

HAITI MISSION CHRONICLES

Gentlemen,

Here's a message I received from one of our own, the newly-installed Deacon Vernon Hammett, during his Haiti Mission. I don't know if this was widely distributed (or if he intended it to be), but I thought I'd share it with you as a perfect example of how God uses us to do His good works, and the peace and joy we receive from it in return. Yes, it's true - we have "Christmas everyday". (kudos to Bro. Andre Lipford, who also participated in the Haiti Mission)

Subject: December 3 - Haiti Mission

I should have mentioned on my first day here that I realized I was not going to be too helpful doing manual labor (shut up CJ, lol). Some of you don't know but I broke a bone in my right hand a couple of weeks ago and opted to postpone surgery because I was committed to this mission trip. Being "single-handed" is a bit of a hindrance with that type of work but, being the optimist that I am, I made the best of my situation and used my talents elsewhere. It's been rewarding to minister to the sick. It's has been a true joy to hold babies and love on them, and to play with the young children we share time with. Did God have a plan or a hand in all of this (pun intentional)?

For the record, a clinic here is nothing like we're used to in the States. Here it's just the basics: there are no xray machines, no blood or urine specimen is collected because there is no way to analyze it. There is a thermometer, blood pressure cuff and the medical staff have stethoscopes. I brought a 300-count bottle of Aleve with me and you would have thought I was a savior. They need pain relief medicine, antihistamine, and medicine for upset stomachs in the worse way--things we take for granted. They rely so heavily on donations. I know another team is coming in March and I plan to donate some of these items.

We had wonderful devotions this morning. Each of us has been assigned a day to lead devotions. I will close out our time together by co-leading devotions on Friday. I must tell you that I look forward to going to the clinic. I realize that it's a combination excitement and anticipation to see what God has up his sleeve for us. Before we pray for people we make sure to ask them if they believe in God, whether they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, encourage them to attend church, and then find out what they would like God to do for

them. Today the Lord told me to hold the babies we were praying for and to specifically lay hands on those who were ill. Most of the people in the waiting room have young children with them. There are several people who complain of headache, fever and chest pains...these symptoms seems to be very common. All of the people we interact with are very grateful to have someone pray with them BEFORE they go in for treatment. One young lady actually came to us to say she was examined before we could pray for her and she still wanted prayer...so touching. In speaking with another young lady who had a 3-month old child with her, she shared that the baby's mother had died in childbirth and that the child's father had succumbed to an illness and passed away last weekend. Additionally, her husband had passed a while ago so now she is caring for two additional children. It is touching to see a sense of family in my sisters and brothers here. The last person we prayed for, I sensed and noticed a darkness about her. When I first laid eyes on her and greeted her, she eerily rolled her eyes up into her head. I later learned that those who practice voodoo do these things occasionally. When we laid our hands on her you can best believe I pleaded the blood of Jesus continually in my prayer. I recall the scriptures tell us that at the mere mention of His name demons have to flee and I wanted Satan to know he was not welcomed here.

It's always a fun time when the children return from school. The first thing they do is take off their school clothes. Most of them only have one school uniform and a single pair of "school shoes". They change their clothes then it's homework. I love the discipline they show. Today, several youngsters have "writing homework". It's when the teacher writes a letter or number on a line and the child must repeat what she wrote 8 times. It just so happens that two of them are left-handed like me so we spend some time practicing. We bought blow pops for the children so everyone was on a sugar-high for a minute. It's fun and games and cuddle time until we have to leave. We realize this is our last full day in the village. Most of us are having a difficult time saying goodbye..we've become attached to the children. One member of our team has fallen for a little boy with cystic fibrosis and she almost refuses to put him down.

Below are just a few pictures. The first is Ms. Sophie (in white on the left), my heart-throb with Laura, the second is one of the children removing their shoes after returning from school and the last is the younger children corralled in the daycare area...they were always entertaining.

I have many more pictures to share but I am limited in what I can include in an email.

