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Surprising Reflections from a Journey to the DR in January 2017



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SUPPORT PLEDGED



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

At a Conference for Missionaries in Pennsylvania in 2015, the call came forth to go and visit the Dominican Republic. The call never left me and it grew in Cheryl as we asked God where we should go. Ketly and Vital were my neighbors at that retreat, far away from Nicaragua where they had just finished up serving. I knew of Ketly and Vital because of my daughter going and serving with them in Bluefield, Nicaragua. Madeline Flores-Lopez was also present at that conference and I found myself wanting to see the work God was doing within her life.

So, in the months that followed the desire increased. God gave me air miles that could be used. Cheryl's desire to go increased. We never knew why we were going but knew we needed to be there. So we made preparations and were set to leave town on Wednesday, January 4th. We could not even get an answer from these wonderful Global Servants as to what we could bring that might assist them. A few weeks before I knew, I needed to see my brother before going. Those of you who know me know I love being around groups of people. Yet, deep in my being I just wanted to be with my brother after the holidays so we could just be together the two of us. On that Sunday night, January 1st, I stood in my brother's studio and he let me know, "God has given me this stuff and now I need to hear where it's supposed to go." The next morning, an e-mail came from the DR with a request for specific equipment for a radio station. At first my response was, "How in the world will I get that stuff?" The God gently reminded me of what was in the studio less than 100' away from me. My brother and I spent the day laughing at how God so wonderfully directs our lives.

Cheryl and I drove away later that day with 135 pounds of radio station gear. The station will have three hours of prime time, from 6-9 p.m. Ketly and Vital describe the ministry in this manner:

A local station has given us three hours to broadcast a holistic program in Creole targeted for Haitians on the sugar cane plantations. While Jesus was on earth, he accompanied the people and cared for the whole person. Likewise, we are called to do the same. The program will seek to be educational, aimed at helping the people to live with dignity and raise their standard of living. It is another form of accompaniment.

The gear in two checked packages and one carry-on bag, as well as our two suitcases arrived safely. Customs opened up one package and we were through.

Our journey was in two phases. The first two days were spent with Madeline and a group from Puerto Rico. You all would be so proud of them. With Madeline they were busy celebrating Three Kings' Day. Gifts were loaded into the back of Madeline's 14-year-old pickup truck. First, she drove her almost-worn-out pickup truck to a Haitian migrant labor camp where we delivered Kings' Day gifts to the children. It was beautiful to watch her and her Puerto Rican brothers and sisters embrace the children of that Community with love and grace. Second, we loaded up again and headed up to a leper colony way up in the hills and visited every person there giving hugs, prayers and care to the people. Madeline lives out the concept of being a "living reminder of Christ's love" and showing in her actions that "God does truly love the whole world."

The following day we headed off to worship in the morning with the mission team and Madeline. When we arrived at the church, a few minutes into worship Madeline said, "Pastor Gregg, the pastor is ill and the guest preacher and musician have not shown up. You are going to preach." On that Three Kings Sunday, not only was I blessed to bring a message of

hope but also was able to dedicate a young baby girl's life to Jesus while the congregation joined in with words of prayer and encouragement to the young family.

We were then whisked off to our next stop at Iglesia Bet-El. We enjoyed singing, hearing each of the age group choirs sing and I got to watch Vital be very animated as he shared with the congregation. Then once again I was asked to preach. In both instances, the presence of the Spirit was very real and guided me on Three Kings Sunday. We walked around the batey that day and interacted with many of the people. We watched as Ketly and Vital touched the people, listened to them and shared the presence of Jesus through their actions. Their deep love for the people was so evident in their actions.

When we arrived at Ketly and Vital's home, the radio station equipment had been all unpacked and set up. They were awaiting a computer and it will be ready to roll. In the days that followed we were blessed to experience more of the work by visiting different churches and hearing of their ministries. Without an exception, what I heard loud and clear was pastors wanting to touch their communities. I sat in a 2.5-hour discipleship training one evening with Vital and watched as he encouraged the future pastors on how to lead. They looked through scripture and studied many texts about servant leadership and what it means to pastor.

When we would visit a church sight, I was amazed at how community based and engaged each one was. It was not about building a project for them, but it was about building so that others could know of the deep love of Jesus for them. They so wanted to care for their communities and invite people into new life. They wanted people to know they are genuinely cared for and Ketly and Vital are working closely with these new church plants and existing churches to encourage them to flourish and invite people into new life with Jesus. I witnessed Ketly caring for people deeply wherever we travelled and also she is loved deeply by others who knew her from 23 years ago from the Good Samaritan Hospital in the DR.

Many of the people that Madeline, Ketly and Vital work with are migrant laborers and have little rights, not too dissimilar to Jesus' beginning days in Egypt after Kings' Day as told in our biblical narrative. Yet those laborers know that the circumstances of their lives do not define who they are, for that is found in the One who calls them "beloved daughters and sons."

To each of you who are beloved by God, thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you do to make it possible for us to share God's love "from everywhere to everyone." Each person in the office aids in making these ministries possible. Each person who generously gives as the Spirit leads is partnering with God's work around the world. Each Global Servant aids in our call "From everywhere to everyone." God with us is doing so much to touch the lives of people in the DR and around the world. Thanks to all of you who partner with us and God in sharing the story of God's amazing gift of love in Jesus.