

# REFLECTIONS FROM OUR TRIP TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

## 3 SERMONS

BY HARTLEY BRODY, GRACE CROSBY & KURT ZITZNER

FAIRMOUNT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OHIO

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SCRIPTURE TEXT: Luke 10: 25-37

### HARTLEY BRODY

The Dominican Republic. A vacation destination for many Americans, a tropical paradise unrivaled by any of the best beaches in the US. But for the 47(?) of us that flew down there this past June, it is so much more. I can see why it draws so many tourists, and when you look around at the sun and the ocean and the brightly colored buildings, its so easy to think, "Wow, the Dominicans have it made".

But dig just a bit deeper into this paradise... and you find children with no clothes. Haitians who can't find any hospitals that will treat them. Elderly men and women drinking well water from a puddle in the dirt, wondering how many more months it will be until a doctor comes with some worm medicine.

Hardly an ideal vacation spot. But that's exactly what drew all of us down there.

There are thousands of other capable Americans who come through that country every year who stay in their resorts and play on the beaches and then return home. Whether they know it or not, they are looking away from the wounded strangers, in desperate need of a helping hand. They are passing through that country on the other side of the road, so as to avoid the sick and starving. That being said tourism has recently overtaken agriculture as the largest economic influence in the D.R. which is arguably a good thing because it generally provides higher paying, safer jobs.

But as Jesus said to love thy neighbor as thyself, we loved these Dominican neighbors. We

gave of ourselves to bring assistance and hope into their lives. We helped to bring back the sense that, despite their conditions, God hasn't forgotten about the Bateys in La Romana. They could see that He called on us, kind strangers from a foreign land, to bring medicine and clothes... and with those, hope and joy.

They may not live next door, and they may not look like us or even speak our language. But they are our neighbors, and we are all called to give of ourselves to love thy neighbor.

Part of the mission of Fairmount Church is to make a difference in the world and this trip is one of many opportunities to help fulfill our mission. For over a dozen years, Fairmount has sent teams of youth and adults to spend a week of their vacation time working with the people in the DR. Aside from paying for all of our own expenses, Fairmounters have also donated to pay for building supplies and equipment, give fair wages to local workers, and provide medical equipment and supplies.

Since I'm speaking first... Kurt asked me to make sure I provide an overview of the trip and some historical information regarding the mission of the Good Samaritan Project -- which is the group we partner with on this trip. The late Rev. *Jean-Luc FAN -ORD* had a vision of ministering to Haitian Immigrants living in the Dominican Republic through both medical and spiritual services. In 1987...prayers were said, land was purchased, more prayers were said, and construction began on a new Hospital that he envisioned would one day help the people in an area of dire need. "Construction" consisted of digging holes in the rough, coral-rock ground to make a home for the footings that would, a decade later, hold up a two-story hospital.

With support from many churches in the United States, little by little, the hospital began to take shape. On November 9, 1997 the doors of the Good Samaritan General Hospital were opened. The following year, it provided medical service to 10,000 people, whether or not those patients were able to pay. Today, this figure is over 10 times higher - Over 100,000 people, including those living in the bateys, have received medical care, ranging from minor

infections, to life-saving surgeries.

All of this has been made possible through the efforts of about 40 teams of volunteers from all over the US and Canada who come back to the DR to work (and play) year after year.

So that kind of gives you an overview of the trip and what we do while we're there. Now I'm going to turn it over to Grace Crosby to give you a glimpse into her experiences on the trip.

### GRACE CROSBY

I'm not going to pretend I was brimming with excitement when the mission trip location was announced earlier this year. Most people on the Mission Trip Committee knew it wasn't my first choice -- to say the least. Fact is I was hesitant to go there for a variety of reasons. One of them was my doctor explaining to me the many communicable diseases supposedly "running rampant" in the Dominican Republic but there were others as well. Anyway, I decided to sign up against my better judgment because I figured God was sending us there for a reason.

A few weeks before the trip, I injured my knee so while sitting with my leg up for hours on the couch and I made the mistake of looking at the weather forecast for La Romana and Punta Cana. Oh boy... 90 degrees and raining... with an 80 % chance of thunderstorms all week. But I just kept telling myself that God was sending us there for a reason and I kept praying that God would show me why he chose ME because I did not understand it.

God showed me over and over all week why he chose me to do his mission this summer. From the smiles on the elderly people's faces when I spoke to them in broken French, to the children eager to teach me colors in Spanish with crayons, to the look of gratitude on the peoples faces when we could give them the medicine they needed. But there was one instance in particular that stands out to me as the moment when God showed me the purpose of us going there.

