

On April 1, 2011, Linda Brown, Nick Candee, Susie Almquist, Mary Provo and John Cuozzo travelled to Leogane, Haiti on a medical mission from Epiphany Church.

Our odyssey to Haiti began with a snow storm in Boston and a delayed flight to Miami, but it could not diminish our enthusiasm and strong sense of mission as we travelled to Haiti. We were carrying 500 lbs of medications in 10 suitcases for people in need. Our destination was the Episcopal L'Hopital de Ste Croix in Leogane, where none of us had been. We were travelling on a leap of faith, and knew that God would guide us on this journey.

Haiti in all of its complexities, poverty and vibrancy greeted us with open arms. The airport itself is surrounded by a sea of tents where thousands of people have been living for over a year. Port au Prince and surrounding towns bustled in the heat with roadside vendors and Saturday markets.

We arrived in Leogane and found our new home in the guest house at L'Hopital de Ste Croix. The five cooks created wonderful Haitian dinners for us. On Sunday we attended a spirited church service in the remains of L'Eglise de Ste Croix next door to the hospital.

Then our work began on Monday. The hospital director and guest house managers had chosen four villages for our medical mission: Machieu, Laberger, De Boucher and Banyette. We had hired a team of five Haitian translators and a Haitian physician Dr. Alex Lebrun, nurse Rosaline Telfort and dentist Dr. Emmanuel Bastien to work with us.

Over the next five days we travelled to and set up a medical clinic in one of these villages outside Leogane, which gave us a chance to explore Haiti a bit en route to each site. Each morning we packed and carried four or five suitcases of medications for the clinic. We would then set up a clinic and pharmacy and see about 100 patients in the village. Each afternoon we would repack the suitcases and return to Leogane.

During our week in Haiti, we provided medical care and medications for over 500 Haitian patients - many mothers, babies and children as well as elderly patients. We used much of the 500 pounds of medications and materials which we brought, and drew other items from the well-stocked guest house pharmacy. We left our unused meds for future mission groups.

Mary Provo wrote:

My time in Haiti was not as I expected! Upon our arrival in Haiti we spent a few hours in Port-au-Prince. Nothing could have fully prepared me for the sight of a city left in near-total ruin by the January 12, 2010 earthquake. If there was a building that was not damaged, I simply missed it.

The part that amazed me was the vitality of the people on the streets! We got out of the car and walked about the ruins of the Episcopal Cathedral. First we encountered a teenage girl playing the violin, and soon we heard an orchestra playing in a makeshift music hall amidst the crumpled walls. Each day in Haiti was like the first -- something out of ordinary would happen. On Sunday we attended a spirited three-hour Episcopal service in Leogane with "three choirs" in a temporary structure with no walls -- their church had been flattened by the earthquake.

Our time in Haiti would have been "Mission Impossible" without the addition of the medical mission dream team of five Haitian translators and a Haitian dentist, doctor and nurse. The POE team formed a deep spiritual connection with each other, our new friends in Haiti and the people we were able to serve. Every day was a living prayer to the people who entrusted us to care for them.

My hope: that we will be able to return to Haiti for as long as our assistance is required and we are able.

John Cuzzo added:

We met and served about 500 wonderful people suffering unbelievable loss and multiple medical needs, yet sustained by their faith. Virtually every commercial vehicle is painted and named for Jesus or a saint, with entire psalms on some. Ditto for many businesses (at least those still standing). Huge percentages of unemployment as home-based businesses were wiped out with the homes and other places of business fairing little better. The horror of the thought that about ¾ million people still live in tents and a fewer still in plywood shelters some 15 months after the quake, with hurricane season 7 weeks away! Rainy season begins this month

The roads are a mix of potholes, dirt, rocks, earthquake-rippled pavement, and plain unpaved rural roads everywhere we went. The 24 miles from airport to the guesthouse in the hospital took two+ hours through the narrow, market-crowded streets, dodging motos that carry 2-3 passengers plus driver, zig-zagging from one edge of the road to the other, honking horns continually, passing simultaneously on both sides of vehicles as other vehicles and motos pull out at will from curbside and side streets, horns honking there too! Chaos everywhere, yet we didn't see a single accident (thank God).

As we left on Tuesday to go to our second village, Laberger, the Guest House director admonished us to leave immediately if it started to rain. When we left the dirt road, surrounded by mountains, to follow a mostly-dried river bed for close to two miles, we understood why!

All that said, much of the countryside was beautiful and peaceful, and we left with a hope to return (with several others) before the year is out.

Susie Almquist described our last clinic in Banyette:

I believe they bring us to this place so that we cannot resist coming back. The clinic was set in the Pelerin (Pilgrim) church in a most beautiful village of Banyette. The church's front wall had fallen down (only adding to the beauty) but as Nick says the 'bones' were still intact. There was a beautifully carved podium on a slightly broken up marble raised area where we set up our field pharmacy.

We could see beautiful greening hills just above the still present door through the fallen down walls. A donkey brayed nearby off and on, and we had a dear little angel following us around all day. We had our biggest day for patients, and this humble volunteer truly enjoyed triaging the people ranging in age from 3 months to 95 years. The road in passed abundant and greening farms, much new construction and well organized rubble piles. A truly hopeful place.

Nice people, a few of which left us in tears after they thanked us for coming. Our last patient, a grizzled 80 year old farmer, a father of three with six grandchildren, hobbled over with his walking stick. He had so many needs and therefore a lot of meds so we gave him a carrying bag. He smiled, shook our hands, and said "God bless you." The dust, the heat, the hammering of the tropical sun faded in this moment of one to one appreciation

Nick reflected:

"Be the change you want to see in the world" said Mahatma [Great Soul] Ghandi. We hope that we have made a contribution to that positive change and have left Haiti in a bit better shape to move forward.

We will confer with our Epiphany leaders on possible next steps, on our own or with the diocese. We have a broader awareness of how we can make a difference in the world, and thanks for opening your heart to provide the resources for us to serve as "the hands of Jesus" in healing the poor and the sick.

Linda added:

Haiti is still hurting one year after earthquake. Over 220,000 people died in the earthquake, and a larger number had serious injuries from it. The destruction and rubble are still very evident. Housing, employment and poverty remain major problems. In Port au Prince and Leogane, many people are still living in tents in large and small camps.

We also saw rebuilding in Haiti. In rural area, many families are now living in small plywood shacks, 10' square, donated by relief agencies. USAID trucks were picking up rubble in Port au Prince on a Saturday. We saw signs for all the international relief groups working in Haiti.

Our Haitian patients thanked us for coming and our clinic. On the trip home from our last clinic, a farmer stopped our truck and gave us a bag with half a bushel of corn in thanks.

Our mission to Haiti was God's gift to us. We were blessed to work in Haiti. I can feel God's presence when working with very poor people. In the end, we received far more than we gave. We returned with our faith and spirits revitalized.

We hope that our medical mission will be the first step in developing an ongoing ministry in Haiti.

With deep appreciation for everyone's support, prayers and pills –

Linda, Nick, Susie, Mary, and John

For more details on our medical mission, go to our trip blog: <http://www.poehaitimission.blogspot.com/>