

Bonjour mon ami,

Hope you are well, as spring approaches, and as we observe Lent and celebrate Easter. I have returned from a great trip to Cap Haitien, Haiti, with the Eastern Oregon Haiti Project (EOHP) team. Below is my trip report; if you'd like to view some of my pictures from the trip, click [here](#).

The two-fold purpose of this trip was to work with the teachers and students of the K-12 school that sits next to the Church of the Holy Spirit in Cap Haitien, and to provide a health check for as many of the students as possible. So, we had the following 2 sub-teams on this trip:

1. Education team: Led by Diane W., this team included Melanie, a PhD student from Wyoming, and a former elementary teacher in The Dalles, and Tori, who teaches elementary school in Portland. Diane was on the trip last January and has caught the Haiti bug, while Melanie and Tori were on their first trip - Tori's husband, Jeff, and her father, Don (DW), were on the trip last year. Tori's intensive study of French before the trip would be a real God-send for the combined team.

2. Medical team: Led by Dr. P.K., a veteran from last year's trip, the team consisted of 2 nurses, Amy - a first timer to Haiti, but a veteran from Iraq, and Shirly, who is both a native Haitian and a U.S. citizen, fluent in Creole, French and English. Shirly had been back to Haiti after the earthquake to work in Port de Prince, but hadn't been to Cap Haitien before. The non-medical support team members included DW, Jeff and myself.

In addition to the 9 members mentioned above, Bishop Nedi Rivera was going to be spending part of the trip with us before she departed to join up with a New Orleans Rebuild mission trip. Originally, Janet was going to travel with Bp. Nedi, but I assumed that role sort of late in the game. Janet and I spent Monday night, February 14th, in Portland. Tuesday morning, I began a 3-flight trip to Ft. Lauderdale, while Janet returned home to get ready for her trip to Denver. Bp. Nedi and I met up in Ft. Lauderdale and began to deepen our friendship as we ate our last U.S. dinner together and discussed the trip ahead.

After an early morning departure to the airport, our IBC flight (non-stop) to Cap Haitien went off without a hitch. Signs of recent rains greeted us as we descended through the clouds into Cap Haitien. Fr. Noe was waiting to take us to his home, and we learned that our luggage would be in on a trailing IBC cargo flight. The drive to Noe's is always an eye-opener, for those who have been there before, and especially for a first-timer, like Bp. Nedi. The pot-holed streets are jammed with trucks, cars, motorcycles/mopeds (with up to 6 passengers), pedestrians, vendors, donkeys, etc., and the view of the crowded markets, the bus 'terminal', the river that dissects the city, and the ever-present litter soon causes sensory overload. In sharp contrast are the beautiful Caribbean sky, views of the sea and the many, many friendly Haitien people, walking hand-in-hand, smiling and laughing, going about their daily lives which are so different from our own.

First things first - breakfast provided by our hostess Shirley and her cook and kitchen team - spaghetti, boiled eggs, tropical fruit and juice, and rugged Haitian coffee. This was actually our 3rd breakfast of the day, if you count Dunkin' Donuts in Ft. Lauderdale, and the turkey sandwich served on the IBC flight.

After settling into our rooms, Noe walked us through the compound, exploring the new medical clinic, the prosthesis lab, and the trade school. We met a team of Physical Therapists from New Zealand in the clinic, and watched a construction crew transform a run-down building into the new prosthesis lab. Last year, we would have been accompanied by Magli and Brutus, Noe's 2 dogs, but there are now 4 more adult dogs and 6 puppies - when they all move in the same direction it was like watching a river flow. We then headed over to the Church and school, where we met some students and toured both buildings. Noe and his crew have nearly completed the 3rd floor of the school, which will hold the new library - there are quite a few students from the Port de Prince area who came after the earthquake and now are attending the school. While standing on the street in front of the church, I saw my Living Water International (LWI) buddy, Gilen, loading up supplies for LWI. It was great to talk with him, however briefly, and to hear what's going on in his life. He's still working for LWI and pastoring his church out towards Terrier Rouge.