I spent the week doing Medical Clinics (which Hartley explained a few moments ago) with Drs. Colleen and Michael Silva. Each day we traveled to a different village of sugar cane workers, we set up a makeshift clinic in their place of worship and saw patients. The first day our workspace was a tarp supported by four wooden poles and on Wednesday we were in a town that had a cinderblock church with electricity... pretty high class stuff! Clearly, we had to stay flexible.

On Thursday, we went into a batey to find a 7 month only baby with a 25 year old single mother who had 4 other children. This child had been severely ill for a week without keeping down any liquids or foods for the last 7 days. This child was so severely dehydrated that its body had given up on life. There were no signs of movement. Dr. Silva was handed a dead baby who only had a heartbeat. This child's head had collapsed inward because all of the fluids from the brain had gone to save the remaining organs in an attempt to stay hydrated. According to Dr. Silva, Roberto had less than 24 hours before his body would shut down.

So the bus was loaded and off we were to the Good Samaritan Hospital to hopefully save this child's life. It turns out Roberto had worms his stomach causing a horrible belly ache (as you can probably imagine) and his body simply shut down. He would not eat or drink anything and if we were able to get it into his mouth he would wake up only long enough to spit it out. We got him a bottle of water with a powder in it resembling some HIGH strength Gatorade to try to replenish his fluids but no one could get him to drink it. Maddie tried, Cameron tried, CeCe tried and Rosa, his own mother, tried.

Rosa had to go back to her house to gather some things for the hour and a half trip to the hospital so I held Roberto. I was hoping, sitting, wondering what one could do to get Roberto to understand he needed to drink this fluid! It was going to save his life. Then I felt God take my hand and gently tickle his chin... he drank some.

On the long bus ride back to the Hospital I sat with Rosa and we both took turns getting Roberto to take some more of the bottle.

Because of us going to that batey, on that day, at that time... Roberto was given a second chance at life. Had we gone the next day... he would simply be a statistic. That is truly God at work. Even more, Rosa and I were friends. It didn't matter that we spoke different languages. We had God in common and we had our concern for Roberto in common and we were instantly friends.

God had a definite purpose for sending us there. To change lives. We saved Roberto's, that's for sure, but we also changed everyone's life that we met. From the children who can now play duck duck goose to the elderly people who got a smile and the blood pressure medication from one of the doctors. I know that we are the body of Christ but sometimes its hard to remember but I know the reason God sent my bad knee and I there was to FEEL God working through my hands and my smile and I wouldn't change that for the world.

### KURT ZITZNER

This morning's Gospel reading, the Parable of the Good Samaritan, is one that many of you probably know by heart -- not necessarily word for word but we more or less we understand the story and the lesson behind it.

The first time I remember studying this parable... we were sitting downstairs in the dining room in a big circle and we read it aloud as a group. That was 12 years ago when I first went on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic with our youth group. I remember feeling good, because we were going to help the Haitian Refugees and to be Good Samaritans just like the bible says we should.

When I returned from that first trip I realized my expectations for what we would accomplish were out of touch with reality. We were dealing with a much bigger project than I had imagined. We worked very hard. Every day we woke up early, spent hours passing buckets of cement up a latter that was then poured onto the roof of the first story which has since

become the floor of the second story. During that first week in 1995, we basically added a section of concrete that was about 40 feet by 40 feet by 3 inches deep to the roof.

If a group like ours which had about 40 strong able volunteers could only pour one section of concrete in an entire week, I thought it would be dozens years before this hospital could do anything for anybody. It led me to believe the trip was not really about the work that we were doing, but more about teaching US how the world truly works and making us aware of the perceived exploitation of Haitian and Dominican sugar cane workers. Even if that was the purpose... it still made for a great trip and a culturally eye opening experience.

Our hosts in the Dominican assured us that this 40x40 section was a major accomplishment to be proud of and that one day we'd see how much it was changing lives. I remember my father taking a group of us up to the roof to sign our initials into the freshly poured cement so we could "remember" what we did when we returned in future years.

I returned the next year. We did the same thing. This time, I felt even less that we were there to build a hospital and more that we were there to see the bateys the projects and culture. After all, it had been a whole year and it didn't appear that they were making much progress.

But we returned again, and again, and again. This trip was my 9<sup>th</sup> and more for others. I think that we, who have gone so many times before, have somehow lost site of a few things simply because it has become routine for us. During a conversation with our group, the Hospital Administer and current leader of the entire project named Moises thanked us for coming and reminded us "The people in the Bateys think that everybody has forgotten about them, and that God must have forgotten about them. It isn't until they see Americans fly thousands of miles to volunteer their time to save their children and to build them a hospital that they see God at work in the world."

