

Dominican Republic Trip Update

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak and our return through major airports in the US, the ability for us to give a prompt report on what God did in us during the week may be delayed, so I am composing a summary of our trip and some testimonies from the participants. This way the church can hear what God did and be informed on our most recent mission trip to Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic.

First, Chelsie, Eric, and Kai are doing well in their environment. We got to spend quite a bit of time with them throughout the week. We flew in a day earlier than the rest of the groups, which afforded us the opportunity to spend the whole day Saturday with Eric, Chelsie, and Kai. We went hiking Saturday morning with Eric to a beautiful waterfall that was breathtaking and simultaneously relaxing and challenging with the strenuous hike. We returned back to the base and relaxed before we went to Eric and Chelsie's house to celebrate Ella Klepzig's 13th birthday. Chelsie made brownies that we all ate, and then we sat around their house and talked. Next, Chelsie took us to town for shopping. On the journey we got to talk about church in the DR and the future for them in ministry. Chelsie was excited to share with me that Crystal (the new person taking Chelsie's position) will be leading our week. This would be Crystal's second team to lead since she has arrived in Jarabacoa. This will allow Chelsie to be at home and take care of Kai while Eric still serves in his role as the SI Jarabacoa site director. The night concluded with a big family style meal at a local restaurant and ice cream.

The next morning, we got to attend Eric and Chelsie's church. There we were challenged to read the Bible as GOD'S WORD. That means when we read something we don't say "Yes...BUT", however, we read and simply say "AMEN!" That evening we were introduced to the culture through a video on the history of the country, some cultural norms, and some cultural dances in which we all participated. There are pictures and videos to back this up! This provided a great opportunity for us to connect with another team there with us from James Madison University.

Monday started our regular ministry at our sites for the rest of the week. Students International does a great job at conducting short term mission trips. There can be a lot of danger done on short term mission trips by groups who come and do ministry for a week and then depart. These groups can unintentionally create dependency for the locals on the team by always meeting their material needs. Or worse, they can come in and share the gospel and then leave them to figure things out on their own with no help. Students International (SI) partners all of the short-term participants with a long-term missionary that serves in that area every day of the week throughout the entire year. That way when the short-term team leaves, the ministry continues and there can be follow up with whatever God may do through the group.

With that said, our team was split up into several different sites; women's social work, education in Los Higos, women's sports (volleyball), and men's sports (baseball). Every morning we woke up and reported to the chapel for our abiding time through the parables of Jesus. That was followed up with a video series called "Helping Without Hurting" based off of the book *When Helping Hurts*. This was a phenomenal series that helped us define poverty not as the lack of material, but what it is, the brokenness of relationship with God, ourselves, friends and family, and others. With this insight we were taught better ways to relieve poverty other than giving money or goods but by seeing ourselves equally broken, asking good questions,

evaluating their assets, and empowering them to be a part of the solution. These truths were great for us to learn and even better to see them practiced by our site leaders in the different areas.

Despite all of the rain (it rained nonstop from Saturday evening to Tuesday morning), our different groups would head out in several different directions in the morning and carry out a variety of different ministries. Being limited by our ability to speak the language, we sought to encourage our site leaders with what we saw them doing well and by serving them in whatever way they asked us to in order to make their job easier that week. The site leaders are really awesome missionaries who undoubtedly encouraged and challenged us throughout the week as you will hear in some of the testimonies below.

There were a couple of unique experiences that we had throughout the week. One of those was a worship night where we got alone with God and responded to Him through prayer, confession, repentance, singing, and serving. There were several who took advantage of this moment to speak life into others as well. Another night we got to go into the home of a Dominican and have a home cooked meal together. Finally, our last night was a night of celebration where we went out to a restaurant to eat a meal, worship through song, watch a recap video, and hear testimonies as a whole group of how God worked in the lives of some of the individuals on the trip.

