

Reflections From the College

Emily Bak — UCONN School of Nursing 2015

When the topic of Haiti comes up in discussion, many minds conjure up images of disaster and despair. However, those that have had the opportunity to travel to this tiny island country think otherwise. Two years have passed since the country was hit by a horrible and life-changing earthquake and it has been amazing to see the progress that has occurred in this time. Work teams and generous donors have offered their time and money to help Haiti stand on its own once more.

Mountains of Hope for Haiti just recently sent its first college work team to Haiti since the earthquake. Six college students and four adults set out for a week of work in the rural (and mountainous) village of Furcy. Team members included Emily and Leigh Bak (Mary Taylor Memorial UMC), Amy Buono (Kingston UMC), Lisa Casey (Shrub Oak UMC), Thomas Craemer (UCONN), Shannon Davis (West Hartford UMC), JR Dowd (Wethersfield UMC), Jude Exantus (Wethersfield UMC), Lindsey Jones (Newtown UMC) and Wendy Vencuss (Nichols UMC).



The work week consisted of some manual labor; the team constructed shelves for the Methodist school and the Medical Clinic in Furcy, and also worked on painting the newly built store. However, the most important work that the team did was in community building. With money raised by the Methodist Youth Fellowship group of Mary Taylor Memorial UMC (Milford, CT), the group was able to purchase a drum set, a guitar, microphones, an amplifier, and a generator for the creation of a Praise Band at the Methodist church of Furcy. These instruments, in addition to two keyboards that MHH had brought in the past, brought the community of Furcy together. Spirited music brought the church to life as many gathered to dance, sing, or simply listen. The joyful sounds served as reaffirmation of the Spirit of God in this beautiful place.

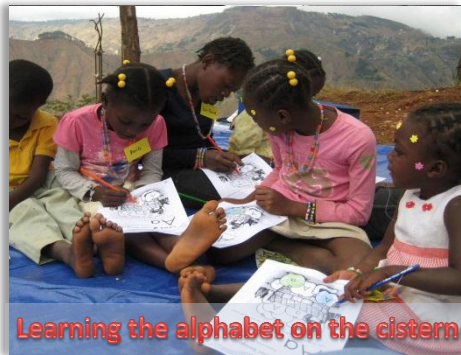


The group held the first ever youth gathering in Furcy. More than fifty Furcy teens gathered to converse with the six young adults on the trip. The conversation included discussion about church, school, leisure activities, sex education, and work. The gathering ended in an energetic dance party where the youth gave praise to the Lord with joyous voices and movements. In addition to gathering the youth of Furcy, the group also held the 3rd Women's Gathering at the Methodist Church of Furcy, which was also a huge success. Through these gatherings, we are learning that women in Furcy actually share many of the same concerns as women here at home, but often aren't encouraged to share their ideas or opinions. These gatherings are helping the women in Furcy to find their voices; through this, great change can be brought to the community.

As the week continued, the group also held a day of mini sessions for the children of Furcy. The sessions included English lessons, arts & crafts, music, and Bible stories. In addition, one of the youth, Lindsey Jones (Newtown, CT UMC), gave violin lessons to a small group of children (made possible thanks to the donation of six violins.) At the end of the day, the group provided a hot meal for the children, which was a moving experience for all.



The following day was game day! The children of Furcy gathered once more for a day of fun and relaxation. The games included soccer, jumping rope, relay races, and crafts/music for the younger children. When the fun was over, the group was able to provide a second hot meal for the kids; sending the children home with satisfied bellies for two days in a row was truly heartwarming.



The hard work and fun did not cease for a moment. On one of the afternoons in Furcy, the group gave dance lessons to the girls of Furcy; all the young ladies involved had a fantastic time moving to the music. A few members of the group also gave crocheting, knitting, and embroidery lessons to the women of Furcy. In addition, the group was able to send each of the girls and women home with a generous supply of crocheting/knitting needles and yarn, in the hopes that they will be able to create beautiful works of art to keep or sell.

On their last night in the mountains, the group visited the home of Ismaye (a schoolteacher and leader of youth affairs in Furcy,) and his wife, Isabelle, in order to see their new baby girl who was born on the day the group arrived in the village. Ismaye smiled with pride as he said, "She waited for you all to arrive." The group was overjoyed by the new and healthy life of this beautiful child of God.

Upon returning to the Methodist guesthouse for a final night in Haiti before departure, the group gathered to discuss the things that Furcy will need in the future. By planning ahead, future groups sent by MHH will be able to build on the work done by the college group and preceding teams.



Despite the huge amount of work that got done in the five days in Furcy, there is still a great deal of need. One of the most pressing issues currently is the Farmers' Cooperative's need for seeds and fertilizer. Agriculture is the key to self-sufficiency in this rural village, and the seeds and fertilizer will help to feed more mouths and bring incomes to the 120 members of the Farmers Co-op. Ideally, the farmers need the money for the seeds and fertilizer by March of 2012, as this is the time when the planting occurs. Other dreams that came up in discussions with the people of Furcy included hopes for a trade school, a welding shop, and an orphanage. With the continued generosity of donors and volunteers, we can see to it that these dreams someday become reality.

The group members all agreed that the week had been eye-opening and life-changing. By disconnecting from their typical existence, (which is filled with the distractions of technology – phones, TV, computers, etc.) the group members were able to deeply connect with one another and with the people of Furcy. Instead of being just a group, the team became a family. The good that can be accomplished through disconnecting from our (over) developed world and getting back to basics is truly amazing.



Enjoying Lulu's Rice & Beans



Furcy's first store gets painted by Lisa & Emily



Learning about handwashing before lunch



Lisa & Leigh wash hands



Praise music with headlamps



Sharing a hot meal

In leaving Haiti, the group felt that it was not an ending, but merely a beginning. There is still so much to be done and thankfully, the opportunities to help are endless! One opportunity to do so will occur on Sunday May 6th at 2 pm at the Westport UMC, where the Union Brothers Singers (a group of Haitian brothers/cousins) will perform to benefit Mountains of Hope for Haiti. For more information on what you can do, be sure to visit the Mountains of Hope website at <http://mountainsofhopeforhaiti.org/> and to "like" Mountains of Hope for Haiti on Facebook! As Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."