Blessings from Haiti...V







Subject: December 4 - Haiti Mission

This is Mission Team Trinity's last day in Carries (by the way it is pronounced Car-ree-es). Our host, sister Lyn Joseph poured into our spirit as only the Lord would allow. She spoke of her vision for the village and how God took her away from a successful career in Florida and returned her to the vineyards in her native land. She shared that her husband is a pastor and she lived the life of a first lady, wearing fine dresses and beautiful hats to church and how she developed an intestinal illness that kept her off of her feet for a while. Doctors couldn't find the source of the problem and suggested she take some time to relax so she returned to Haiti for a bit. Miraculously, her illness disappeared. It was while she was recuperating that God told her her purpose was to glorify Him here and help this struggling village. I can feel the very presence of God as she speaks from the depths of her very soul. Her family owned beachfront property in the village and she decided to fix it up after years of neglect. Lyn shared that as she went about this task, people would leave their babies that they could no longer afford to care for at her door. She spoke passionately about how people who were sick came to her seeking help. Also of how several of her villagers died because of malnourishment and lack of medical care. I personally was moved to tears when she spoke of a woman and her child who died in her arms during delivery. She realized that God was moving on her heart to provide these necessities for her village. Now she feeds people regularly and built a clinic.

As our time with Lyn drew to a close, one of our missionaries asked how can WE help...how can WE be of assistance. Her words were simple and profound. She said that we MUST tell the story of her village and what God is doing. While it may seem tragic, there are times that God uses these as catalyst for greater things. Acts 1:8 tells us that we are to go out and witness to the world. She asked that we continue to love on the people here. She drove home this point by saying that more than our words and deeds, the Haitian people will know that we care by the love we share with them. Morning devotions are wonderful yet again. I am one of three who lead devotions and each of us, in our own way, focuses in on why we are here. We pack our suitcases because we need to head back to Port Au Prince since the team has an early flight tomorrow (Saturday December 5th). Many of us brought clothing for the villagers as we gather these items together. I must say that several of my teammates returned home with just one change of clothes...they are leaving every other piece of clothing with the village. The last day in the village is a very emotional one. We have poured our hearts and tons of love into our brothers and sister here and we don't want it to end but we know it must, just for a while. We head over to the village to say our goodbyes and you can just feel the emotions. We love on the babies and say farewell to our friends and then head to a former sugar cane

plantation which has been converted to a museum. We learn that many Haitians were enslaved and worked in this very lucrative environment for their masters.

We make the hour and a half trip back to Port Au Prince and spend the night at a guest house close to the airport. We have an intense debriefing. Believe it or not, some people suffer from anxiety and even depression coming from this environment and heading home. I am proud that Lott Carey (our foreign missions organizer) recognizes this and sets aside time to allow missionaries to unwind and share. I can feel the emotions in our group...the urge to do more. I will face these very emotions in a few days since I am staying on when my teammates depart in the morning.

Below is a picture of the men on our team and one of Laura saying goodbye to Ms. Sophie. By the way, you see the (almost completed) toilets in the background of the first picture. Most of the people in the village had never seen a bathroom with a flushable toilet. They are accustomed to an "out-house" structure if that so this may seem insignificant to us but is a huge thing to them.

Oh, and I am back home trying to catch up on these posts. Please be patient.

Love ya...V

Date: Mon, Dec 14, 2015 at 6:41 AM

Subject: 2015 Haiti Mission - December 5th

This morning I say "safe travels" to the 10 people with whom I have shared the last few days. They are headed back to the US but God has more work for me to do in Haiti. As they head to the airport, my driver takes me to Grace Village in the Carrfour area of Port Au Prince where I will spend the next few days. Grace Village is a rather large compound which houses a church, hospital, school campus, girls orphanage and a transitional home for young ladies who are too old to stay at the orphanage but not quite ready to be on their own. It's run by Bishop Joel and Madam Doris Jeune, along with two of their sons. I've been here several times over the last four years and I am greeted by several people I recognize. I am the only missionary here right now but a total of 65 will be here by Monday to help prepare Christmas gifts for 6,000 children. I will speak more on this project later on.