As a small group, we got to spend another time together in Eric and Chelsie's home doing a debrief of the weekend. Everyone went around sharing their one big thing they will take away from the week that God had taught them. We then heard from Eric and Chelsie and their journey to their current positions. We wrapped up the night with prayer over Eric, Chelsie, and John Simmons.

John, the guys had a great time getting to spend time with him for most of the week. John rode with us from the airport, and he stayed with us till Sunday evening. He returned again on Wednesday afternoon and rode with us to the airport on Saturday morning. We got to have many laughs, serious talks, and service opportunities throughout the week with him. Currently, his position is influx with the Coronavirus potentially shutting down the school he is teaching at in Santiago. Because of his school's move to online and his role as a PE teacher, there is not a need for him to be present. As of my last contact, John was to return home in the next week with no return date in sight as they waited on the conclusion with what to do about school. Please be in prayer for him as he waits for God to open up the door for what is next with him and that he would have the faith to walk through that door.

Thank you for all of your prayers during the week. Despite all of the Coronavirus talk our travel there and back was smoother than was to be expected. Continue to pray for Eric, Chelsie, and Kai especially as Chelsie continues to seek out what the future holds for her. Pray for the health of their family and for God's prefer future for them in Jarabacoa. They are doing a great work and their ministry is having a great impact on the lives of those who participate in the program that they run.

What follows are a couple of testimonies from our team about their week...

"My name is Aubrey Reagan and I am a Special Education teacher and head volleyball coach". I have said that same sentence more times than I can recall, but never truly understood the meaning. After arriving in the Dominican Republic, I was immediately bombarded by statements pertaining to purpose and how

we, as Christians, can use our own gifts and passions to serve. I consistently felt as though God had arranged this trip and had placed me in a situation to both serve others and grow myself. This was yet again validated after meeting my site leaders, Mabelis and Megan. Prior to leaving, I had assumed that volleyball, coaching, and life in general in the DR would be different than what I experienced daily in the US; I was excited to experience something different, but never could have imagined what I would learn. Through Helping Without Hurting videos and Mabelis's personal testimony, I realized that we were, in fact, the same. We, all of humanity, are connected through brokenness; brokenness in the world, brokenness in relationships, and brokenness in our connection with God. Realizing that, I began to watch how my site leaders interacted with people in the community and realized that they were doing so much more than playing volleyball with kids. Megan and Mabelis were constantly addressing the brokenness they saw in others through intentional conversations about God. This past week on missions allowed me to "get my feet wet" playing volleyball and sharing the love of Christ. Returning home, I hope to use my own talents, passions, and calling to be bold and seek out intentional conversations. I intend for this not to be a wasted experience, but something that impacts my life for years to come.

Aubrey Reagan

God is at work and is clearly moving and active— it was awesome to see how evident His goodness is in the Dominican Republic and getting to witness that He doesn't just move in Cleveland, Tennessee. We follow a God that moves internationally! I went on this trip hoping to serve and encourage others, but I was more served, encouraged, and blessed by the people there than I ever could have imagined.

I learned that service isn't a quick deed, it is slowing down and being intentional with people without a specific timeframe in mind. And it is also being sensitive to the Spirit at work in the lives of other people. It is easy to serve people I want to serve and it is easy to follow Jesus when everything is easy— but coming home, I want to equally love on people that are hard to serve and I want to point to Jesus when things are difficult.

In closing, thank you to each person that gave to us- whether financially, through prayer, or through encouraging words. I am thankful to be apart of the Body of CCBC and I look forward to sharing more soon.

In Him,

Annie Kate Gibson

Others shared with me how God has revealed to them that all people are beautiful creations of God. They are all deserving of the love of God through the Gospel. Another student talked to me about the boldness they need to take when they return home to make a spiritual investment in the lives of other young men. There were other great moves of God in our teammates and I pray that soon we can gather to hear from the whole team. FOR HIS GLORY!

Humbly Desiring to Serve,

Jonathan Kyle