

It's often said that Haiti is the land the world forgot. It's been plagued by poverty and corruption over the years, and it was devastated by a major earthquake in 2010. It's also said that if Haiti is the land the world forgot, then La Gonave is the island that Haiti forgot.

Our vision at Christ Church is to go and make disciples, and within that vision is a call to go and make disciples in communion with those whom most of the world has forgotten. So for the past two decades, Christ Church has been in relationship with Anglican Christians in La Gonave. We contribute annually to fund teacher salaries at the parochial school of Church of the Holy Spirit, and we have sent several mission teams over the years to build relationships in La Gonave and partner in ministry with fellow Anglican Christians.

This past September, I led a team to Haiti to offer a Vacation Bible School (VBS) at Church of the Holy Spirit's school, to partner with local Haitians in building desks and benches for the school, and in all that, to build relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we look back on our time in Haiti, we see the hand of God at work in ourselves and in those to whom we ministered.

The first thing that anyone from the US notices upon first arrival in Haiti is the poverty—the rocky roads, the scarcity of clean water, the huts and shacks that most live in. And these material conditions of poverty coincide with a poverty of opportunity. Trip Ottinger recalls a time when he was confronted with a sense of his own privilege: "Sam was a kid who wanted a visa, and asked me how he could get it. And the answer was, he probably couldn't. I was struck by the stark reality of that. The unfairness." And yet Trip's experience was that in spite of the poverty, there was a wealth of joy in the Haitian people: "I saw God in the attitude and the joy of the Haitian people. They seemed very happy, and their happiness was not predicated on material things."

The Haitian people are a living witness to Jesus' words in Luke 12:15: "...one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." The Haitians we encountered seem to have learned that the life Jesus talks about comes instead from our relationship with God and our relationships with others in him.

Candy Solyan was impacted by the strength of relational ties in the midst of material poverty: "We saw families together, and when the baby would start to squirm, someone else in the family would just take the baby. When they were with friends, they made sure all of their friends got the same thing they did. They take care of each other." One of ways God clearly worked in those of us to Haiti is in teaching us that true joy comes from relationships with God and others, not from our stuff.

We saw God at work in ourselves in this and many other ways, but we also saw God clearly at work as we ministered. On the first day of our VBS at Church of the Holy Spirit's school, we discovered that while the school is connected with the church, most of the children at the school do not attend church. Many of them had little knowledge of Jesus and his love. So part way through our first morning in VBS, we were led to scrap our original plans and simply spend three days telling the story of Jesus.

For Robin Quick, "One of the experiences on our trip that stands out the most is the last day of VBS, when we acted out the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Way too many kids were way too focused on what we were doing. It couldn't have been us. It was God at work. The kid who played Jesus, carrying the cross, acting it out—I will never forget the look on his face and how serious he was. All the children felt that story come to life in a very real way."

Throughout our time with the children at the school, we shared the gospel with clarity and conviction, we led them in songs of praise, and we had lots of conversations with students and teachers alike. By the end of our time, they knew we were there because we loved Jesus and we loved them.

As Trip Ottinger reflected on his experience of the trip as a whole, he said, "I saw it as an adventure going into it. That's what I wanted, and that's what I got. Charles Stanley said, 'If you live the Christian life, it will be the greatest adventure you'll go on.'"

It is indeed an adventure to respond to Jesus' call to go and make disciples. Maybe God will call you to go to Haiti on our next trip. But if you don't go, you can still be a part of the adventure as you send others with your prayers and support.

La Gonave, Haiti is simultaneously a place of great need and great blessing. As we partner with Anglican Christians there in ministering to physical and spiritual needs, we are blessed as we continue to live out our one great purpose: "Go and make disciples."