On Thursday, we had the privilege of attending a 'Grade Card' ceremony for the elementary students. All

the classes, teachers and many parents gathered in the church for this event - on their way in, Bp. Nedi and I distributed Oregon hand-made crosses to each of the students - thanks to Bob and Aloha D. who provided us with 1000 of those wonderful, aromatic crosses. These gifts were a big hit – much appreciated by the children and all. Fr. Noe then proceeded to ask a classroom to rise and he would call out in order and present grade cards to the top 10 students from that classroom. The remainder of the students then received their report cards outside. It was very moving to watch the reactions of the students - some peeked at their cards and then often broke into smiles, while others offered a prayer before peeking. Of all the students, only 3 didn't pass - that was really sad for them as they had to face both the embarrassment and discipline at the church, and then head home to face the parental music - education, when it can be had, is taken very seriously in Haiti. Back at the compound, Bp. Nedi gave some sewing lessons to Lexi and Noeli, while I taught Lex some of the finer points of soccer – oh, about that swamp land for sale?!

Spirituality is a key aspect of our trips to Cap Haitien, and so we started each day with Morning Prayer, at 6:30, and ended each day with either Evening Prayer or Compline. It was a joy for me to be able to do these services with just Bishop Nedi and myself during the first few days of the trip. On Friday, we were up at 6:00, completed Morning Prayer, ate breakfast and headed out with Fr. Noe on a trip to Port de Paix, where there would be a celebration for the 4-year ordination anniversary of 6 priests (a 7th member of that group has died since being ordained). When you fly out of Cap Haitien, you often see Port de Paix out the left side of the plane, right after you see the ever present cruise ship at Labadee Beach. Opposite Port de Paix is the island of Tortuga (Ile de la Tortue) - Port de Paix is 40-50 miles from Cap Haitien, but the trip this day would take about 5 hours. First, you must bump through stop and go traffic in Cap Haitien, and gradually the country side opens up and you are on your way to Gonaives. If you've read past trip reports, you may recall that I was on a LWI trip that repaired wells around Gonaives and witnessed the damage caused by the 2008 hurricanes there.

After a short visit at the Episcopal church in Gonaives, we headed out to Gros Mome, for a brief visit to Fr. Noe's first church (served 5 years there), and then on to Port de Paix. Not so fast, though – remember all that rain? We had long delays at 2 rivers where we eventually hired scouts to walk in front of the truck and guide us through the torrents to safety on the other side. Others, less fortunate, were stuck in the middle of the river. After our two successful crossings, we were on our way to Port de Paix, again. Along the way, we passed many bridges under construction, but none were yet complete.

Arriving in Port de Paix at 2:00pm, we were immediately served lunch, which was followed by dinner at 4:00pm and would be concluded with a celebration feast after the service. The service was joyful, filled with familiar hymns, in French, accompanied by an alto saxophonist sitting beside Bp. Nedi, and Fr. Noe preached the sermon in French, as well – resolution: get better with my French. All 6 priests and Fr. Noe were honored, and Bp. Nedi and I were also recognized and given Haitian paintings. Then, on to the aforementioned feast – I was able to talk with each of the Priests about where they were living and what their various churches and missions were like. They came from as far away as Les Cayes and Port au Prince, while we were in the home church of one Priest.

The next morning, Saturday, we were on the road by 4:00am – no breakfast. We needed to be back in Cap Haitien by 9:30am to greet the rest of the team. At the first river, as dawn was breaking, we hired a driver who successfully navigated the rapids for us. The second river was down, so we could drive across with no help. We pulled into the compound before 9:30 and Fr. Noe was off to the airport to meet the team. Upon their arrival at the compound and a brief tour of the Bernier's house, most of us got to work setting up our sleeping quarters. The EOHP had provided Fr. Noe with funds to build 10 beds, which people from the trade school had completed. We moved 3 of these beds into the large entry room, where P.K., myself, and DW would sleep. Tori and Jeff got the small bed room in the back and the remaining 4 women took the large middle bedroom. Everyone, but me, rigged up their mosquito netting and we were set for the coming week. During all of this activity, Bp. Nedi was working on her sermon, which would be interpreted into French by Fr. Noe. Probably more importantly, Bp. Nedi was working on mastering French to lead the service – she would be presiding in a language that was basically new to her. The remainder of the day was pretty laid back, with a large evening meal, and then Evening Prayer and card games, reading and journaling.

