

Ministry: Allowing God to guide, teach and humble me January, 2007

Greetings from the DR! This month has been one packed full of moving experiences, various opportunities to learn, and even more chances to grow spiritually. I thank the Lord for all the challenges He has placed before me, but more importantly the lessons He uses these challenges to teach me. When I returned on January 4th I had the opportunity to spend some time with the Foundation for Peace's Project Coordinator, Greg Penza.

To begin with, I want to thank any of you that sent items in the container that shipped out in early November, as it has arrived, been unloaded, and distributed to various communities. I know some of you are aware of the process that goes into organizing and loading these containers, however, I would like to share with you a little bit about what we do on this end. It is our job to make sure all of the items shipped down get sorted and delivered to the appropriate communities. This job is not an easy one; however, it is a very rewarding one because we are able to see the faces of the pastors, school directors, and children as items are delivered to their communities. The excitement they have over a used desk or a beat up filing cabinet is amazing. It is very special to be a part of this process because it is at this very moment that you are the "link" between those who have donated the resources and those who need them. I wanted to be sure to let everyone know, the items you packed up and shipped down are being used as I write this update, in our classrooms, churches, clinics, and in the homes of various communities.

About my second week here, Greg was preparing to receive a youth baseball team that travels from Ridgewood, NJ to play in a tournament in San Pedro de Macoris against a Dominican teams. While this group is in country, they also participate in a service project. Last year they started a project in a batey near San Pedro called "Hoyo del Toro" (Hole of the Bull) where they were building a basketball court for the youth. However, the government and sugar cane company decided to step in and stop this process. Hoyo del Toro is one of the poorer communities that exists around San Pedro, and of course, like other bateyes, was founded to house sugar cane workers. Well, the problem now is that there is little cane to cut. Fortunately, some of the people living in Hoyo del Toro have found work in San Pedro (unemployment is still 70% in the community) and few are working in the sugar cane fields. At this point in time, it seems the sugar cane company no longer wants to encourage people to live in Hoyo del Toro; they are not supporting new construction or other community improvements that might encourage community members to stay.

Greg testified at a tribunal with the President of the batey, and he has assisted with writing letters to the local government seeking their approval to complete the basketball court. The result of all efforts over the past year have been the same, no response and definitely no support. Despite much prayer and fruitless attempts to change the situation, Greg began to work to find another area for the baseball team to work in during their stay.

Through a variety of connections, we ended up in Batey Esperanza (Spanish for hope). Even after living here for 4 months, and traveling to a variety of communities, Esperanza was a sight to see. This community is extremely poor, but what is shocking is

that it's not in the middle of nowhere, it's 2 minutes out of San Pedro—a major city. Despite its proximity to the city it seems that no one is helping this community either. While the team will work in Batey Esperanza this year, Greg and the Foundation for Peace will continue to diligently work in partnership with the leaders of Batey Hoyo del Toro to overcome the prejudice and social injustice that has been brought to light by the attempted construction of a basketball court.

Later this same week I tagged along as Greg preached in Los Alcarizos, another community the Foundation for Peace has been working with since 2004. After the service the Pastor asked Greg if we would go with him to see the house of a local family. While the mother was at church and the father working on evening, they left their 4 children alone in the house (which is perfectly normal in Dominican culture). Due to the loss of electricity (also very common here) one of the older children lit some candles for light, and the candle started a fire. In the end, the house was burned very badly. The walls are still standing but not much else. All their belongings inside were lost, their roof is gone, and all the doors are burned as well. However, the most important thing they lost that night was their 12 year old son who suffered from mental retardation. Despite the tragedy, it was an incredibly moving experience: this family had lost so much and still had faith in the Lord. Of course we wanted to help, we wanted to take their pain away, we wanted to make everything better again for these people immediately. But we couldn't! So what did Greg and I do? Turn to the Lord. Ask him for help. As usual, He was faithful! The next day the pastor called and said the church had a few extra construction materials from when the FFP built the second story on their church, and he wanted to know if they could use some of these materials to begin fixing their house. God showed us the problem, and then a step we could take to help with this problem. Of course this family still needs our prayers as they scavenge for resources to rebuild their house, and their family without their 12 year-old son. But we are hopeful now that God has provided a way to start the healing and the reconstruction of what was lost.

