

WHAT IS OUR HAITI STORY?

By Becky Bennington

During our February 2017 visit to Haiti, one of our leaders asked the question, "What is troubling you about your experience in the village (Leveque) this week?" and I had to say it was my inability to nail down just what our Haiti Story is. You see lots of pictures of the countryside, of homes and people, and especially the faces of the children. You see pictures of people from Hopewell interacting with them all. But what we really want you to see is the HEART of Hopewell that is beating in our little slice of Haiti called Leveque. We are all being woven into the story of this village that is poor in finances, poor in resources but rich in tradition and wealthy in faith.

Many of us would be content to travel to Haiti and build things, paint things, fix things. But that's not what's needed there. Sure, it feels good to accomplish something, to do a favor for a needy family, see results . . . but those results are only fleeting.

Just what can we North Americans do in this little country that is plagued with poverty, political struggles and natural disasters? There is a line from a prayer of blessing that we used before our trip: "May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really CAN make a difference in Haiti, so that we are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done." The two prayer requests that nearly every person we talked with were for employment, and good health. And they rarely even asked for that without also offering prayers of thanksgiving for what they do have.

When we arrived at the Breathe Partners compound this year, our Pastor Mackenzy informed us that we would be helping him stage a 3-day crusade in the village. The "House of Prayer" that we helped him establish last fall was to be the hub of activity. Because of this big plan we spent most of our time in the area surrounding the bright pink House of Prayer. We saw many of the same people each day. We got to know their names, which house they lived in, and who lived with them there. We prayed with them, learned of some immediate needs, and were able to address them. We encountered familiar faces from earlier trips, and saw joy when they recognized us. Nearly everyone had met or knew of Pastor Mackenzy and when we invited them to the crusade, they accepted. When we said "all are welcome" and "come as you are" they were excited. They were anxious to be part of something, to be included, to be a community. And it hit me that at the same time we were becoming part of that community, that we were being included. We were no longer visitors!

So our Haiti Story is really one of two communities, joined in commitment, joined in fellowship, and joined on a journey with the Holy Spirit as our guide. There is so much need in Leveque, so much to overcome, and by coming alongside these friends, sharing the Good News and calling on the power of the Holy Spirit, I am convinced that they will rise up in faith, hope and holy strength.

It's hard to stay in touch with our friends across the miles, the ocean and the language barriers, even with all of today's technology . . . but we can communicate through prayer.

Here is a HAITI acrostic to help us encourage them in our prayers:

H: HOPE. Actively hope for a bright future.

A: ANTICIPATE. Expect that God will answer your prayers

I: IMAGINE. Dare to dream.

T: THRIVE. Be healthy, grow, flourish

I: INITIATIVE. Using all these strengths, stand up and move forward!

Our motto for the 2017 trip was "Respire Lavi" . . . Haitian Creole for "Breathe Life." In Ezekiel 37, the dry, dead bones in the valley were awakened and brought together, but they had no breath. In Verse 9, God tells Ezekiel *"Prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man. Tell the breath, 'God, the Master, says, Come from the four winds. Come, breath. Breathe on these slain bodies. Breathe life!'"* Our God is breathing life into the church in Leveque and the church at Hopewell. This is our story.

By Michelle Shields

My first trip to Haiti was in February 2017 – and what a life changing trip it was!! It is hard for me to describe how the experience has changed me as a person and how I view the “material things” we have here in the states. I recommend experiencing Haiti for yourself if you are able. You will be sure to come home a different person in so many ways.

The grace that the Haitian people have is completely amazing - even after all that they have been through. They have this beauty about them that runs deep, and I was blessed to be able to spend time with them to see and experience their openness and beautiful spirit.

These people have a hardship that many cannot even begin to imagine nor fully understand. They have no running water and no electricity. You can see the hardships that they endure day in and day out on their faces - and yet, they are most humble and have kind hearted souls. And what was so amazing to me was that they were so full of grace. They praised God for all that they have, which is nothing compared to what we have available to us here.

We had the opportunity to experience church one morning. There was power in their message

and in their voices through scripture and song. They are passionate people and their voices resonated from inside the tin building with which we were in. There were cutup colored plastic bottles used for decoration and bare bulbs hanging by their wires overhead. The building roof and sides were made of tin and 2x4's and yet they were rejoicing! What a beautiful testament to these people.

When it was time to say goodbye after our week was over, I just couldn't say the words. As I hugged the children and adults, I was finding it hard to speak. I am sure if the children knew that it was the last time we would be together, they would cling to me and the rest of our team and not let go. I knew then that I would be back the following year to do whatever I could to help the people in the village.

I was honored to be a part of this wonderful, amazing, and inspirational group of people. I thank the "Great Eight" with whom I was so blessed to be traveling with during our journey last February. May God Bless Haiti and the people of Leveque!