



The Toledo Kids Who Care



Winter 2014 Newsletter

Stephanie & Rene's Trip to Haiti

Six months ago if someone would have asked me to describe Haiti, I would have responded with words like poor, sad, dirty, etc. Today, I can say Haiti is a beautiful place with beautiful and happy people. As many of you know my dad, Rene and I were blessed with the opportunity to go on a mission trip to Haiti in early November. Many have asked me how this came to be...it all started when *The Toledo Kids Who Care* heard about the need for a shoe drive to benefit the children of Haiti. Without hesitation, we began spreading the word and collecting donations. In the end, we were able to collect over 700 pairs of shoes. All the donations were going to be given to Steve Gebhardt and then distributed by The Missionaries of the Poor in Haiti. My enthusiasm and passion for this project was so apparent that Mr. Gebhardt graciously invited my Dad and I to join him on the next mission trip.

Before we knew it my dad and I were all packed up and sitting in JFK Airport. Along with us went Mr. Gebhardt,



Barbara Martinez, Agnes Amundsen, Peter & PJ McGlynn, and Rev. Przemyslaw Nowak. Steve, Agnes and Peter go to Haiti very often, but for the rest of us it was a completely new experience. I was very excited but couldn't help but feel a little nervous. Once we landing in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, we boarded a smaller plane taking us to the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien, where MOP (The Missionaries of the Poor) is located. The MOP is an international Catholic organization that serves the *poor*, destitute, homeless and abandoned. We were able to meet many of the 30+ Brothers serving at Cap-Haitien. It was so motivational to get a peek inside the daily lives of the Brothers. They have completely devoted their lives to the Lord and serving the needy. These men never stop day-in and day-out. The MOP in Cap-Haitien consist of an AIDs Center, Disabled Children Center, Elderly Home and an orphanage. After getting a tour of the grounds, we entered the disabled center. When I thought of a disabled center, I pictured a big white room with children in shiny wheelchairs. However, what I found as I walked into the center was the complete opposite. This was probably the

hardest part of the trip. Due to lack of wheelchairs, many children crawled on the floor. The wheelchairs they did have did not have the rubber around the wheels, so they were very difficult to move around.



Although, it was a hard sight to see, the smiles plastered on the children's faces as they saw us walking in, is a sight I will never forget. All they

want is to be loved and touched. After a few minutes, I was holding a little boy in my arms. We also had the opportunity to distribute lovely dresses home-made by the very talented Mrs. Connie Dziomba. The girls loved them!! The AIDs Center was much easier and a lot of fun. Although the children are sick, they appear healthy. They are smart and playful. We were able to play



games with them and Fr. Przemyslaw even taught them some prayers. One 7 year-old boy, displaced by the 2010 earthquake, really hit it off with my dad and always had a smile on his face. He was one of the first



children to receive a rainbow loom bracelet. My Aunt Carmen's religious education class and neighbor made rainbow loom bracelets to add a little color in the children's lives. Gabby and Mrs. Martinez's daughter also made bracelets. We handed them out to all of the AIDs children, some of the women living in the centers, and to children living at the nearby Kids Alive: Haiti Orphanage. We were also able to participate in a bi-weekly



food donation. People from the community began lining up at the gates of the compound hours before they opened. We

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then handed everyone 10 lbs. of rice & 8 lbs. of beans. The food line usually occurs once every two weeks, when these items are available. It was so heartwarming and humbling to personally be a part of feeding these wonderful people.



Distributing the shoes we collected was an amazing experience, as well. While walking through Cap-Haitien, the need for shoes became very apparent. I noticed that most of the children did not



have shoes, and if they did, they were outgrown or broken. We brought some of the children into the compound to choose their own pair of shoes. I noticed at that time that they would pass over a brand new pair of Nike sneakers and go for

slightly used Crocks or sandals. Later I realized that many of the children do not know how to tie their shoes. Therefore, it made sense that they didn't want laced sneakers. I would like to have another shoe drive this year.

However, this year I know what to ask for. I would like to focus the drive more toward flip-flops and crocks. Also, black leather shoes are very important for the children's school uniform. I was shocked to learn that the private schools in



Haiti will not accept a child if they are not wearing black shoes. One of the orphans who were being sponsored for an education, went to school while we were there and was sent back because he was not wearing black shoes. It's a shame to think that a pair of shoes would deter a child from a good education. Therefore, black shoes are very crucial for the

next shoe drive. My favorite moment of the whole trip was right after we distributed the shoes to the children. Philemon is a physically disabled man in his mid-20's who works as the gate opener for the MOP. He never stops working and is as sharp as



a tack. After all the children collected their shoes and left, I saw Philemon peeking over at the leftover shoes. Not being

able to speak, without using words, he asked if he could look at them. I nodded and he immediately went over to a pair of slightly used sneakers. He picked them up and went to sit in a rocking chair in the corner of the room. He then asked me to tie them for him. I crouched down and slipped them on. It was a perfect fit. I tied his laces and a huge smile grew on Philemon's face. He began to clap and when I backed away to indicate I was finished, I was shocked at



what he did next. Philemon jumped up and began to dance! He clapped his hands and moved his feet. Then he started moving his feet as if he was playing soccer. At first I was confused at why he wanted to play soccer. Then I remembered that the Brothers have a few hours a week for



recreation, which include soccer matches. Most of the Brothers wear sneakers for these games. Philemon felt that now he would be able to join them and play. I felt tears in my eyes and overwhelming joy in my heart. Words cannot express how

much that moment meant to me. I will never forget all the wonderful people I met and all of the things I was able to experience there. I would like to thank the Brothers at the MOP, Mr. Gephardt and the rest of our group, everyone who donated shoes, everyone who made the rainbow looms, Mrs. Dziomba and my Dad. If it wasn't for my Dad, I would never have been able to have such a beautiful experience. I would love to go back to Haiti and can't wait to see how this year's shoe drive turns out. I can't thank you all enough for all your prayers and support. This was truly a dream come true for me and an experience that I will never forget!