As the next week started up Kristin, Ruth, and I started to map out our new teaching schedules. We have reached the point where my Spanish has improved enough, and Ruth has had 4 months of teaching experience, so we are now able to split up and teach in separate communities. Together we agreed that it would be most beneficial to spend more time in fewer communities, instead of stretching ourselves over three different communities. This will allow me to add another day of teaching in Pantoja (3 days now!), along with teaching some community classes, visiting families and members of the church, and participating in street and house to house evangelism with the church members. I am absolutely thrilled to be able to spend some more time in Pantoja, and really feel like I am becoming a part of the community.

I have been able to figure out public transportation routes to Pantoja and back, enabling me to travel a little more freely when Pastor Mesa is not available to drive me. This new schedule is wonderful and should allow me to build stronger relationships with the members of this community. As of now, I am actually staying in Pantoja some Mondays and Tuesdays, sleeping at the home of one of the school staff members named Carmen, and her two children. This is a true blessing as I am learning that it is really important to experience the way people live on a daily basis. God has blessed the FFP and its missionaries with a beautiful home. I thank God for this all the time, but I also

thank him for the opportunity to live like the people of Pantoja: without running water, without my own room and own bed, without couches or furniture to sit on, and without a toilet that flushes. I am so grateful to the Lord for these experiences, as he uses them to teach me so many lessons and to humble me.

On Wednesday nights I am able to worship with the church in Pantoja and share with the community our love for the Lord and all he has done in our lives. We visit families in their homes and pray for them. We then hold a church service in the streets where we sing, pray, and preach allowing the community to participate. Many of my students come to participate, and the community is able to see our dedication and love for the Lord. This is one of my favorite nights!

As you can see the Lord is continuing to nurture me down here in the DR. He has given me the privilege to teach English to these beautiful and joyful children and I pray that in some small way that I may demonstrate the servant love that Jesus showed when he walked this earth.

This month I have been reading a little book called “The Prayer of Jabez for Women” to teach me how to better serve him. For those of you who aren’t familiar with the story, Jabez is a man mentioned in 1 Chronicles 4:9 who prayed the following: “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” The Bible then goes on to say “And God granted his request.” It is truly that simple, when we are genuine in our prayers God is faithful in answering them. As the third part of the prayer states, “. . . let your hand be with me. . .”, the Lord has helped me and provided a steadily increasing knowledge of the language.

I continue to pray for patience to better understand a different culture. I am reminded daily of God’s faithfulness, but only when I first have the faith and the trust in Him. I am truly blessed to be serving in this country, and once again want to thank all of you for helping to make that a possibility. I thank the Lord for your support daily in my prayers.

We always need your prayers. They are the fuel to our fire, the fire of the Lord!

My Prayer List

Things I am thankful for:

- The opportunity to serve in the DR!
- Opportunity to spend time with Greg in various communities this month
- Juana, the director in Pantoja, and the joy she is to work with
- Carmen, Julia, and Chris who feed and house me in Pantoja
- The presence of the Holy Spirit in my life
- Isidro and all the times he has helped me in my ministry.

Areas we need your prayers:

- Pray for healing for the family in Los Alcarizos who lost their son and home in a fire
- Pray for success with my increased work load in Pantoja.
- Ask that the Lord will continue to humble me and through that experience that He might reveal more fully the specific calling He has for my ministry here.
- Pray for the people of Batey Hoyo del Toro and that God will break them free and allow them to be a community and provide them with basic needs. Pray that the God will change the hearts of the sugar cane company and government involved with this batey.
- Pray for church groups in the US who will come and work in Batey Esperanza
- Pray for healthy relationships of all 4 missionaries here and that we may allow God to use our different strengths to be a group united in Him.
- Pray for health and happiness for the Yan family with whom we live with in Ensanche Quisqueya (Ercilia, Ysolina, Lidia, Vladimir, Isidro)
- Pray that God will provide a means to supply food and resources to the orphans in Haiti (as Greg traveled there and witnessed the great needs present there last week)