



Haiti Mission Trip 2010

Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, New Jersey

For the past 23 years, the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville has been involved in the life and work of Harmony Ministries, based in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and led by our Mission Affiliate, Pastor Luc Deratus

Several members of the January 2010 Haiti Mission Team who landed in Haiti the day of the devastating earthquake wrote a few memories of their trip....

The Mission Trip begins....

"The purpose of the 2010 mission trip to Haiti was to sustain and expand support for Harmony Ministries. A medical team of twenty from three churches (Shiloh Baptist Church, Trenton, New Jersey, Kingdom Church, Ewing NJ, and the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville (NJ)) arrived in Port-au-Prince by air from JFK airport about 1:30PM. We had left Lawrenceville at 4:15AM in a bus and two mini-vans to travel to JFK with our personal carry-on luggage and 33 duffle bags filled with medicines, vitamins, supplies, reading glasses, cell phones, painting and medical equipment, sleeping bags, and air mattresses."

"Late in the afternoon, after clearing immigration and customs, we were on our way to the mountain village of Thoman in a truck/bus with wooden benches climbing the switchbacks of a mountain road. We noticed rock slides to the side and ahead and dust clouds in the dry riverbeds below. Joking that it was an earthquake, the "joke" soon turned into reality when our host, Pastor Luc Deratus, received a cell phone call that his church and school in Port-au-Prince had collapsed trapping people who had gathered for a prayer service, and there were reports that the Palace and the Cathedral had collapsed. Then the phone went dead. As darkness fell, we ate a meal of rice, beans, and chicken brought up the mountain with us. Little did we know that this cooked meal would be our last until Thursday night. We tried to get information from a radio, but heard only static, and the words "tsunami watch" and "Mexico." We worshipped that evening with members of the Thoman church and slept on the floor of the school, awakening to several aftershocks."

"Once the service in the sanctuary began, I felt some peace and the presence of God. The singing was something, even though I didn't understand the words I recognized the melody and found myself singing along. It was almost like Taize, because the hymns went on for several minutes, much longer than what we are used to, although the tempo was much quicker than that of Taize. I became lost in the chanting music. It was wonderful."

"Another part of the service in Luc's sanctuary that really moved me was the praying. They do not pray in silence, nor do they politely listen to others' prayers. It is a literal babble of voices, everyone praying loudly at once. It had a profound effect on me and I found myself joining in, reciting the Lord's Prayer, praying for people, just praying out loud rather than the silent prayers I was used to. It was a glorious cacophony of sound."

"Wednesday morning in Thoman, not knowing what the state of Port-au-Prince was following the destruction, the decision was made to stay on the mountain and conduct a shortened medical clinic. We planned to leave the mountain at noon. Our team got going a little after daybreak setting up a pharmacy station, four doctor stations, a wound center, a station for handing out rice and soap and toothpaste and toothbrushes. Each member of our team quickly found work helping in one of the stations. Due to the shortened day we abandoned painting the church building, teaching art to children and playing games with the children. We saw over 300 people that morning who came with all types of maladies. There were old people who were blind, babies with deep coughs, women with low iron, young adults with high blood pressure, adults and children with open wounds caused by burns or infection following bug bites. Our team helped so many that day. Pastor Armstrong from Shiloh prayed with each person as they left the clinic.

"Haitians bear pain in a remarkable way with little outward sign. Children sit quietly for hours waiting to get into the clinic, not squirming. Mothers and fathers hold their children who are sick, with hope in their eyes that a doctor will make them well. In Thoman, there is no electricity or running

water, all the cooking is done on an open fire. Life is primitive by our standards, but the people seem the same as we are. They just do not have the opportunities we have for education, work, health care and their food supply is dependent upon how much it rains, not on trucks and trains and airplanes as ours is. I think about the women there, knowing they want more for their children, but with little hope of a different life for them. Mountain life is peaceful and close to nature, maybe that is a better way of life than the one we lead which is so encumbered with things."

Getting to Port-au-Prince...

"As we passed through the streets of the city of PAP, I was struck by the people all walking. Where were they going? It didn't seem different than an afternoon in any city, with people all calmly going somewhere, but it felt surreal since they were walking past crumbled buildings and bodies lying in the street."

"Driving through the streets of Port-au-Prince, not even a day after the earthquake, and seeing almost every building damaged--some collapsed, others with a wall down or a roof caved in. Bodies in the street, some covered others not. I wondered about the uncovered bodies. Were those who loved that person dead or were they in some other part of the city and did not know this loved one was lying here dead. It was a bewildering time. So much grief, so much sadness and no one cried, no one screamed, so unlike the weeping of Rachel at the killing of innocents following Jesus' birth. What would happen to all the bodies? How would they be buried quickly?"

"There was a moment on the bus when we were trying to figure out what to do and where to go.

I personally thought the Embassy was a great idea, but part of me also wanting to rush out of the bus and start helping, even though I feared for my own safety. I wanted to see Pastor Luc's compound and do what I could, but also realized that we would be a burden and a worry to him in a time that he should be concentrating on his people and helping them. I felt a surge of relief, both for myself and our party, but also for Luc and his men, as we walked into the Embassy that afternoon."

At the Embassy...

"I loved doing the Lectio Divina at 3:00 in the morning on the grass of the Embassy. It gave me a centered, calm feeling to be praying and discussing things with others. The fact that Joan chose the story of the loaves and fishes was so perfect, since we were commenting that our duffel bag of food never seemed to empty, even though we continually gave away food to others. There were so many people there and no food. It felt good to be able to help others even as we felt our own fears and dealt with our own demons. I treasure that time on the grass, simply getting together and praying"

"Life in the Embassy was one constant day. It seemed like we were there for a week, but it was really around 30 hours. Those hours were so packed with work, decisions, waiting for a word when there might be an airplane out. Our doctors and team members helped the Embassy staff from the moment we arrived. I think everyone back home would have been most proud of how calm and focused we were carrying the injured into waiting helicopters with blades whirling, treating injured with crushed bones inside the Embassy with the little medical supplies available. Some of the aftershocks were strong, shaking the Embassy walls. We slept for the most part outside. The grass was soft and inviting encouraging short naps. There was no way to maintain a regular routine that would have helped us know what time of day it was. Our meals were from a bag of snacks we had brought for our lunches while we were working in the clinics and churches. The lights were always on at the Embassy, inside and out. There was never a lights out time. Work was continuous until the US Air Force Medical Team arrived Thursday afternoon. They were amazing to watch set up a MASH unit in just a few minutes and begin to do surgery within an hour or so. We are grateful to the Embassy staff for finding medicines for our doctors and arranging a safe, fast delivery for our team back to the USA.

"We left Pastor Luc behind in Haiti. He said he came back to the Embassy to check on us Thursday and waited for two hours and got no word. He found out Friday from Jeff Vamos we were on our way home. We praise God for Pastor Luc, his care for us and his care for the people of Haiti.

"Pastor Luc stayed on in Haiti for over two weeks after we left, helping his people to find doctors. He arranged somehow for a doctor to come to the site of the collapsed Port-au-Prince church to help the people there. They used the medicines we had left behind. He conducted burial services for people who died in the church collapse and held church services on Sunday. The first Sunday following the quake 40 people were saved or confessed their faith in Jesus. "