In the afternoon we head over to the boy's orphanage. This orphanage as well as one for widows is about a 15 minute drive from Grace Village. It's a joy to see these guys and I love coming here. We spend a few hours helping the boys write thank you cards to their sponsors. All the while we are laughing and playing and taking pictures...these guys love to see pictures of

themselves. I was asked to give a couple of boys some gifts from their sponsors in the States and we do that toward the end of my visit. We head back to the village around 5pm. They know I am a RETIRED computer guys and there are a couple of minor issues I try to resolve before it gets too dark. I eat a bowl of soup that's been prepared for me around 6pm (not sure what it was but I was hungry and gracious anyhow) and go to my room because there is nothing else to do and no one to do it with anyway (remember I am the only person in this building because the other 64 people don't show up until Sunday evening). Even though I am exhausted, I have a tough time sleeping. Since I was up, God decided He would share some things with me but I am not at liberty to share them with you just yet but...

I forgot to mention that I arrived in country with two big suitcases. As a matter of fact one of them was actually over the weight limit but the baggage handler at DCA let me slide when I told him I was going on a mission trip to Haiti (yep, I gave that brother a big tip). One suitcase was packed, overloaded really with things for the people in Carries. Thanks to your generosity there were new underwear and socks for both children and adults, toiletries, medicine, snacks and some clothing for the men. I can't tell you how touched I am for your support (I didn't think to take a picture of the suitcase...sorry)

FYI - I am back home now...just trying to catch you up on my journey...more to come.

Pictures below are: 1-Sitting with a couple of guys helping them compose "thank you" notes to their sponsors; 2-goofing off time...taking selfies. PS - I have more than 150 pictures but I am limited in what I can include in email. I try to include a couple which capture the essence of my day/experience. At some point I will put them all online and give you a link so you can view them at your leisure.

Date: Tue, Dec 15, 2015 at 10:11 AM

Subject: December 6 - 2015 Haiti Mission

I am up early this morning because I'm going to church service with the Jeunes. The van with Madam Jeune and several people from the girl's orphanage pulls up at 6:30 to pick me up. As we make our way I am reminded once again how things are so different here. Most people in Haiti do not own vehicles and there is no public transportation system. The Haitians rely on TapTaps which is an amalgamation of private vehicles, (often pickup trucks or box trucks with a set of benches, or school buses) which travel along a specific route. All of these vehicles are in some state of

disrepair to the point of being dangerous but they are all packed with people. You hop on and pay the driver when you get to the end point. One could have to ride several TapTaps to get to their ultimate destination. People often travel great distances to go to church or work. Some spend hours commuting. I know there are several people we will see shortly who had to leave their home before dawn to come to worship service.

Bishop Jeune will preach the 7am service at the church to which we are headed. He will leave there and preach again for the 10am service at Grace Village. The roof of this building is made up of tenting material and there are no doors or windows...it is open on three sides. However it's apparent as I walk into service that this ground is revered and sacred. Church service is packed, probably 2,500 people. We are ushered to the front of the church and eventually I am seated on the podium. I start to wonder whether I need to prepare to do something like give a word of welcome, sing a song or speak a word from the Lord. I start to converse with God about this and tell Him I am not fond of surprises so He had better clue me into what I need to do. (Side note - several people here keep referring to me as "Pastor Vernon". I have no idea why they call me "Pastor". While some of my OLD friends still use the title "Bishop" when addressing me, this is an inside joke started by Rev. Emil Thomas in the 1990s and was a reference to a red shirt with a white banded collar I wore back then, so it was more about my "dress" than my "address". [I pray the Lord ain't told them something that He forgot to discuss with me]. I keep correcting everyone who uses that title but they insist on it anyway. The fact that most of the missionaries who travel here alone are pastors, I think, makes them assume that God has called me to that office. NOT...). I notice the communion table is setup when I take my seat. How ironic given I was recently ordained. They actually serve communion before the preached word. Communion is offered to those who are members of this church. You literally have to present your membership card before you are served. I think that this is a "closed sacrament" and I become a little disappointed that I may not be allowed to participate (I learned what a closed sacrament was at Alfred Street, thanks to Pastor Wesley). After members were served, visitors who were members of other churches invited to partake. I notice a few people come forward to be served but they are denied. I am not sure why. What a blessing it is share in the Lord's Supper here.

