

MERGER STUDENT SPONSORSHIP

February 2016

Reflections

by Brenna Kulla

We arrived in Port au Prince and were immediately in the midst of a culture drastically unlike our own. The drive from the airport gave us a glimpse of Haiti—its differing culture and the immense poverty that is the reality for most of the population. Every street we turned onto had the same story of trash lingering everywhere—in some places huge piles waiting to be burned. We saw men, women, and even children carrying things of all shapes and sizes on their heads. Rows of vendors lined the streets. There were people everywhere. It was a lot to take it, especially considering the fact that this small portion we caught a glimpse of was only a miniscule fraction of the reality on a much larger scale. Port au Prince is home to seven million of Haiti's ten million people.

After arriving at STEP, Mason showed us around the campus and the neighboring communities, including the area we would be building in during the week. It was a sight like nothing I had ever seen before. Houses stacked on top of one another, countless people living in such small spaces and so close—trash everywhere—some children half naked or completely uncovered—homes with no running water or electricity. More than all these things, it was the faces that made the biggest imprint on my mind and my heart - beautiful brown eyes of people dearly loved and created by God, beautiful smiles of children who Jesus died for.

The next day was Sunday and we began our day by going with Mason to the church at the bottom of the hill (right outside the seminary campus). It was a precious experience. There is something so joyous in worshipping with other nations. To hear voices of praise in another tongue lifted up to God. We were familiar with a couple of the songs and delighted in singing along—our voices melting into the strong choruses of praise.

Monday was our first day at the job site and I was nervous. Language barriers can be so tough and I wasn't sure how it would all go. However, I came to the end of the day with a heart so full I thought it could burst. It was wonderful working alongside the Haitian workers and getting to interact with them. Watching the walls go from the ground up all in one day was exciting to see. In the morning we helped put mortar



Brenna with some of the community children

on the rows of cinderblocks and in the cracks when ready. As the walls grew higher some of us worked on putting up the frames for the cement for the bonding beam. And during this first day and continuing through the week we passed bucket upon bucket in a bucket line. This was one of my favorite tasks. We have created machines that can move and pour, not requiring many human hands and accomplishing the job in less time, but there was something so rewarding in working with others to pass bucket after bucket and block after block along. We learned the Creole words “motye” and “baton” and “blok” very well as it was yelled out through the bucket line, informing us of the content of the bucket.

At one point, Brian Ford and I walked back to campus to refill water bottles. A few children who had followed us through the door in the wall came up to us when we stopped to rest for a bit, before making the trudge up the hill. I was able to start hand

games with some of the girls and one of them began to sing a song in Creole. Seeing their smiles and having their faces become familiar through this simple connection was sweet. As we were walking away, ready to brave the hill, one of the little girls who had been playing hand games with me ran up and stopped me, wrapped her arms around me and kissed my cheek. Her childlike acceptance and trust was touching.

Moments like this, all throughout the week, left deep imprints on my heart. It was the connections with people. Connections with those we worked alongside and connections with people from the community who stood nearby watching. During the week when the work would reach a slow point there was opportunity to go and sit with people from the community and even though we couldn't get very far conversationally, it was so special just getting to be with them.

At the end of the week we were able to be there for the key ceremony where the family is given the key to their newly finished home. We sang "How Great Thou Art," the family was prayed for, the Gospel was shared, and an invitation given for response. A couple members of our team said a few words to the family, and they were presented with the key. It was wonderful to see it all come to completion.

Experiencing the community first-hand with our building project, coming to know names and faces, connecting with children by playing hand games, working alongside people, looking into deep brown eyes, watching relationship interactions... our time in this community left an imprint on my heart. I came away praising God for the ministry of STEP, whose vision is to see students going out and impacting their communities (communities like the one we had worked in) with the gospel.