Sunday morning, Bp. Nedi and Fr. Noe attended the 6:30am service, and the rest of us walked over, after

breakfast to the 8:30am service. As usual, it was quite the service and Bp. Nedi did a wonderful job of presiding in French. The music was truly a joy to hear, and we sang Siyahamba (We Are Marching) in English, then in the Zulu language, and finally in French. The congregation then joined in with a repeat of the French verse. After exploring the school, which is where we'd be working the next 4 days, we returned home for lunch and then leisurely spent the remainder of the day. Fr. Noe took all of the newcomers on a tour of Cap Haitien, while Bp. Nedi and I stayed home and caught up on some reading with perhaps a catnap or two. That night, Bp. Nedi led an instructed Evening Prayer, since we had some folks who were pretty new to this service, and we encourage everyone to lead the morning and evening services during our time there. Bp. Nedi also introduced the book of Ruth, which would be our OT reading for the week, and gave us one version of what it meant to 'uncover his feet', which became a running joke for the rest of the week. I won't say more about that.

In brief, Monday through Thursday ran as follows: up and showered by 6:30, Morning Prayer and breakfast, off to the school by 8:00, wrapping up by 4:00pm, home for dinner. After dinner, we'd review the day, attend Compline or Evening Prayer, and then either play a couple of rowdy games of Up the River, Down the River, or read, write or retire early.

Monday, we headed to school for our first day. As the team set up, Fr. Noe and I went to the airport with Bp. Nedi – she was headed to the U.S. and the New Orleans team. No problems at the airport, and we were back at the school by 9:30. The education team spent the day observing in the class rooms, which was pretty informative and eye-opening to all 3 of them. The medical team saw 180 students on that first day – the visits ran as follows: 10 or so students came into the clinic and were told, in Creole what would be happening. First, they were given an eye exam (did the E point up, left, right or down?) – many were 20x20 but many others were showing signs of poorer vision, eye strain and the effects of living in a smoky, dusty environment. Then, they were given a red-green color-blindness test, which only a few could not discern – I often used this exam as an opportunity to tell them, in my basic French, what the English words for rouge and verde were. Following the eye exam, we weighed and took their height and then the nurses took over. The nurses checked pulses, listened to lungs and heart beats, asked general health questions, verified ages, checked teeth, etc., and noted specific health concerns if they existed. Finally, every student was examined by Dr. P.K., who probed and prodded, listened and noted. Any child with critical health issues was referred to Fr. Noe, who would hopefully help them get the attention they needed.

What did we see over the week? Lots of the patients (ages 3 – 26) were in pretty good health – hardly any malnutrition, but this is one of the better schools in all of Haiti. Many eye issues, mentioned above, and the need for glasses, lots of cavities (we need a dentist/dental hygienist and oral hygiene classes), lots of skin lesions, one critical abdominal situation, a few with some loss of mobility. All of this information was captured on paper, to be captured in a database at a future time.

Tuesday was a big day for the education team. Elementary school was cancelled for the day so that our team could work directly with the Haitian teachers. Going into the day, there was a palpable feeling of anxiety amongst our team members – how was this going to work out, were they prepared, could they adapt. By day's end, all 3 of them were basically walking on air – all expectations were exceeded and the 2-way learning that had occurred was incredible. Meanwhile, we saw another 180 7-12th graders in the clinic.