In his message Bishop Jeune speaks about a Haitian woman who migrated to the US and recently committed suicide. He said he was angry with God for allowing that to happen and it took him a while to pull himself together. This young lady was a school principal and by all accounts very successful in her field. As most Haitians do, she would send a considerable amount of money to her relatives still here. The crux of Bishop's message is we cannot get caught up in the trappings of success as the end or purpose for which God has called us. If we do, when that "thing" is taken away, as it was from this

young lady, she was deemed unfit to continue in her job, we can lose all hope. He said our hope should be in the Lord Jesus. We must remember that our calling supersedes any material gains we have or will attain in life and our purpose is to always glorify and worship God. If we keep that in the forefront we will never lose sight, get discouraged and contemplate suicide. We leave church and go back to Grace Village to change clothes before heading to Lambi Village. This is the place where the missionary teams worked in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Recent rains have made the road into the village impassable. This happens often here. I walk around the village going to homes of my friends. Most are not home but I do run into a few friends. I stop by David's home, one of two young men Judy and I have committed to sponsoring through high school. His mom and sisters are home but he is away and they are not sure when he will return. I also look in on our other sponsoree Paul but find out he has not returned from church service. Word spreads that there are visitors in the village and soon there are quite a few faces I recognize from previous visits. I get to see both Paul and David before we have to leave. It is truly heartwarming to see my friends. Pictured below is a view from the pulpit at church. The next two pictures are me with Paul and David.





Date: Fri, Dec 18, 2015 at 11:26 AM

Subject: December 7 - 2015 Haiti Mission

This place is teeming with missionaries now. Just a day ago I was dining alone and now meals are a logistical feat with so many mouths to feed but the staff here is doing their best and I am/we are thankful for their efforts. They do an admiral job of "Americanizing" the meals for us and I always manage to eat what is put before me. I must tell you the coffee here is thick and rich and very tasty. Roughly 60 people arrived at various times yesterday (Sunday Dec 6th) from late afternoon through late night. The largest group is from a town near Columbus, Ohio. There are also folks representing churches in Key West and other parts of southern Florida, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Bridgeway Church in Columbia, Maryland. I think it is so awesome that each of us has purposed in our hearts to be ambassadors of God's grace and mercy. The primary focus for the teams this week is to prepare Christmas gifts for 6,000 children and there is a bit of work to prepare for this. There is a charge in the air...you can feel it. We start our morning together with devotions led by Pastor Mark from Raleigh. I remember him and Pastor Craig from a previous trip to Haiti.

In Haiti as well as most Caribbean nations, people build structures with the money they have available. They don't borrow money to build like we do in the States. When their money runs out, they stop the process and begin to save again. Once they have additional funds they pickup where they left off. You see this throughout Haiti. Most structures look like they are not fully completed. This is the case in the building where we are staying. There is no electricity in the area where the men are sleeping, the bathroom was just completed a couple of days ago and, while there are doors, there are no handles on them and no glass in the inserts. The team from Ohio is made up of tradesmen and they are here to do work in this building. They have an electrician, a HVAC guy, carpenters, painters and several people who are just plain handy. They manage to get electricity installed in some of the areas in the men's wing. This allows some of us (not me yet) to have fans to circulate the air. Did I mention that the temperatures have been in the mid to upper 80's with high humidity since I arrived. Oh, and of course the area of the building where the women are staying is already functional with electricity. SMH - just kidding ladies.

There is not much for the "non-handy" people to do today because all of the items for the 6,000 gift bags we are making haven't arrived yet. Although I pride myself as a "handyman" (of sorts), I fell and broke my right hand a couple of weeks ago so I am relegated to "other" one-handed tasks. The internet in our building has gone out so I go about trying to determine why since I was a computer guy in my former life. Of course I cannot find the route of the problem so we are without internet service until they can bring someone in. Footnote - We can learn a lot from the Haitians. Power outages are a common thing and it doesn't seem to stop them from being productive. If they are working on a task that requires electricity they switch to another one which doesn't until there is electricity again. And here the power goes out several times during the course of a day. Also the internet stayed down for the remainder of my stay in Haiti and they didn't seem any worse for wear. I must admit it was kind of nice being "unplugged" for a while.

