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Cedarville Student, Alumnus Bring Church to National Parks

CEDARVILLE, OHIO – During the school year, Miranda Sams is a sophomore studying environmental science, with an emphasis in marine science. During the summer, however, Sams led short church services in Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP).

ACMNP is an interdenominational ministry that provides Christian community for people living in, working in or visiting national parks. ACMNP focuses on relational ministry, which includes a Sunday church service, but the main emphasis is ministering to fellow employees and travelers at the national park during the week.

In addition to Sams, Paul Fotter, a 2017 chemistry education graduate, guided tours through Glacier National Park in Montana with ACMNP.

“I had so many impactful interactions with other employees,” said Sams. “One of my co-workers was unable to regularly join us for worship on Sundays, but was able to make it one week after a fellow employee had committed suicide. We were able to spend some one-on-one time praying with her, and it was an encouragement to all of us.”

During the week, Sams ran the register at a deli and opened the store each morning. On weekends, Sams and three other ministry members led two church services — one at a small campground and another at a lodge. They switched roles each Sunday, so each led music and corporate prayer, read Scripture or shared a brief devotional.

In Montana, Fotter worked during the week as a tour guide, driving a red bus through the park. While he was not officially a ministry member this year, he served with ACMNP in 2016 and still worked alongside the ministry this summer, helping them lead church services for as few as two and as many as 30 people.

“While my interactions with people coming to the services have ranged from confused concert-goers to deep conversations late at night, I was surprised at the number of people I found who had been hurt by the church,” said Fotter. “These were really tough conversations, but I loved the opportunity to show that the church is a loving, not judgmental place. One person told us that we were the first Christians that seemed to actually care instead of just trying to convert him.”

Both Sams and Fotter got involved with ACMNP through Cedarville. Sams was recruited when the ministry visited the school her freshman year. After she was accepted, she received training in Colorado

and then left for the North Rim of the Grand Canyon May 14. She spent three months there, returning home August 14. Fotter had a longer summer at Glacier, planning to stay until the end of September.

“Through our Bible classes, Cedarville taught me how to share the short sermons we give on Sunday mornings,” said Fotter. “And my education degree from Cedarville really prepared me for my job as a tour guide. I was taught how to prepare and present information, which is what I do daily as I unlock the secrets of the park to our visitors.”

“Cedarville really prepared me for this ministry through chapel and the Bible classes I took freshman year,” said Sams. “I learned biblical topics to talk about with those around me and I found myself regularly pulling from chapel speakers I had heard.”

“This summer helped grow my faith, which I know will help me in any job I have in the future,” she continued. “I also learned a lot about the lifestyle I would have if I end up living in a national park with limited resources, like Wi-Fi and cell service. It showed me in a practical way what it would be like.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 3,760 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 100 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.