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I Believe in Short Term Mission Teams



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I believe in short term mission trips because they can change churches and individuals. One of the most graphic stories that I was involved with began in 1976 as we were visiting our home church, First Baptist Church of Covina, CA. The Minister of Music, Dave Lehman, had developed a youth/young adult choir called the "Son Shiny Day". This group had traveled around Southern California giving concerts and making impact on young lives. Dave asked if they might come to Haïti and I replied that I would investigate.

This was a transition time and Haïti was only marginally stable. On return to duties at *l'Hôpital Bon Samaritain* (HBS), the request was flatly rejected the reason being that young people could not possibly contribute to the work of ministry, and would only be there for a good time. There was, obviously, no need to pursue the conversation. After the first of

the year the subject was broached again, this time I added a little enticement; Bernice and I would be fully responsible for transportation, feeding and housing of the group. If we held the responsibility, the group would be accepted. The work began in earnest. Learning the regulations concerning transportation of foreigners in the interior of Haïti, Visas required safest bus for transport from South to North and back again. The roads were dangerous and it was necessary to choose the best and most careful drivers, not necessarily the fastest. I chose the "San Salvador", an older well-maintained bus with Jean Mastrodi as its driver. Next came finding meaningful work projects, the medical technologist would work in the lab. A nursing student or two who could follow Belle Roméus, RN, in the Clinic. The new born/abandoned infant nursery needed to be scrubbed and repainted, Iron grill for windows in a new construction need to be welded which would utilize several of the young men; they would cooperate with the hospital engineer. Next was establishing an agenda of cultural and historic enrichment. There would be evenings of "speakers" including Dr. Hodges, the best resource on Haitian Culture and History, Phil Uhlinger the newly assigned General Missionary for Haïti, and some of the local Haitian pastors who spoke English telling of their work. And of course, a trip to the Citadel and the Palace of Sans Souci. We also chose settings and set the itinerary of concerts in the various local churches. Moreover, not to forget, a trip to the beach.

With all of the preparations complete and the date of arrival at hand, I hitched an early morning ride to Port-au-Prince. The adventure of that trip is for another story. We did meet the plane on schedule. We had reservations at a family run "guest house" Villa Rocourt on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. After checking in and enjoying super... French cuisine.

We began a cultural introduction/orientation. As to stress the points of current political fragility in the light of recent bombing, about a mile from where we were, there was a power failure. The team behaved in a most mature way. Early the next morning after breakfast we headed to the Palace of Justice where the team leader and I, armed with everyone's passport, started the documentation process. The team remained in the park across the street with the reminders of the cultural lessons of the night before. When the Secretary of State arrived, we had most of the forms completed. The reputation of l'Hôpital Bon Samaritain had even penetrated the streets of P-au-P. So after explaining the purpose and scope to the trip to this man, who carried no love for Protestant missionaries, he signed all of the travel forms and sent us on our way wishing us well. It only took a little more than three hours so a little after 1PM we boarded Jean Mastrodi's bus. Then after a quick stop at KFC for lunch we were on our way north on the road follows along the Caribbean for some ways be crossing a desert land the climbing the *Masif du Nord* (a mountain range known as Haïti's backbone.) As we crossed over in the northern part of the Country, we encountered the low clouds of a storm. As we continued on the ridge of the mountain, the storm blew over revealing a black starry sky brightened by lighting flashes in the distant valley, silhouetting the mountains. The team broke out singing "**Oh Lord MY God, How Great Thou Art**". At about nine in the evening, we arrived home to a hot meal and comfortable bed.

After breakfast, devotions, and orientation, everyone was off to work. To say that there was no miscommunications, missteps or hurt feelings would be the of denial human nature. In every circumstance, every difficult situation these young people rose to the occasion. They were a hit at each of their concerts and in the work that they did in and around the hospital compound. To such a point that the person of the Administration team, who was the great

opponent to the STM team came to me and said "Herb I am so glad that WE invited they young people".

That is not the whole story or even the best part. These young people were transformed. Several years later when we visited the church the parents wanted to know what we had done to their children. Several in the group had no direction before the trip, now became nurses, others teachers. One who was a Lab Tech quit and went to seminary to become a pastor. One who was working on his MBA went in to church administration and after further study became a pastor as well. He and his wife, whom he became better acquainted with on the trip, became active youth leaders. The transformation of the youth bubbled over into the church as they increased their mission giving. This church who had been number six in the region giving to mission, moved to number one surpassing a church that had four times the members. The following year after hearing a missionary from Democratic Republic of Congo they partnered with IM to provide \$25,000 a year in an over and above offering for four years so that a helicopter could be purchased for work there.

Is short-term mission important? I you ask ...I might be biased as I too am a product of short-term mission...but that is a story for another time.

Herb and Bernice Rogers served in Haiti for 28 years as American Baptist International Ministries missionaries, serving in North Haiti, serving at l'Hôpital Bon Samaritain and teaching as well as receiving numerous volunteers and teams.