Thursday was our last full day and we went to Merger in the morning. It was wonderful to see the school in person and in action after hearing about it for so many years. We couldn't stay very long, but we had time to visit each class and then spend ten or fifteen minutes meeting the students during their break time. Johnny showed us the kitchen/cafeteria and the now completed Kindergarten/office building that one of last year's G.O. teams took part in building. It was great to see it in use!

While we were at the school I noticed a group of girls jumping rope and started walking across the field to join them. I didn't make it very far, however, before there were ten- fifteen children hugging me from every side. We tried to share names through my broken Creole and some broken English. I strained my ears to hear their soft voices sharing names that seemed to just bounce off my ears, being so unfamiliar. Looking around, other members of our team were in similar positions, surrounded by swarms of children hugging and yelling. It was a precious time.

Seeing the tin shacks along the dirt road where some of the students live, hearing the mingling voices of a class in session, watching them wait in line for their hands to be washed before lunch, experiencing their sweet hugs and seeing their precious smiles... faces and descriptions that I had previously only seen on paper came to life. We came away praising God for the ministry at Merger. Thanking Him for the ones who are faithfully leading and teaching these children, for the many that sponsor these students-allowing them an opportunity that is nearly impossible otherwise, and for His father's heart.



From our trip and all that we saw and experienced it is evident just how valuable both the ministry of STEP and the ministry of Merger are. It is evident that God is the author of each ministry and that He is at work transforming hearts and lives. What a privilege it is to partner in that work!

Kindergarten teachers in front of the kindergarten/office building.

Praises For...

A successful trip for the recent G.O. Team.

The safety of Mason, Lauren & family as they transitioned back to Haiti.

The generosity of the Glenwood congregation who contributed well beyond the \$25,000.00 needed to complete the kindergarten building! Any additional funds will be put towards additional building projects at the school. We will let you know when they are ready to begin construction.

The dresses, shorts, blankets and school supplies that were either made or donated by people in the Glenwood family. Everything was warmly received in Haiti!

Please Pray For...

Spiritual growth in the teachers and students.

New sponsors for the available students in Merger.

Stability for the Haitian government as they struggle with their election process and having ethical officials in power.

Wawa and the leaders at STEP for health, safety, and wisdom as they teach and mentor the next generation of Haitian leaders.

Johny and Rosadite – for their health, safety, and for wisdom in their ministry in Merger.

Correction

We assumed that the first graduating class at CENV would be this June (2016), but the first class will actually graduate next June (2017). We apologize for the misunderstanding and we will keep you posted as we receive more details.



A class using the new Kindergarten/office building that was completed last year.



For the Kids

(or the kids at heart)

Metal art is popular in Haiti and can be seen all over Port-au-Prince. Below are directions for a craft that mimics the metal art of Haiti. Have fun being creative! This project and many others can be found at <http://www.teachkidsart.net/haitian-inspired-foil-cross>

Haitian-Inspired Foil Cross



Materials:

- 4" x 6" foam sheet
- 12" foil tape
- scissors
- ball point pen (medium point)
- hole punch
- Sharpies in a variety of colors (optional)
- yarn for hanging

Directions: *(note: You may want to prep steps 1-4 for younger children.)*

1. Cut your foil tape into two pieces, one 5" long and the other 7" long.
2. Center your 7" piece lengthwise on your foam sheet, wrapping the ends under and sticking them to the back. *(It's not easy to reposition the tape without crinkling it, so try to get it in the right place on your first try!)*
3. Now lay the 5" piece across the first piece, about an inch from the top. Wrap the ends under and stick them to the back.
4. Cut away the foam sections that the tape doesn't cover. *(Save these pieces and cover them with foil tape to make beautiful pendants!)*
5. Next, "draw" a design onto your cross using a ball point pen. If you use a medium point pen, it shouldn't tear the foil, and the ink doesn't usually stick to it, so it should just leave a nice impression.
6. Punch a hole at the top and thread with yarn for hanging.



Optional: You can color your design with permanent markers for bright, vivid colors!