The trip this year really reminded me that we are there because God has called us to be there and to build this hospital. It's not just an eye opening trip that is meant to make us feel good.

This year, the hospital was open and saving lives. It is no longer a concrete shell, but rather fully functioning with equipment, doctors, nurses, receptionists, and MOST IMPORTANT patients. It is fully functioning:

- Without ever using cement trucks or big equipment like we use here in the states
- without receiving money from the government
- because of the vision of the late Jean Luc who was willing to wait almost 15 years from the original ground breaking before it ever opened its doors
- Fairmount Presbyterian Church and other churches around the country
- Members of our congregation who support the mission-- the adult leaders and the youth in the community who give up their vacations and money to serve a calling
- Because of parents who are willing to let their children experience something that will change their perspectives forever

The hospital is up and running because of people like you... willing to stand up for our neighbors.

Grace Crosby, who talked about the 7 month old baby is absolutely right... it is because of Fairmount Church that Roberto is now living, breathing, crying and moving. That is a fact. Had they not gone to that bately the chances of someone else randomly stopping by to set up a makeshift clinic in the middle of nowhere is slim to none. Within hours of our medical team taking over his care the child was transported to a hospital where it was given an IV, fluids, and was brought back from life. The child was not taken to any hospital though... He was taken to the hospital that we, Fairmount helped build. He was taken to the hospital that would be willing and able to care for his life. It was taken to the hospital that:

- Brendan Pham, one of our long time Fairmount members broke ground on in 1987
- Over 300 other Fairmount members and friends have volunteered for over the past 15 years
- Jim Neville, a Fairmount member and architect, helped wire and layout
- Our group in 2000 installed a patio

- His mother Rosa was able to sit in the beautiful courtyard that was cleared of debris by Fairmount Church in 2002.
- Remember that 40x40 foot section we poured in 1995? That was the floor in Roberto's room. I guess they were right... one day we would be able to see the difference we were making.

Folks, this child's life was saved by a church that is located thousands of miles away in a small town called Cleveland Heights, Ohio. That's pretty amazing and I congratulate you on your decision to send your church on such a mission! You should also know, however that each week the same story is being told by the Baptist church from New Jersey, and a Presbyterian church from Kansas, and Andy Wilson's church in California.

We are saving lives this week, next week, and every week because of our commitment to something that we felt called to serve so many years ago. With God's help, this hospital will be saving lives for centuries to come. There is more work to do and this is not a trip that can not be forgotten by Fairmount now or anytime in the future. There are some serious problems in the Dominican Republic.

	<b>Dominican</b>	<b>USA</b>
• Inflation rate	8 or 9%	2.5 %
• Unemployment	16 and 20%	4.8 %
• Infant Mortality Rate	28 deaths/1,000 live births	6.37
• Life Expectancy	73 years	78 years
• Popul. Below Poverty Line	25%	12%

And if you think the minimum wage in America is bad... the workers cutting sugar in the fields are making about \$22 per week. At that rate, they cannot afford to buy rice and beans for dinner. I list these problems not to paint a dull picture, but to simply display the seriousness with which they need help.

Children are being abandoned by their families because they cannot afford to feed all their children and they must chose to save the healthy children.

They are literally calling out to God to send somebody to save them from this situation and what does God do about it? God calls on us to do something... to tell our story... to convince friends and other congregations to come and support such mission work... both here and elsewhere in the word. And we will continue to as long as we are able to fulfill Gods work on this mission and other missions across the City, state, the country and the world.

Let us pray.

NOW TO THE ONE THAT PROVIDES US OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD NOT ONLY IN FAR AWAY LANDS BUT ALSO AROUND THE CORNER. HELP EACH OF US TO REMEMBER THE LESSON OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN ALL THAT WE DO... EACH DAY... NOW AND FOREVER MORE. WHETHER WE ARE HERE IN CLEVELAND WALKING DOWN THE STREETS OF DOWNTOWN OR ACROSS OCEANS IN OTHER CONTINENTS, LET US REMEMBER OUR NEIGHBORS ARE NOT BOUND BY DISTANCE, ETHNICITY, OR RELIGION... OUR NEIGHBORS ARE ALL AROUND US.

TO THE GOD THAT PUT OUR TEAM IN ROBERTO'S BATEY ON JUNE 28<sup>TH</sup> AND SHOWED THE PEOPLE IN HIS VILLAGE THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN. TO GOD BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH TO ALL GENERATIONS, FOREVER AND EVER.  
AMEN!