I spend the afternoon on the Grace School grounds. There is a soccer match (football) and quite a few students are standing around watching. I see Paul and go speak with him. I notice a few other young people from Lambi Village (where our team worked in previous years). Paul tells me he is scheduled to play in a game tomorrow (Tuesday Dec 8th) and his eyes light up when I tell him I will stop by to watch him play.

Pictured below is a football game in progress as well as one of the TapTaps I mentioned earlier. These TapTaps are the primary means of travel for most people in Port Au Prince.

The scribe has been on holiday and fallen behind in his "duties". Day 7 - "Haiti Mission Chronicles"

Date: Fri, Dec 18, 2015 at 12:55 PM

Subject: December 8 - 2015 Haiti Mission

Just after we finish our devotions and breakfast, Bishop Jeune comes in with a group of students. They serenade us with a few songs in 2 and 3 part harmony. Bishop is proud of these girls and shares that they represent the successful investment missionaries like us make. What a glorious way to start our day. We then head over to the staging area to begin our task of putting together Christmas gifts.

All together we have to put together 6,000 gift bags but are focused on preparing enough for the 3,500 people we will be with on Thursday (Dec 10th). Each gift bag has a toy, an inspirational story book, a candy cane and other snacks. It may not seem like much to us but for some of these children it is the only gift they will receive. Each child who receives a gift bag will also be fed a meal. For many children this will be the only meal they get that day. Part of what we do as missionaries is contribute money and items towards "Christmas". Each missionary who is here made a monetary donation towards the gifts and meals. And then we do the work necessary to make it all happen, TO THE GLORY OF GOD!!! Side note-the group from Raleigh and the one from Ohio are also sponsoring "The Lord's Kitchen" at Grace. This is a program which provides a hot meal for the students at the school. The "Kitchen" was in operation almost daily just after the earthquake in 2010. Nowadays it operates when there is funding or a sponsor. Both of these groups will sponsor the "Kitchen" this week which means two days of hot meals for the young people. Praise God!

We've setup an assembly line to stuff the gift bags. There is one line for boys and one for girls, the difference being what kind of toy we put into the bag. We are excited to go about our task. I should tell you we are working alongside some volunteers who are members of Grace Church and they are some seriously hardworking people. We work until noon and go to eat lunch. My Haitian friends continue to work and eat in shifts so that the work can go on. We manage to bag about 2,000 gifts before lunch. In the afternoon we work another hour or so and bag 1,000 gifts before we start to run out of supplies. The assembly line is halted until Madam Jeune can go and purchase more items. We also bagged 500 gifts for the boys detention home. We place bibles and other inspirational reading materials in their

bags. The detention home is a place where troublesome children who have been found homeless and living on the streets are taken. Although I have never been, I understand that the conditions there are less than ideal. While it is not a prison, the young men are not kept there of their own free will. A group of missionaries will go to this facility on Friday (Dec 11th) to minister to these young men. My plane leaves Friday morning so I will not be able to join them.

Around 2pm I head over to the football field. There is a game in progress but I see Paul on the sidelines still dressed in his uniform. As the game ends, he tells me the other team forfeited so he will not be able to play today. I hang around for a little while talking with Paul and a small group gathers. Paul tells me that his friends want to talk English with me. I am tickled and thrilled to engage these young people and we go back and forth asking/answering questions: What's your name, where do you live, do you have any children, what are their ages, do you like it here; what is your name, how old are you, what grade are you in, how long have you been studying English, what is your favorite subject, do you believe in God, would you like to come to America. Paul's English is pretty good but some of his friends speak it much better. We go around and around like this for a while and we are all thoroughly enjoying it.

