

Testimonials Are Us

Dominican Republic Missions Trip Changes Lives

Centenary's Youth and their leaders are home from a mission team that blessed lives from Shelbyville, Ky to Santiago, Dominican Republic. The impact of this mission trip will be felt in the lives who went to serve and those who were served. Here are the stories of two of our missionaries who went and were touched in ways beyond their expectations; way only our Lord could have been part of.

Jordan Knipp's first impressions of the Dominican Republic, "Hot". Then after a moment of further reflection, "Sad looking. Streets filled with garbage. Foul smells. No trash cans. Garbage just thrown down. Houses about to fall over if a gust of wind came. Then on the same street giant, nice houses. A very big gap in the same neighborhood. Some people had cars and mansions on the same street with people in terrible poverty."

In addition, despite all that, the poverty-stricken children Jordan and the other members of Centenary's mission team had come to serve were "all very happy". The happiness of the children and the adults, despite their destitution confounded Jordan. The high school grad, headed to Lindsey Wilson College in August, found herself in the midst of a unique learning experience.



Jordan Knipp learned the children were very loving and appreciated what Centenary's mission team was trying to do to help them.

Jordan was impressed with the love, faith and patience demonstrated by Los Perez, Santiago pastor, Nico Gracesqui. A member of Go Ministries, which coordinated Centenary's mission trip, Nico's church serves people living in despicable conditions. "Everyone knew Nico who is like a father to them. A lot of the kids are fatherless, but I was impressed with Nico's relationship with them."

She was also impressed with the Nutrition Centers the Go Ministries sponsor. The centers provide meals and vitamins six days per week. "The children are fed portions of food like rice, beans, meat and cheese (they love

cheese). Different size plates have different colors and have different proportions of food depending on the size of the child. The kids know what size they should have and refuse to take the wrong size. They share with another child if there is any unfinished food. During the summer, they feed 90 to 100 kids in a small building that looks like it will fall down. They have to make choices: money for food or for a building."

Whenever our bus arrived, the kids flocked to the door, immediately wanting us to play with them", says Jordan. "When we were leaving the kids would try to jump on the bus, bang on the windows. Trying to get in the bus, they would sometimes fall in front of the bus. We were scared we might hit one of them. They love Americans and wanted to play with every one of us."

Someone else who was inspired by Go Ministries' Nutrition Centers was Chellie Gaither. "They are so organized, providing meals for the children with color coded plates to be sure they receive appropriate portions for their size/age. The children are proud of the nutrition center despite it being in a shack. They learn about hygiene and use a hand washing system that was made from materials the Go Ministry team could find."

Chellie, who was one of the five adults who joined the 15 youth on Centenary's first international mission trip, knows about working with children, but this was different from anything she had even imagined. "This was a life changing experience. I have traveled, seen other places, and even seen poverty. But we live life like being at a resort all the time. The extras we enjoy, the amenities we take for granted they (the people they met on the mission trip) don't even have trash cans or grass. It is a hard place. As adults a lot of people (in the USA) complain about taxes and public services. . . But things we take for granted garbage collection, running water, phone service, they have none of that. There is no infrastructure for organized services. Not a lot of green space. No grass. No parks. No sports complex. Nothing for regular citizens."

The impact the mission trip is having on Chellie's life is coming as a big surprise. Her expectation was to do ministry work, of course, but a big reason to go was to "make sure the teenagers had a good experience. I wanted to be sure they were taken care of." Including Chellie's daughter, Meredith, who was so committed to go on the trip. Chellie admits she was a little "nervous. We've always been safe together. Jeff and I felt one of us had to go with her. The world can be a dangerous place."

Within minutes of arriving on the mission site Chellie knew she was going to face challenges she had not figured on. "Physically, I was not prepared for it. The first day I was sick. Too much sun. Too much heat. It was a bigger challenge than making sure our youth had sunscreen and didn't eat or drink food that might make them sick. I was out of shape, but I am willing to go back. I was touched by how happy the people with so little. We can make a difference in our own community, but there we were giving kids our undivided attention and they were so grateful."



Chellie Gaither has fallen in love with the happy children she found in the Dominican Republic. Chellie said as they left the children on the last day of their mission trip, "they were crying tears, we were crying tears."

Chellie was relieved how organized Go Ministries was in coordinating people to be with the team and to put them to work as they kept them safe. The work could be hard like digging a trench for a fence that would go around one of the three churches they worked with. The heat was often oppressive. Chellie was proud too of Centenary's mission team. "Beth Hickman had mission field experience and was a great help. Youth like Jacob Hisle worked like men doing hard work in the oppressive heat. We had several youth who had never been on a plane, let alone out of the U.S. Our youth were exceptional. No one got mad, or wanted to go home and that says a lot about our youth. We have all these luxuries at home that we were hesitant to give up at first. But everyone said they were willing to go back."

Jordan and Chellie loved the time the team spent with the children in the Vacation Bible School sessions they were able to hold at two of the churches. Chellie says, "Some of the kids have been through some bad stuff, but they showed up with smiles on their faces. Even though they have very little they tried their best to get fixed up for us. No one has things, but they are happy even with the little they had."

“The churches,” believes Jordan, “are making a difference. One of the churches was really small in a rough area where there was drug trafficking even using little kids.” Since the church has been there, things have improved. Jordan says she looks forward to seeing what a difference the churches they visited will continue to make. She has learned, “it’s OK to get out of your comfort zone to do the work that God wants us to do.”

Chellie who would like to see Centenary do more mission work, international and local, is willing to speak to different classes about her mission experience and hopes for groups to continue to serve. “I want to encourage people to make a commitment to go and serve. It is an entirely different experience going away from home to serve. This was a kick in the pants for me to get more involved in serving others. We get so busy with our own lives, family, work. . . We are here to serve those that don’t have what they need. . . In the big picture, we are to spread the happiness we know. Spread the word that God loves them. We are here to do that.”



Centenary’s Dominican Republic Mission Team and Friends.