

Mission Trip To Haiti



May 6 to 13
2011

Haiti Mission May

Safe Arrival May 6, 2011

We arrived safe and sound in Port au Prince. What a day!!!

First Day Friday, May 6

Diane's Journal:

We are on the way to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, for a wekk with the United Methodist Church as part of a volunteer mission. I had thought about and considered the idea of going to Haiti, but I don't know if I really thought it actually possible to be a missionary until now. The group consists of 7 of us and the tentative plan (we won't know until we show up) is to finish building a church in Dond Douze which is west of Port-au-Prince and at Petit Goave. Our team leader is the pastor at the Clinton, CT, United Methodist Church and 3 others besides me are also from Clinton. There is also a fellow from New Mitford, CT, and another woman from New Paltz, NY. We were allowed one carry on and one checked bag free of charge and some have packed coloring books, crayons, soccer balls, medicines, etc. to have distributed to the various areas once we arrive.

Upon arrival at Port-au-Prince we found a small airport with one side backed by mountains. This is the first trip like this to an off-beat location for many of us and the first experiences at the airport were a little bit of a learning experience for us all. Once we find our driver, we pile into the back of a truck filled with padded seats and, with all our luggage, ride to our guesthouse in the nearby suburb called Petionville. On the way we see vendors selling vegetables and fruits by the roadside, including onions, mini limes, plantains, mangoes and tomatoes). We also pass many schools (all private) and buildings in various places and sorts — some affected by the earthquake and some not. The guesthouse we are going to is a meeting point for other mission groups and will be the first and last place we stay in Haiti as the majority of our trip we will be working outside of the city.

Second Day - Saturday, May 7th

Steve's Journal:

The day started with some relaxing at the guest house in Petionville. A french toast breakfast followed with fresh fruit. All wonderful.

Then packing to head out was next. First our bags in one truck. Then find out it was the wrong one. Bag shuffle to right one. Then load ourselves into the passenger van for the eye-opening trek to our destination for the next 5 nights, Petit Goave. So many sites as we sped by. From the destruction, to mass chaos, to beautiful sites of mountains and ocean. What was billed as a Gilligan's Island-like 2 1/2 to 3 hour ride turned into 4+ hours with traffic, political unrest, rough roads, and more. Arrival was a bit after noon.

A portion of the team ventures out to our work site, Fond Deux church. We met some of the workers, and of course the children. We were able to see what tasks were before us starting Monday. Then back to our guest house for a light lunch. Another good meal including delicious pineapple and my favorite sandwich, or one of them, PB&J.

The restless team then stretches our legs with a nice walk to the local beach. What a mix of inviting water (at least to this wandering diver) and pile upon pile of trash. Run-off really made water, at least in the bay, a tease. So walk, view, play with kids, and back to home away from home.

A short time of reflection right after dinner. Yes, another meal. Chicken, rice, veggies, and a warm cake. Full again, or still. Then personal time to relax and reflect. The team is gelling well and anxious to get to work. It is almost time. Just one day to go to church and site-see in Petit Goave...

Third Day - Sunday, May 8th, morning

Paul writes:

Just back from Church service. About two hour-plus service. Folks

very friendly and outgoing. They asked us to introduce ourselves and Kissmir translated.

Could not believe how well dressed everyone was. Little girls with bows in their hair. So pretty with beautiful complexions and big stunning brown eyes. Young boys in long pants, nice shirts, and shined shoes.

Just a wonderful experience.

Third Day - Sunday, May 8th, evening

Bob journals:

Made it to church in Petit Goave - only 10 minutes away. Ride in pick-up truck with Paul, Steve, & Sal standing in the back. The Pastor of the church picked us up. Very nice church and friendly people, happy to see us. We should all take a lesson from them on how to dress for church. For people who have virtually nothing, they are very proud and dress extremely well. After church the pastor took us on a short ride around Petit-Goave and back to the guest house. Relaxed for a few hours and took what turned out to be a long walk through the town and back to the church. Many people walking around and on motor bikes, many of which serve as taxis. Again on our walk we encountered well-dressed people on the streets. Little kids would call us "Blanc". Made it back to the guest house a little after 6pm and a little late for dinner.

All around, had an interesting and exciting day.

Fourth/Fifth Days - Tuesday, May 10th

Sal's journal:

In any relationship, there is a period of time that's needed to break the ice with another person. We had to feel comfortable with a whole village. The church is in a rural area, semi-jungle, with many tropical trees and stark mountains, stripped bare from clear-cutting. The village huts are spread out along a dirt road, off the only paved road on this end of the island. There is no running water, no electricity, nothing

we take for granted in our homes. The communications between families is by word of mouth. But that seems to spread like wild fire! Within minutes, our presence is known and the villagers begin to arrive, most with smiling faces. It is the children who have the courage to be the first to approach us, and touch our hands and move away. We smile back, make friendly gestures, and they know we are approachable. At this time, we also feel secure enough to respond back in a language that they do not understand. However, it is easier to overcome a language barrier with children than with adults.

Fifth Day - Tuesday, May 10th

Paul shares:

Warm - 94 degrees - but beautiful with a little shower this afternoon. Seems the locals (older folks) were more open and willing to converse better today even with the language barrier. (Even had some good laughs.)

Work from my perspective was not all that difficult as long as you switched off and had enough water. Certainly is manual labor.

