

Last March, I went to Haiti on my second mission trip. These trips are truly amazing! I'd like to share a few memories with you. I went with my husband, Don, and with 5 other people from our parish. We stayed at the Missionaries of Charity nutrition center and orphanage in Port au Prince. It is a wonderful experience to pray and work side by side with these Sisters in Blessed Teresa of Calcutta's order.

The first time I walked into the nutrition center to feed the children at breakfast, I cried. Even though I knew what to expect I was moved to tears. I immediately began to pray for the little ones. The first room with the sickest children had about 25 cribs. I noticed a few cribs with 2 infants per 1 crib. There were more sick children this year. Two aides were assigned to take care of about 30 very ill infants. We know the aides certainly appreciate help from the volunteers. The hospital-like ward is so inferior to the newborn nurseries in which I've worked here in the U.S. There is quite a disparity in technology, equipment, personnel, and food. The contrast is hard to reconcile. We have such an abundance of food in the U.S. with a fast food restaurant on every corner it seems. I read an article about the poor in Haiti making mud cakes to eat. Parents drop their starving sick children at the nutrition center for the Sisters to nurse back to health, if it's not too late. Some parents come at the visiting hour. Other parents may abandon their children at the Sister's nutrition center, because they don't have food or money to care for them. I can't imagine how difficult that would be! Oh my, we have so much and they have nothing!

We went twice a day to care for and feed the children. We saw many very skinny toddlers too weak to walk. A few infants were too weak to eat so they had an I.V. or a tube feeding. We held them or stood by their cribs and tried to quiet their cries. Sometimes they cried more when we put them back in their cribs! As a mother, a grandmother, and a nurse, I was prepared to care for these little ones. I know how to change a diaper, wipe a tear or hold a child. Yet, at times I naturally felt discouraged and overwhelmed. Each night as a team, we discussed our reactions and feelings from the day. This was helpful. I also remembered reading a story about Mother Teresa. Someone asked her if she felt discouraged caring for so many poor people, and she said no. She helped one person at a time. That story enabled me to focus on one child at a time. I didn't worry about the overly bleak setting but tried to reach out, one child at a time. I wanted to provide whatever comfort I could to those little ones. What a joy it was to pray for them. It was wonderful sometimes to get a slight smile from a very sick child! What a privilege it was to serve them! Oh, we have so much and they have nothing!

I think the Lord was present in our simple acts. Through our hugging, smiling, changing a diaper, singing, and laughing, we loved them as the Lord would love them. "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will..." Throughout the week I was so happy to be there. I was happy to be used by God, to be His hands to caress, His arms to hug, His heart to love.

Later in the week, we went up in the mountains to a small village to distribute food. Our organization is Catholic Assistance Mission. We support a small three-room school there. One of our team members, Ed Torres, brought along school supplies, which his

religion class at Marian donated. We passed those out first to the children. We also gave them coloring booklets about the Saints and Sacred Heart holy cards.

Our contact is a man named Loll. He purchased food earlier in the week and transported it to the school for distribution. He had organized the villagers and pre-selected about 75 families to receive food. He called out their names and they lined up. To each person, we measured out 2-gallon tins of corn, 1-gallon tin of rice. The women brought plastic bags or scarves from home to carry the grain. Each family also received 2 bottles of oil, some hand creams, toothbrushes and toothpaste. We gave some baby clothes to mothers with newborns. And lastly we gave away 3 donkeys to help 3 families carry water or supplies over a very rugged landscape. Another team member, Bob, brought along baseball caps, which he distributed to the local men. It was a hot sunny day, without any shade and the men's smiles said thank you for the hats. It was a busy afternoon of delightful giving!

The food distribution was timely because their prior food supplies were low. We saw spinach and cabbage in some fields, but it wasn't ready to be picked. Loll said that the food we gave out would last about 8 to 10 days per family. Thank goodness that a second mission team was going in 2 weeks after us and they also planned to distribute food. Oh, we have so much and they have nothing!

Some memories of Haiti are good and some are very unsettling. That phrase "Oh we have so much and they have nothing," has come into my mind like waves on a beach. Just as waves can change the shape of a beach, that gentle repeated phrase is causing me to examine the shape of my life. I think the Holy Spirit is encouraging me to change and say, "Oh, I can do with less and they can have more!"

Thank you so much for supporting us with your prayers and/or moneys. We need both and we truly appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Connie Miller