

Serving in Haiti

Overview of the Trip:

Haiti is a country that needs much help. There are some wonderful people there who love the Lord, but there are also many who have been fooled by Satan and are entrapped in the practices of Voodoo. There is very little infrastructure, but the people somehow do seem to manage.

This is a very poor country where the average income is \$2 a day (90% of that goes towards food). Contrast this to the GDP per capita of Mexico at around \$7K per year and the US at \$48K per year. I imagine even before the earthquake that there were a lot of shanties, but there are many more now. Buildings are being repaired, but there was so much destruction and the people have so little money it is hard for them to rebuild. Much of the relief effort is still focused on the basics of shelter, clean water, and sanitation.

Everywhere we went the people were living in ramshackle shanties and temporary shelters. You also still see many pancaked and damaged homes. As an example, in the Leogane area where we worked on the reconstruction of a little church, over 90% of the structures were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake.

Life in Haiti is harsh. Women still do their wash in streams and irrigation ditches. They cook over outdoor fires. Most have no indoor plumbing so they carry their water on the heads from the local well. Men look for whatever kind of work they can find to try to feed their families. Many of the children are not able to go to school because they do not have a free education system there. The children are required to wear uniforms and there is also some kind of tuition. It can't be too high, but is still too much for many families. That makes their prospects for a better life very slim. Despite all this adversity the Haitians that we met had such a sweet spirit and were doing their best with what they had.

Our incoming flight to Haiti was delayed so it was after dark when we left the Port-Au-Prince airport. Therefore, we couldn't really appreciate what Port-Au-Prince looked like until our return to the airport at the end of the week. On our way back to the airport we finally saw the chaos that is Port-Au-Prince. Everywhere you look is a mass of people. There are certainly some "normal" homes but the majority of the people live in shanties built from anything that they can find. Trash is everywhere. Even the streambeds are filled with trash - often chest deep. Like the rest of the country, the roads were mostly dirt and in major disrepair. Traffic was horrendous with crazy drivers everywhere. We were both actually thankful that our first impressions of Haiti was the rural locale that we worked in for most of the week and not Port-Au-Prince.

There are hopeful signs, though, as we found some areas where longer term shelters were being built. These shelters had wood floors, were sheathed in plywood, had ventilation and were colorfully painted. The ground around them was clean and they weren't packed as close together as the shanty towns. There was also road construction happening. We saw businesses that were up and running and people were selling whatever they could by the side of the road.

God's Provision:

When we left on the trip both of us were concerned as to how well we would hold up physically. Yes, there were some aches & pains, but we held up remarkably well and we thank the Lord.

The place that we stayed was very comfortable and safe. We never felt like we were in danger--other than maybe on the roads:0) They have a man that is there to keep the house secure whether someone is there or not.

Water wasn't an issue because they have a water purification system at the house. Showers were cold and military style--burr. Regardless we were thankful for them.

David's Reflections:

We served with a team from Chicago. There were 14 volunteers between the two teams. We were able to help with the construction of Samaritan's Purse shelters, to help with the reconstruction of a little church and to love on children at an orphanage. This was a great group of people and we found that we shared a lot of the same passions about compassionate service for those in need. I suspect that we will count a number of these people as longer term friends.

One of the things that I found hard to deal with was the fact that we have so much and they have so little. We were told to not hand out food because everyone would come running hoping to get something and when you ran out you could put yourself and others in danger. You felt cruel, but just seeing how many would gather around us when we weren't even giving anything away made the point. We were able to share with the Haitians that helped build the walls at the church because there was no one else around. They in turn taught the team there how to peel & eat the sugar cane and showed us how to cook bread fruit on a little fire. It was a nice way for them to say thank you for the help on their church and a great cultural experience for the team.

I was also really touched by several of the local pastors that we met and worked with. They were all "tentmaker" pastors that worked several jobs to be able to meet their basic needs but also really loved and shepherded their flocks. It was a real joy and an inspiration to see how closely they walked with the Lord and how they trusted the Lord to provide in every instance. They really put my faith to shame.

We are both still processing all that we saw and did while in Haiti. We hope the Lord will open the door for us to return at some point, but regardless He has certainly given us an even stronger desire to do what we can for the people of Haiti whether it is from the home front or by going. We do ask you to continue to pray for the people of Haiti and all of those that are serving there.

Kathy's Reflections:

I went into this trip with some fear, but I also felt strongly that the Lord had a purpose in my going. At this point I may still not fully understand His purpose, but I do know that He wanted to break down some barriers in my own heart as to how He would have me serve.

I have enjoyed being able to work on homes when we go to New Orleans. There is usually something that fits within my physical capabilities. In Haiti there were either too many people to help with the simpler tasks or I simply physically couldn't do it. The other type of work that was available was to help at an orphanage. This was a challenge for me as I am more comfortable helping with construction related tasks.

The first day we went to the orphanage we were asked to help do some physical therapy with two little girls. We really didn't know what we were doing and the girls got very upset. This was very disconcerting to us. The next day I did not want to go back, but ended up in a situation where there wasn't anything I could do at the church construction site and ended up feeling very useless. After that I knew that I needed to return to the orphanage even though I felt ill equipped. God said get rid of those notions and just be there for the kids--love them for me.

There were several little boys that were considered to be trouble makers and I just gravitated to them without knowing this in advance. I was able to give them some one on one attention and was able to reward them for good behavior. A little positive reinforcement never hurt anyone--them or me. Now I would happily go back and serve at the orphanage if that is where He wants me.

Thank you all for your love, support and prayers. We are very grateful for each one of you.

Serving & Praising the Lord,
Dave & Kathy