



Haiti Mission Team (*Jacob Couch, John Euler, Elissa Koele, Mike Moran, Phil Page, Sterling Scroggins, Caryn Volland, and Rev. Kara Scroggins*)

Our Plan for the Week - Rev. Kara: We will be working a few hours per day with Sadhana Forest, the reforestation project that first drew me to this small border town on the south coast of the island of Hispaniola. The project employs local Haitians and welcomes volunteers from all over the world to live, work, eat, and learn together in community. Part of the work we will do there will be directly involved with the care and keeping of young fruit trees, and part of it will be assisting in the upkeep of the project site—maintenance projects, tending gardens, and helping to cook meals for all who are working. In the afternoons, we will travel to a settlement about 4 miles away, where Haitian immigrants who were deported from the Dominican Republic first set up camp in June of 2015. The community has become a bit more established over the years, and they are trying to get regular schooling hours going for both children and adults. Part of our group will offer classes and practice in speaking English, and the other part will spend time doing crafts and activities with the young children. We will also bring trees and supplies from Sadhana Forest, and plan to spend a day planting fruit trees out at the settlement together.

On the Road - Caryn: We've all come a long way to be here – from frozen Washington, DC; from our offices, meetings, daily routines – and spent seven hours in two cars driving through cities and countryside to a place most of us have never been. Some of us know each other well, others are still getting acquainted. But I think we all share at least one common motivation for being here, which is to expand our notion of the community that we belong to, and to change the lives of the people we meet the way they will change ours – by beginning new friendships, becoming familiar with new places, challenging our bodies and minds in new ways. Personally, when I am at home I spend a little too much time thinking about all the many things on my many agendas. Already here I feel myself focusing more on the present. I hope I can practice that focus throughout the week and take it back when I go home.



Relationships - Jacob: When we entered church this morning, the pastor made an announcement about our arrival, but I'm sure our presence had already permeated throughout the town. We conversed with many people who I had met on prior trips [*this was Jacob's third trip to Haiti with BUMC*], and it was exciting to see what their new endeavors were. The excitement and spirit behind each of these discussions brings a new level of dimension to our relationship. I hope and pray that this will continue through our time in Anse-a-Pitre. We have meetings, dinners, work times, and much more scheduled with so many different players in this community. It is my hope and prayer that we can explore relationships where we are *working with, being with, and being for* the members of Anse-a-Pitre. Then, and only then, can our presence provide a small, miniscule, but positive impact within a community that is thriving in love.

Transcending Language - Elissa: As we cross the border and cross lines of conversation with ourselves in English, the Dominican people in Spanish, and the Haitians in Creole, I have begun to notice that words aren't really important. I do not need to understand or even be understood to show and know that bonds are being formed. Yesterday, while visiting the beach, a young girl came up to me whom I realized was deaf. She could not speak, could not hear, and even if lip reading, it would have been difficult with my less than stellar Spanish skill. Despite all of these obstacles, we bonded. We spent quite a while playing in the water and just being joyous with each other. Even being at church yesterday stirred my heart. I could not understand a single word of the sermon but was moved by the palpable spirit in the room. You could feel the spirit, you could feel the joy. Each day, each hour brings new opportunities to love on others and it has been the most blessed experience. Although short, my time here has already shown me the power of allowing God's love to flow through you. Of opening your heart and loving; loving completely, loving without judgement, and loving without abandon.



Hope Through Education - Phil: Education comes in many forms – the classroom, field trips, research, experiential and experimental. Ultimately, I believe one function of education is to provide hope that the future will be better, brighter, happier. Over the past several days in Anse-a-Pitre, Haiti and the neighboring refugee camp, I have seen hope manifest itself through a variety of forms of education. Hope is manifesting itself in the refugee community through the eagerness to learn, particularly English. Through no fault of their own, the refugees have been displaced by government policies and forced to settle in this camp. Despite these hardships, there is a thirst for knowledge, a desire to learn, a hope for a better, brighter, happier, and perhaps, most importantly, a kinder tomorrow. My hope and prayer is for that thirst to be quenched.



The Experience - John: There really are no words to describe this place where we are and what we are experiencing. The closest word is "AMAZING". On the down side: Amazing poverty; heat, dirt, dust and trash; noisy motor bikes; amazing critters; tarantulas, iguanas, wild burros; and stray dogs everywhere. Amazing hopelessness in some respects. A terribly low standard of living with little sign of change. Destructive politics. Undergirding corruption. But then, as a counter we have: amazingly friendly people who live in this place, almost all of them openly welcome and glad to see us and who take genuine joy in their daily life. Amazing spirit of the worshipers in church, and those who work in the forest restoration project. Both project good will and gladness with lives so different from our own. Amazing effort put forth by forest workers who grow and plant trees, our BUMC team members, and a handful of community leaders named Nixon, Raphael and Eddie whose devotion and courage are inspiring and moving. And amazing are the children, who smile, hug, laugh and sing in the



face of grinding poverty and uncertain future; as though the world is good and love abounds. Finally, amazing is the work that we are called and able to do here, a life changing and faith building experience. All of which most simply reflects, the amazing grace of God.



Preparing to Leave - Mike: Today was our last day of work in Haiti. As I began this adventure, I had no specific expectations and determined to appreciate each activity as its own remarkable event. As I look back on it, I will take away the memory of some truly remarkable people. I have come to think of [Eddie and Nixon] and the team at Sadhana Forest, Santhonax and Rev. Eduane as community heroes. Each has channeled their dreams and their passions toward improving the quality of life in Anse a Pitre and Parc Cadot. They are the type of people who could be builders anywhere; they chose to do it here. Eddie's internet café will be a game changer for learners of all ages in Anse a Pitre. Nixon has brought his agricultural expertise to the community in Parc Cadot and for me, a highlight of our work experience was the day that the Sadhana Forest and BUMC teams together planted 30 trees in the refugee settlement and shared some time with the children at the school. Nixon was a true friend to our team; in addition to sharing his knowledge he helped us coordinate transportation and border crossings. Santhonax is one of those wonderful people whose energy radiates and energizes others. We learned that he helps out with anyone who asks, and it was inspiring for me to see the way he connected with the children at Parc Cadot. Under Rev. Eduane's love and care I have hope that conditions will continue to improve at the settlement. I was privileged to share this adventure with a wonderful team from BUMC. We shared some good work, a lot of song and laughter, and a few tears as we said goodbye to our new friends. I'm feeling energized by the example set by our new friends. I hope that I can figure out how to channel that energy into supporting their efforts in the future.

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Bethesda United Methodist Church, 8300 Old Georgetown Rd, Bethesda, MD 20814 + 301-652-2990