

# Our Trip to Haiti

by Lynsey Keator, Monica Torpey, Gillian Mertens, Megan Randall and Lyla Al-Husseini

We left Longmeadow on Saturday at 3:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 7 and drove to JFK airport. Our flight went smoothly and we even arrived a few minutes early in Port-au-Prince, which doesn't happen very often with flights to Haiti. From the airport we drove to the guest house where we were staying. We dropped our stuff off and then drove to Kim and Patrick Bentrrott's new apartment so we could go over the plans for the week. While we were there, we met Solomon, the Haitian baby who the Bentrrotts are adopting. Back at the guest house, a few of us went for a swim and then we were ready for bed!



On Sunday, we attended a service at a CONASPEH church. The dynamic energy of this congregation was palpable; the Pentecostal style of worship left us dancing along. We were then asked to sing in front of the church, and did so with great trepidation. We were well received, and the pianist played along. Later in the day, we visited a new complex of houses that CONASPEH built after a hurricane destroyed the prior complex. We met Obed, a friend of previous missionaries from our church, and his family graciously invited us into their home. The complex was solid and the people received us enthusiastically. We'd see Obed and his brother Covain periodically throughout our trip.



The next day we went to the CONASPEH school, which has about 400 students, and met some of the kids there. We helped serve cornflakes to over 100 of the younger students as part of a food program sponsored by the school, and during their lunch we were able to get to know some of the kids and take pictures with them. It was a lot of fun to interact with them and the kids definitely enjoyed our presence. After lunch, we went to a kindergarten classroom and drew pictures with the



children. We left the school and drove to the Palace in Port-au-Prince, but while we were in the van we saw a political demonstration going on near the Palace and decided to drive straight back to the guest house. We were able to do a little bit of shopping at the artisan stalls near the guest house before dinner.

On Tuesday we went back to the CONASPEH school and talked to the older students about what our lives in America are like. They told us about how they live in Haiti, and it was interesting to hear about life there from their perspective. After that, the younger students came and gave us a presentation in which they sang and performed songs for us. We helped with the food program for a second day and after lunch we painted a classroom and some chalkboards in the school. We painted with some of the senior students, so we were truly able to become friends with some of them. It was great to see the work we accomplished after we finished painting, but it was more important for us to form relationships with the students. After dinner at the guest house we met with Patrick, Kim, and two speakers who talked with us about Haitian culture and about historical relationships that Haiti has had with more developed nations.



Wednesday morning we visited an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. The reality of seeing about 130 children, from newborns to age fifteen, living together in this building was very sad as it reflected the lack of attention and negative

situations so many children suffer with. As upsetting as it was to see all of these children without families, many dealing with disease and illness, it was very heartwarming to see the smiles and hear the laughter of the children as they played with our hair, sang with us and simply basked in the attention we gave them. About three quarters of the children at the orphanage have already been adopted, but because it takes so long for papers and visas for each child to be prepared, the children have to wait in the orphanage until they are cleared to leave Haiti. It was an amazing experience to find that something that seems so simple to us, a hug or a smile, could absolutely brighten the spirits of these children. After all, they are just kids and all they want is to be loved.



Later in the day on Wednesday we traveled about an hour through the countryside to the beach. Upon arriving, we found ourselves at a breathtaking beach, clear blue water, mountains in the distance and palm trees waving on the shore. We were all taken back by the natural beauty of our surroundings. After all, like many others, we had heard about the poverty and overwhelming struggles that Haiti faces. Here, however, we found ourselves in an undiscovered and beautiful part of the country. We discovered in the people an undying spirit and truly heartfelt acceptance and at the beach, we found a gorgeous landscape. These two discoveries sharply contrast the images of poverty and hardships that for so many define the country of Haiti. We found these truths to be truly amazing.

We were planning on meeting with Francoise and Patrick Villier (President of CONASPEH) on Thursday morning, but since Francoise was sick we had to come up with something else to do. We decided to drive to the Palace, which we missed on Monday, so we could take pictures. On the way to the airport, we drove past the outskirts of Cite Soleil, Port-au-Prince's poorest slum. Unfortunately, Lyla's camera was stolen while we were driving, which was a disappointing way to end the trip. We got a better look at the airport in Port-au-Prince, which was tiny, and then flew home without any problems. Even though we all wanted to stay in Haiti longer, we were also very happy to get back home!

The trip was very meaningful for us, and we would like to thank the members of the church who supported us during the planning of the trip. It was a wonderful opportunity.

We would love to share more about our trip as well as do more to help CONASPEH. Therefore, we are planning a fundraising dinner for CONASPEH featuring Haitian food, during which we will share a report and slideshow of our trip. We will be raising money to help the organizations that we worked with in Haiti, and although we haven't picked a date yet, we are very excited and we can't wait to see you there! Watch for more information soon.

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During the trip we will help to continue cleaning up the 9th Ward which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2004. We'll also squeeze in some sightseeing around the edges. It is going to be a great trip, but we need your help to get there! Shares will be available starting Sunday April 5 in Bailey Hall. Come on by and see what we are up to. Questions? Contact Interim Associate Pastor Kelly Gallagher (567-6287 or [kelly@firstchurchlongmeadow.org](mailto:kelly@firstchurchlongmeadow.org)).