

Trip to Haiti  
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Today we put about seven Glad bags of trash outside behind our garage in the alley to be picked up tomorrow morning. Seven is a lot; we missed last week and are eager to get rid of the ripe smell that omission has created in our garage. Two weeks ago I peered out of the backseat of an SUV in Port au Prince Haiti to see the equivalent of literally *thousands* of Glad bags of trash strewn along the edges of the streets as we drove through the city. At night, we could smell the stench of some of this trash being burned in open fires in the city—the only evident means of disposing of it. Every so often, we would see pigs wandering the city streets, grazing through that trash. And young children were walking hand in hand at dusk through the trash lined streets home from school. The streets we drove on had little resemblance to our streets here. Once we got out of Port au Prince to begin the journey to Petit trou de Nippes, the word “road” became a very loose translation for dirt with huge gouged out valleys, some filled with water as we forged small rivers in the SUV and bumped along a very rough path making what would be here a two hour ride something like a six hour ride in Haiti. We enjoyed luxuries few Haitians enjoy during our week long insight trip—such as drinkable water, a trickle of running cool water for showering, and three meals each day. Perhaps the greatest luxury we enjoyed was our health and the immunizations and prophylactic medications to ensure that we would leave Haiti with no lasting, serious diseases.

In the midst of these extremely challenging conditions, we met a community of people who are engaged in one of the most vibrant, exciting communities I have ever witnessed—the mission of Petit trou de Nippes. Each morning, we were greeted by hordes of school children—some 600 in all—many of whom walk more than an hour each morning to get to school. And each morning we saw their teachers—bright, articulate, committed men and women who are clearly highly engaged by their work with the students. Everywhere we turned there were members of the staff of St. Paul’s who were equally engaged in their work there—women who cooked for the 600 children mid day, rectory staff who tended to all the needs of the household, including our every need, and to the meals of all the staff. And at the center of it all was Pere Kesner Gracia, the priest who is skillfully leading this community in its dynamic process of engaging the priorities within the community—potable water, education for children, and vocational training and business development skills for the women and eventually the men as well. In every respect, I saw what Bishop O’Neill heard in the French words of the baptismal covenant and preached about at Convention—*engagement*. The engagement with Jesus Christ was patently evident in the community of St. Paul’s.

For two consecutive afternoons, we had the amazing opportunity to walk deep into the jungle to visit numerous members of the surrounding communities in their homes. Often these homes were the size of one of our walk in closets, constructed with banana fronds or mud and sticks. The floors were dirt; there was, of course, no electricity, no plumbing,

no kitchen. Often, we entered someone's property to find a member of the family lying ill on the ground outside the hut where there was the most shade. We asked and were invariably warmly invited to lay hands on these individuals and pray with their families for healing. Serious, life threatening illnesses are still commonplace.

As we walked, we saw a constant stream of people carrying large jugs toward a water source to be filled and carried back to their huts. The water was what we would call non-potable. It is fair to assume that many of the ill children and adults we saw contracted their illnesses from the bacteria in the water. Yet, it was what they had and needed. Each day, family members would walk anywhere from an hour to three hours round trip to secure the water the family needed.

These conditions are hard for us even to begin to think about. One week of cold showers and a day or two of gastrointestinal discomfort and the absence of good roads and trash removal and proper sewage is enough to send us quickly back to the comforts of life as we know it with proper infrastructure.

For the people of Haiti, these challenges are a matter of course. And so, too, is the reality that many members of a community will die young and will never have the essentials we take for granted.

Often, people in our country wonder whether it makes sense to support work in a country like Haiti, where political turmoil has destabilized the economy and the society over and over, making progress on things like sewage, roads, and potable water even more challenging.

My answer is *yes*. Yes, it makes *absolute sense*. Where else can we hear the call of Jesus more clearly than among a people who daily face both natural challenges and political and do so with such grace, persistence, and dynamic energy? The people of St. Paul's mission are working daily in faith and joy to build God's household in Petit Trou. And let me tell you--God's household is vibrant and growing there. We witnessed several community meetings in the few days we were visiting. Lay leaders are working with Pere Kesner to build every aspect of the mission. Many of our own parishes and missions would do well to learn from the powerful example of a thriving expression of the body of Christ we see at St. Paul's.

I returned to Colorado greatly humbled and affected by what I saw in Haiti. The challenges are enormous and brought me to my knees. Yet, the work that is going on every day in Petit Trou is absolutely inspiring, I can honestly think of no better place I could have made retreat, to have my faith both challenged and renewed, than among my brothers and sisters in Petit Trou. I return to Colorado with such joy to see how the gospel is being lived at St. Paul's, and I am eager to do my part in ensuring that we continue as faithful partners with the men and women who are building God's household

there. Everything we do to support them is money, time and energy well spent, as far as I am concerned. What an amazing gift of true engagement we have been given through our partnership with the people of St. Paul's mission.