Texas, spent her summer interning in San Francisco, Calif. She was located in the middle of the Tenderloin district with San Francisco City Impact, a nonprofit organization. Tolbert was connected to this organization through a longstanding relationship with her home church in Texas and a past mission trip where she worked with City Impact. Tolbert described the Tenderloin district as an area concentrated with homelessness and poverty.

City Impact's mission was to serve the transient population of the Tenderloin district. They achieved this by facilitating a church on Sunday mornings, running a soup kitchen, providing a grocery service and working a children's program. Although Tolbert spent her summer involved in all these different aspects of ministry, her favorite was a ministry called Adopt a Building.

"Many of the buildings in the tenderloin were SROs, or single residency occupancy. That means that they had very small rooms without bathrooms or kitchens," Tolbert said.

These SRO buildings were typically in very bad condition. Each floor of these buildings had a shared bathroom and one shared kitchen for the entire building. Despite these living conditions, the buildings are filled to the brim.

"It's crazy because getting into these buildings and having a place to live is so competitive. I talked to so many people who were homeless for 10 years and waited to get into a dirty building that was infested with mice and roaches because it is better than the streets," said Tolbert.

Tolbert loved this ministry because she was able to go into these buildings and build relationships with the residents.

"I loved this ministry because it was so consistent. I could go back and see the same people over and over again. This was different than the other ministries we did because the population is so transient that you might serve someone in the soup kitchen and then never see them again," Tolbert said.

She lived in the Tenderloin district along with other members of the City Impact team and shared a room with two other girls who were interning with City Impact that summer as well.

Tolbert's summer of serving ignited her passion for the people of San Francisco so much that she began to lead mission trips in the Tenderloin. Church groups from across the country partnered with City Impact to serve in San Francisco, and as part of her internship, Tolbert led these groups during their week of service.

"I don't know exactly what I want to do in the future, but I've learned that I have a passion for connecting people to opportunities for service that will transform their lives," Tolbert said.

Photo by Abigail Blankenship