After dinner, the Raleigh group ask me to join them for evening devotions. We head up to the roof of the building. It is so glorious up here. The sky is lit up with stars. We even see a couple of shooting stars. They laid hands on me and prayed for me and my hand. So very touching!!! I have to see a doctor when I return home and determine whether surgery will be necessary for my hand to heal properly. I should tell you that they wanted to perform surgery after it was determined that I broke it but I wouldn't be allowed to travel if I elected to have it. Without a second thought, I opted to postpone surgery because God had something greater for me to do here in Haiti.

The first two pictures are us on the assembly line putting together the gift bags. Last picture is of the girls singing for us that morning.





Date: Tue, Dec 22, 2015 at 9:53 AM

Subject: December 9 - Haiti Mission

After morning devotions and breakfast some people get on a bus to go to Lambi Village. This is the village where the Lott Carey teams have worked the previous 3 years. It is sponsored by Grace Church, our host this week. Immediately after the earthquake thousands of people descended onto the Grace compound where disaster relief was being administered. Grace eventually relocated people to Lambi Village and began building homes. When the village first started, everyone was in a US AID tent. Some wooden structures were built but the plan was to build permanent, cement and block homes for the residents. To "qualify for a home" the residents had to put in sweat equity not only on their own home but in other projects in the village. For example, they could help another resident build their home or help

construct to community center, dig wells, etc. No one was required to pay for their home...most couldn't afford to do so anyway. Some of the residents still live in tents and wooden structures today. By US standards these people are extremely poor. However, everywhere I look I see hope in the faces and the attitudes of the people. No one seems defeated or down-trodden. I was fortunate enough to have visited the village on Sunday so I chose not to go on this excursion. Many of the missionaries here are new so they have never seen Lambi. When the group returns I can tell it was quite an eye-opener for most of them.

We eat lunch and finish assembling the remaining gifts since the additional supplies have arrived. We board the bus and head to the Sunshine Home in the Pleasantville area of Port Au Prince. The bus ride is rather long primarily because traffic is horrendous. There are few traffic lights (as a matter of fact I think I've only seen 3 in my four trips to Haiti) and even fewer traffic laws. This is another orphanage run by Grace. This one attempts to keep family units together so there are several siblings who live in this home. It's a little ways up the mountain (the city center is in a low-lying area). The heat is taking its toll and a couple of people in our group get ill during our ride. Mostly it dehydration. I've learned to drink plenty of fluids because the heat and humidity here can easily do you in. We stop along the way to get cold water and allow people to use the restroom. We also get into a minor traffic accident but after some yelling and no doubt cussing we are on our way again.

The Sunshine Home is another orphanage affiliated with Grace Church. This one attempts to keep family units together so there are several siblings who live here. This is a planned excursion so several people have gifts for the kids here. The children also know we are coming by and they are excited. There is also plenty of candy, cookies and snacks for them. The children here are very friendly and engaging. I get lots of hugs, smiles and handshakes. Funny that I sometimes forget that I am here to give because they are so giving...but I know that's part of God's plan so I "receive" all that He has for me. We minister to/talk with a few of the older boys. Most know God and worship Him regularly. I know this is a requirement since this is a church-sponsored dwelling but I can tell that some of these kids have really embraced God and know Him as their savior. This is truly heartwarming. The children sing us a song and we spend a little more time taking pictures and interacting. One of the missionaries brought a digital,

polaroid-type camera. It's something old that's been made brand new. The kids get to see their pictures develop in front of their eyes. This is a big hit and all of them want a picture.

It's dusk and Madam Jeune says the power has been out this part of the city for a while. She says she needs to raise about \$2,000 for a generator so the children in the home will be able to read and study later into the day. Her point though is that we have to head back before it gets too dark. We say our good-byes and board the bus. The trip back is more grueling and traffic is gridlocked most of the way back down the mountain. By the time we get back to Grace Compound it is close to 7pm. We eat dinner and I am invited to join in evening devotions with my friends from Columbia, Md.

I had hoped to spend time with Paul and his friends again today as they "practiced" their English but we are too late getting back. It was a little disappointing for me. I know tomorrow will be a very busy day so I don't think I will get to see them before I leave to return home. I try to focus on the smiles and joy we brought to the children at the Sunshine Home but honestly I feel a little down (just a little) as I head to bed.

