

Testimonials Are Us

Mission Trip to Dominican Republic

For a gal, that doesn't play basketball, to go all the way to the Dominican Republic to join others to hold a basketball camp for kids living in poverty, may not make any sense to you until you know who the gal is and why she is going. Meet Centenary youth member, **Meredith Gaither**, a 15-year-old Collins high school freshman who loves math, playing soccer, reading and serving God.

The last mission project Meredith participated in did something she did not expect. "I went into it with expectations completely different than what happened. I thought I would have an impact on the children we worked with, changing their lives. What really happened is those kids changed me more than I changed them. They changed my perspective. I want to go on the mission trip to the Dominican (Republic) to see how God works with people in other countries. I'm interested in seeing how our mission trip will work in people's lives."

"I have no idea how to play basketball or help with a basketball camp," confesses Meredith, "but basketball is a main sport for Dominican Republic kids. Playing basketball well is a way to get out of the Dominican Republic (and out of poverty). They said we could have 300 kids attend the camp."

Meredith says she is looking forward to the whole mission experience even if they'll be sleeping on floors, "that's OK"; bleaching their hands before we eat, "because of the unsanitary conditions" and facing other challenges, "I'm looking forward to it". She is excited about working with fellow youth members, "Our Centenary youth and the adult leaders mean a lot to me. We have gotten very close. Ms. Trisha (Hobbs) is like another 'Mom' to me. My Centenary friends are my main friends. They are like brothers and sisters to me."

Meredith's mother, Chellie, is going on the mission trip, too. They were encouraged to go together by the father/spouse, Jeff, who will take care of things at home. They are joining a Centenary mission team of 20 headed to the Dominican Republic, June 9-16. The team of five adults and 15 students will be working with G. O. Ministries, an organization that helps coordinate mission trips to Haiti, Dominican Republic, Columbia, Mongolia, Africa and the United States.

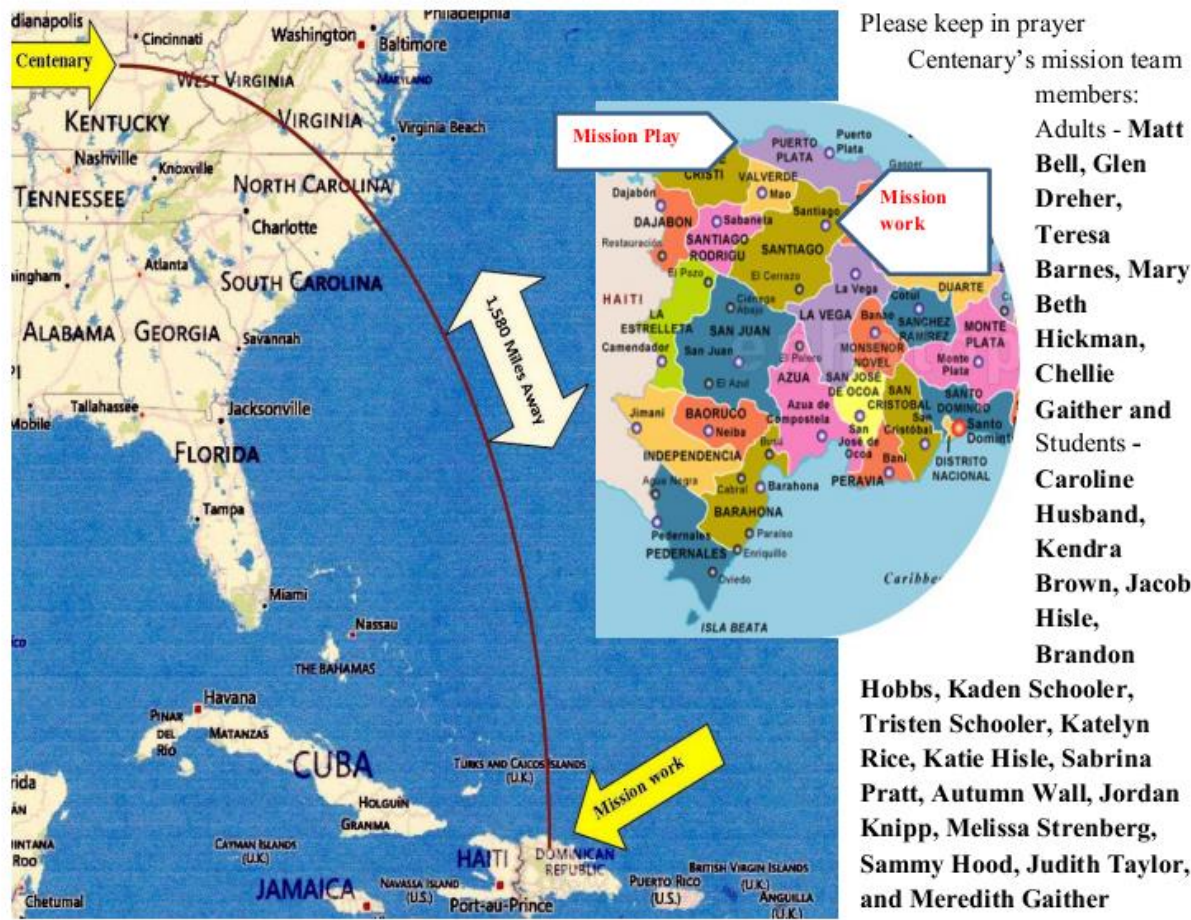
According to their website, "G.O. Ministries seeks to empower passionate, Local Leaders serving inside their own cultures to Redeem people, Renew communities and Restore Creation by developing dynamic International Partnerships in Ministry that result in mutual transformation". G. O. says it is, "partnering with over 100 indigenous Christian pastors and leaders, feeding over 1,000 children a hot meal six days a week through one of nine nutrition centers, offering education to over 600 children through its primary school, partnering with over 30 churches in the Dominican and Haiti, facilitating 12 sport leagues with at risk youth, and offering medical aid to the poor through a daily medical clinic. The organization employs over 20 full-time missionaries and staff." Two of the U. S. staff members will be familiar names to many in Centenary, former United Methodist minister, Ron Creque, Sr. and his wife Cathy. Respectively they serve as all-around-volunteer and the Director of Leadership Development and Human Resources.