At this point, I would be remiss to not mention team health issues. Going in to the trip, we wondered if we might have an extra person or two on the trip, but as various illnesses knocked out members of the team, we came to wish we had another person or two to fill in. We're working on getting to the bottom of the health problems – of the 10 team members, at least 3 were down for the count at least one day. Fortunately for the medical team, P.K. remained untouched and we always had at least one healthy nurse. The support staff hung in there, and the education team never missed a beat, although having a bathroom nearby in the church was pretty handy.

Wednesday, the education team demonstrated what they had taught on Tuesday in the class rooms – this was gratefully observed and accepted by the Haitian teachers – we could have used an extra day for this activity, as well as an extra interpreter. Down one nurse and beginning to feel the effects of working on raw

concrete floors, we managed to see 112 students in the clinic. Tori's French in the classrooms, and Shirley's French/Creole in the clinic were invaluable, and my French at the eye charts seemed to be improving, although that Southern Ohio accent seemed to stump some of them.

Thursday, we only planned to work half a day, and then most of the team would take a trip in the country side to visit the ruins at Milo. Back to full strength, mostly, in the clinic, we saw 88 students, giving us a grand total of 560 – we probably saw half of the school population – not too bad for our first attempt at this. The educators did another classroom demonstration and then broke to meet with 3 of the leading teachers – reading, writing and math. Our original intention was to help two of them attend an educator's convention in Orlando, but we decided in the end that their lack of English would prevent them from benefitting from that sort of training, at this time. Instead, we are exploring bringing a teacher's workshop/convention to Cap Haitien.

The rest of the day included the trip to Milo, for most of the team, which was again an eye-opening experience, as was Bp. Nedi's and my trip to Port de Paix. Back home for a celebration dinner, packing and one last round of cards, after Compline. Friday, we were up for Morning Prayer, breakfast and a dash to the airport, where once again things flowed smoothly and our non-stop flight to Ft. Lauderdale got everyone in on time for flights home. I was actually on the ground in Denver at the same time as Janet – different concourse, but it felt comforting. I met Janet at luggage in Portland, and we waited for DW, Tori and Jeff to arrive. We dropped the latter two off at their car and headed up The Gorge, sometime after midnight. Rumors of icy roads were greatly exaggerated, and we dropped DW off, picked up the dogs, and were home by 3:00am.

What's ahead? Well, my March trip with LWI has been cancelled, so I will be returning next to Cap Haitian in October of this year with LWI - Thanks to you who helped pay for my March trip - the funds have been moved over to the October trip. We are already beginning to plan for future EOHP trips – probably more than one in 2012. Diane and I have met to discuss the feedback that the team has provided, and to look to the future. We will probably separate the education trip from the medical trip, due to the impact that a large team has on the Bernier family. We'd like to be able to see all of the students and begin to track their health – that means either a longer trip, more staff, and/or more than one trip. We'd like to bring along someone who can help with the eye problems and the lack of glasses, a dentist and/or a hygienist, and we'd like to follow up on the care that was provided to the students who were referred to Fr. Noe. Additionally, Fr. Noe has more rural schools under his care that we could expand to, and we'd like to be able to coordinate our efforts with those other churches that visit Fr. Noe in Cap Haitien. Lots to do, lots to plan – all in God's time.

Au revoir,
Ron

P.S. For those of you who are still wondering about our new 4-legged member of the family:

First, let me share the following link with you:

<http://network.bestfriends.org/golocal/ohio/16299/news.aspx>

We met Angie when we arrived in Berkeley in 2003 and got to meet Caritas when Angie brought her home from Circle Tail. They were both with us in our living room when we said our last goodbye to Grover, and Caritas welcomed Joshua into our home a month or so later.

Caritas is retired, and Angie is now getting to know another wonderful, young Circle Tail dog, also trained by inmates in Ohio - His name is Bennett. Caritas has moved in with us and is adapting in a splendid manner. She is such a bright and adaptable dog and she will continue to thrive with Joshua and Angel - we are really enjoying our latest addition to our family.