

Travel to Saltadere

Bob Fromm and I left from Washington, DC on Wednesday November 7 at 6AM. We changed planes in Miami and had a 2 hour flight to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. We arrived there at 1PM. We went through customs and they didn't even open any of our luggage. We rented a car and made our way to the motel where Bob had made reservations. 80 dollars a night and that included dinner and breakfast. What a good bargain!

We left Santo Domingo at 4am on Thursday November 8. It was still dark outside and hard to find our way. Unfortunately, we made a wrong turn and ended up in a scary part of town. Blessed with Bob's great sense of direction, we made it out of Santo Domingo and lost only 1 hour on our travel schedule. It took us 4 hours to reach Banica (on the border) where Medical Missionaries of Manassas had a two and half ton old army truck to take us over the mountain into Haiti. Fortunately, the truck was large because Bob and I had suitcases filled with medicines, tools, and clothes and we were able to fit them all in.

We arrived in Saltadere at the rectory in the mid- afternoon. It had taken us almost 30 hours from Dulles airport to Saltadere. The church grounds were filled with children running, and playing. They seemed quite happy especially after Bob gave each one a lollipop. Needless to say the noise level was quite high but we had come a long way and had found an oasis of joy.

Father Ilric did not arrive back to Saltadere until after dark. He had just driven round trip to Port au Prince. He had taken a sick infant to a hospital there. Father looked tired. He has so much to do. We must remember to pray for him each day.

Irrigation Project Work

The next day, Friday, November 9 Bob spent the day surveying the damage done to the water system from the river to the parish garden. Bob had to repair the hose damaged by someone who had placed hot charcoal directly over the hose. Bob conducted a trial run of the irrigation system for the parish garden. The pump did not function and consequently there was no water to the garden. Bob diagnosed the

problem and he needs to rebuild the pump and install it when he returns to Haiti in the spring. He worked from sun up to sun down. He repaired the generator, refreshed the batteries, and took care of everything else that needed to be fixed.

Clean Water Situation

The water line from the Source to Saltadere ceased to function on our second day there. The last time this had occurred was 2008 and it took 8 months to restore water to the town. This time the Water Committee met with Bob and Father Ilric to plan how to correct the problem. Bob promised the Water Committee 500 dollars from St Thomas Aquinas Church funds to help get things started. For the remainder of our stay there was no clean water for cooking, cleaning, or bathing. It potentially was a very dangerous health situation (Cholera). We had to use the water from the river that was contaminated with human and animal feces. The young boys from the orphanage carried 5 gallon buckets of water from the river to the rectory. The main use for this dirty water was to flush the toilets. It was not safe to bathe. So I went without a shower for a week. I am sure that my presence in the airplane on my return home was not really appreciated by the other passengers. I talked with Father Ilric several weeks ago and he informed me that the clean water was flowing again. The blessing in all of this was that the Haitian town's people worked together with Bob and Father Ilric to solve a very serious community problem.

Medical Situation Report

I spent most of my time there seeing patients on 3 different days. I worked in the clinic room on the rectory grounds. There was no running water there to wash my hands or to clean wounds. I used lots of Purell. I was assisted by Gertrude who functioned as a nurse assistant and a young man who functioned as a translator. I examined the displaced children and found most of them to be healthy. They seemed to be happy living on the rectory grounds. I saw a 5 year old boy with deafness and no speech at all. He had never had any evaluation for this serious problem that should have been treated as an infant. I referred him to an ENT specialist in Port au Prince. Hopefully, they will be able to help him and teach him sign language.

I had purchased 900 dollars of medicine from UVA Pharmacy with money from our Haiti Committee. I also had been given over 1000

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dollars worth of medicines donated by Medical Missionaries of Manassas. I used a substantial amount of the medicine in only 3 days.

Medical Recommendations

The need for medical care is great and the resources are so sparse. There are no doctors in Saltadere so diseases go untreated until it is so severe that they either die or find their way to a hospital somewhere. The average life span for a Haitian is 49 years old!

I would like to see a medical /nursing presence in Saltadere now. There is an immediate need for a preventative medical approach to the community, but we must wait until we have more money to support such a program.

I spent 4 months in Northern Haiti in 1966-1967. Returning to Haiti 45 years later was an eye opening experience for me. There has been little change in the past 45 years. The main roads are somewhat improved, but the majority of them are unchanged. Bridges are almost non-existent, food is still scarce, disease is overwhelming and health facilities are few in number and primitive.

The Haitian people are a real example of living the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven".

The past two times when I left Haiti, I had reflected on how much more I had received than I had given. This time was no different, Thank you Dear God for the opportunity to serve My Haitian brothers and sisters in Christ.

Larry Hofmann MD