The children played several games today and are pretty much open to all things fun. Have to have their pictures taken and see it, even the youngest ones.

Our team has related very well and enjoy all of each other's company. Accommodations are like luxury to what the average Haitian has.

Kissmeer our interpreter has worked well with us. We are able to joke with him and he can give it back just as good. We finished the sand pile for either cement or stucco today and expect a new load of sand for tomorrow.

The Haitian people are very friendly and happy even with their meager existence. Driving is an adventure - the most important part of the vehicle is the horn. No seat belts and riding in the open back of the trucks — like the old days when you were a kid. Passing on a curve is okay here, just keep blowing your horn. For the average North

American, it is truly a ride you have never experienced. I wonder if you were to come back in a hundred years if much will have changed. Off to do an email before the power shuts down..

Sixth Day - Wednesday, May 11th

Linda shares:

Our last day of work — tomorrow will be travel day back to Port-au-Prince, and Friday we head home.

On our way out to the work site this morning, we stopped at the clinic in Olivier. We passed along all the medical supplies we had brought with us from the folks back home. They were very much needed and appreciated. We learned that the incidents of cholera are decreasing, and that some of the most common issues are malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, parasites, vaginal infections, and digestive problems. The clinic is staffed by a nurse only (no doctor at all), and sees about 15 people per day.

Guess what we got to do at the work site today? Sift more sand - yay! But we did also get a chance to learn a new skill - chiseling concrete. We chiseled the foundation sill where concrete had dropped as the workers had worked on the sides of the building.

What was great about today was how the team was able to connect on a more interactive level with Michel Emmanuel, and some of the others. The children sang for us, then we sang together. We taught them the English words to some songs, and they taught us the Creole.

After we finished our work for the day, cleaned up the site a little, and played with the children one last time, it was time for us to say our goodbyes. This was hard. Our hearts have connected - we have become a greater community together. We have become brothers and sisters working and playing side-by-side. We have shared our love for each other. This is what we came here to do. There will always be work that needs to be done, and it will get done with or without us. We have contributed our labor and our sweat, but that is not as important as having shared our presence, our hearts, and our support.

Last Day - Thursday, May 12th

Craig reflects:

The day begins with mixed emotions as this is our last full day in Haiti. We are saying goodbye to Petit Goave and the place that has been home for five days. As Emanuel said yesterday as we left Fond Douxe, we are not friends, we are family - brothers and sisters in Christ - and we will always share that connection. So we are saying goodbye to family yet beginning to transition back to our families back home in the U.S. We have missed them very much, but we have been loved and supported by our wonderful Christian family in Haiti.

Following our most sumptuous breakfast, we shared our devotion time. Pastor Maude then joined us to thank us and present us with certificates of appreciation and gifts. The van and truck from Petionville we found out would be a little later than expected due to a flat tire. We spent the time in conversation and final packing while Pastor Maude and some of her staff dealt with the coloring books, crayons, toys, painting supplies, and clothes that we brought for distribution. Once the vehicles arrived, we made the trek down the long driveway to the road because they had cut off access in order to put in sidewalks.

Thus began the typical (if there is ever such a thing) ride back to Port au Prince. We asked for a tour of sorts of the city. Our first stop was the Presidential Palace which still stands in ruins. My first impression is how ironic that the symbol of government in Haiti is in ruins and in front a stage and bleachers are being set up for the inauguration of a new president on Saturday. He brings with him the hope of a nation and perhaps a new beginning.

Next stop was at the National Cathedral - the church where despite the collapse of the walls, the large crucifix remained standing, unadorned. I was pleasantly surprised to see large machinery present beginning to tear down walls and clean out the rubble. Perhaps this will be the symbol of Haiti's resurrection.

From the National Cathedral, we traveled up the mountain to the

Hotel Montana - the site where we lost the head of UMCOR in the earthquake. We stopped and had a prayer in the garden set aside to remember all who perished that day. We took in the view from around the hotel grounds - a view of contrasts. You could see out into the Bay of Port au Prince. There were fine houses, some with swimming pools and then there was rubble. We could see the airport and houses with tin and tarped roofs. Looking the other way, there were hundreds of houses on the hillside, many collapsed, many with tarps for roofs, and some sections of the hillside that were washed away. This was truly a scene of contrasts.

To our surprise, the hotel was open and they were serving lunch out on this beautiful patio even as construction on the collapsed portions of the hotel were continuing. We decided to begin the transition by indulging a bit with a nice lunch with a great view of a beautiful land. No translation necessary because the menu was also printed in English. As we prepared to leave to return to the Guest House in Petionville, we met a doctor and her husband, a retired doctor from Bronxville, NY. They were native Haitians who came back at least twice a year on medical missions. They had come back for the inauguration. After a pleasant conversation, we parted company and took the short ride to the Guest House.

A fine dinner awaited us and a time of debriefing with Tom Vencuss. We spend the rest of the evening trying to figure out how we are going to be able to relate the powerful experience we have just had and what we might do to continue the mission we have been called to. I guess we will have to leave that in God's hand and be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as to what is next for each of us.

Back home - Friday, May 13th

We arrived safe and sound back at JFK after a long day of travel and airports, very different people from when we left only a week ago.

Now to find the words that can even begin to express what we have observed, absorbed, experienced, and carried home in our hearts.