Centenary's mission trip projects include assisting in a basketball camp, serving meals, conducting Bible School, having fellowship time and helping with construction at a church. The work will be in an impoverished



Meredith Gaither

neighborhood outside Santo Domingo, La Hoya del Cambranan. Before coming home the youth will also enjoy some sightseeing and recreation along the coast of Puerto Plata a Dominican province that hosts some of the country's most popular resorts and some of its poorest communities.



Map of the Mission Trip destination with insert showing detail.

“Funding for the mission trip”, says Youth Director Matt Bell, “came from Centenary members asking that their former building fund donations be redirected to the youth mission trip. The kids are paying some and we are also subsidizing some of the youth from the youth ministry budget.”

Matt explains the decision to work with G. O. Ministries, “I knew of them through Fernando Isa and my cousin's husband, Brad Schutz. Both have been on missions with G. O. before and spoke very highly of them. I first became interested in the Dominican Republic because of Fernando. I knew I wanted to take the kids on an international mission trip and thought the Dominican Republic would be great for us since we have a church member who was born and raised there.”

Mary Beth Hickman is excited about the opportunity to serve as one of the adult leaders on the mission trip. Mary Beth explains, “I have a huge heart for missions. It was what I liked best about Youth (when growing up in Centenary's youth group). I always wanted us to do more mission projects especially cross-cultural missions.

I have a huge love for other peoples and in surveys (taken by youth leaders to seek ideas) each year I asked for the youth to do overseas mission trips as long as I was in it. When Matt asked me to be a leader of the mission trip to the Dominican Republic I was interested. I've never really been a leader. I am hoping that my example will translate into something that is good for the youth, that it can help them. I don't want this to be my selfish ambition."

I knew it was a completely different role I have never had. I knew that since Matt had asked me, it was what God wanted me to do."



Mary Beth Hickman

Mary Beth, an Asbury University sociology major, is a sophomore with a goal to finish her master's degree in counseling. "I want to work in family or children's counseling with a minor in Spanish there are several areas I can work in."

Why Asbury University, Mary Beth? "It was not on my radar but it ended up being the perfect fit. I knew I wanted to attend a small school so I could concentrate on my studies in a safe, academically centered school in an environment that would challenge me to grow my Christina faith. I found Asbury through its smaller classes in a safe the campus community, to be unlike any other school other I had seen. I knew Asbury would be a good fit. Asbury was kind or a step out of my comfort zone. I hadn't considered it. Knowing the school would challenge me, I am so glad I picked it.

Mary Beth may be new to mission team leadership, but she is not new to multicultural mission work. "As a student at Christian Academy," Mary Beth recalls, "working with mission teams in Nicaragua on two occasions. We worked in children's homes, helping feed people and distribute food. The second trip she funded herself to go as an intern for a month helping mission teams transition into the work they were facing in Nicaragua.

She is going with an Asbury team to Puerto Rico before she goes to the Dominican Republic in June. There she will be the manager for the mission basketball team, and help the other projects to run smoothly including construction work and Christian out reach.

What about the role Centenary may have played in your life, Mary Beth? A pause of reflection and then an enthusiastic, "Gosh Centenary has been a huge part of my life. It was where I was baptized. Where I had my confirmation. I love Centenary. Because it is like a small community it has influenced me on where I wanted to go to school, where and how I interact with others. It has challenged me to grow in my faith. It has played a big part in who I am."

Mary Beth also says growing up in Centenary has brought her close to Matt and the other youth directors. "Even when I was too young to be in youth, I was spiritually challenged by them especially Brad & Missy Griffin and Derek Robinette. The Griffins are really close to our family and we keep up with them now."

What will you be doing in the Dominican? "We will be busy conducting basketball camp, and I understand some type of construction work, having fellowship, and a type of VBS (Vacation Bible School), serving lunch and doing some sightseeing.

“I’m looking forward to learning more about the country. I know there are some parts that are vacation spots and some like our mission team will be in that are in real poverty. It will be interesting to see how that plays out in the country. If you can see the difference, if it is a significant contrast, and be interesting to be in a new place.

Any final thoughts, Mary Beth? “I hope our Centenary family will be praying for the mission project. Praying that it will be life changing for those of us that are going and that we would be a blessing to the people (they meet on the mission trip). This is all about them and about God. Pray to give us a sense of humility. We need to be really prayerful about what is going on in the hearts of those that are going and those we are serving.”



Share Your Story

The Lord is at work in our lives every minute of every day. Sometimes we are in tune with those moments when the Lord is at work, in, for and through us. Many times those blessing happen through the work of your brothers and sisters in Centenary. When you recognize such a moment you give thanks. We’d also like for you to praise God for those moments by sharing them with your Centenary family.

Small, medium, large, any testimonial regarding Centenary glorifying God that you feel others will be blessed to know, please drop us a note, or send us an email and let us know. An answer to prayer, a protection from harm an intervention on your behalf, a surprise blessing, a gift from above, whatever you feel God is doing in your life that you want to praise him for and recognize God’s work in your church family you are invited to share.

To share your testimony, please email it to CUMCtestimonials@twc.org including your name and phone number. Or mail to: CUMC Testimonials, P O Box 38, Shelbyville, KY 40066. If you have questions please call Bonnie Burks Gray, 502-633-6941.