Pictured below are the children enjoying their snacks and gifts; one of a lovely and friendly young lady who greeted me on my way in; the last picture is of a little girl who had a tons of fun blowing bubbles.





Date: Sat, Dec 26, 2015 at 1:04 PM

Subject: December 10 - 2015 Haiti Mission

(I think it more than a coincidence that I begin penning this journal entry on December 25th)

CHRISTMAS DAY IN HAITI. Well not quite but it is the culminating day for this week's mission, especially for me. Tomorrow morning (Friday Dec 11th) I head back to the States. This is the second time I have been a part of the Christmas celebration sponsored by Grace Church. Today's celebration takes place on the grounds of a Seventh Day Adventist Church/School. We are planning for 3,500 children. We load the gift bags on a truck and then most of us get on a school bus to go to our destination. The auditorium/sanctuary is enormous. Many of the churches I've been to here seat 2,000 to 3,000 people. I think this place probably holds 4,000+.

There are quite a few children here when we arrive. I am touched at how disciplined they all seem...very orderly, and I am talking about 5-9 year-olds. For more than two hours children of all ages file in and are seated. We are near capacity for this place and there are still lines of children patiently waiting to get in. Ushers come and take the seats from the pulpit/podium area where our team is seated because they are needed in the audience. Then they start what I would affectionately call the Alfred Street Squeeze (ASBC folks know what this is), where they try to fit extra people on the benches but it's still not enough. There are people sitting on the floor and on the steps leading to the balcony and I start to wonder how we're going to serve them all. Our entire team is now spread throughout the auditorium greeting and interacting with students. I notice a couple of children are crying and can't seem to be consoled. I hear Madam Jeune say they are hungry and tells someone to take them out a side door. I can guess that she is going to make sure they get something to eat something right away.

There is a banner on the stage which reads, "BON FETE JESU" which translates to "Happy Birthday Jesus". The audience is treated to a puppet show about the birth of our Savior, beginning with the angel Gabriel talking with Elizabeth and Mary through the wise men coming to see the baby

Jesus. An invitation to Christian Discipleship is given and the Sinner's Prayer is recited by everyone present. I realize this may seem like a waste of time but teachers and chaperons are encouraged to followup later with their charges to see if there is one who has given their life to Christ. I guess you just never know how God will move.

After the show lunch arrives. For many of the children here this is the only meal they will get today. And for some, it will be their only meal for a couple of days. And their meal will be more inline with what WE eat. It includes a quarter piece of fried chicken, rice and beans and vegetables. Rarely do children get that much meat and hardly ever are served vegetables. We are dispersed to each aisle and begin handing out the meals as fast as possible. It seems very chaotic to me but I am trying to make sure everyone around me has food. It is a little disheartening when I realize we've handed out all of the meals and there is still about 200+ people who haven't been fed. Madam Jeune makes a call and more food is on the way. After lunch we hand out gift bags. Again, for many of the students this will be the only gift they received. Everyone is very appreciative and as they file out of the auditorium they thank us. My thought and reply is "thank God". After most of the children have left, the people who did not get meals earlier are gathered together and we make sure they are fed before we leave.

It is late afternoon when we return to the Grace Compound. Most of us are exhausted both physically and mentally. I realize I need some downtime and retreat to my room. It occurs to me that I am leaving in the morning and that I am headed down that "slope" that many missionaries travel as their mission comes to an end. You feel like you haven't done enough...that there is so much more you could have done. I start to pray and read my bible to keep my heart and head in correct alignment. I will leave in the morning before most of my colleagues awake so I say my goodbyes after dinner. I get several invites to join in evening devotions but I know what I need is alone time with God so I decline all offers. After it gets dark I head up to the roof one last time to see the splendor of God's hand painted with starry lights across the night sky then head to my room to finish packing and read my Word. I feel the presence of God in such a mighty way and drift off to restful sleep. I am reminded that God is doing a mighty work here and I am honored yet humbled that He allows me to be a small part of it. I so look forward to those things He will unfold before me and how He will continue to use me in this realm in the future.

