

Trip Report for Holy Spirit Haiti Mission

Sept 13-20, 2010

Members of this mission were Elonda and Donald Harris – Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Chuck Arnold – Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, Erie, PA, Paul Kosinski and Bob McCoy – Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Huntsville. We left at the usual crack of early on a 6a flight that took us to Charlotte, Orlando, Miami and Port au Prince (PAP) by 4p that evening. I knew Mother Mary had her hand on the heart of the US Air gate agent when they not only let a couple over 50 lb bags by but did not charge us for any bags. The PAP airport looks like it has gotten back to its normal running routine. My general observation of Haiti is that there is a lot of building going on and a lot of clean up being done. There are also a lot of people living in tents. However, there were a lot of ‘Work for Cash’ workers in the streets which is akin to our WPA project of the Depression era. The Haitians seemed to be taking more pride in the things they were doing and I can definitely tell you that the people in the Palmiste au Vin area where much of the Holy Spirit and Birmingham Diocese contributions have been made, are really focused on getting their lives back to normal. Fre Olizard has a massive building program going on for the peasants that began with Holy Spirit, but has now branched out to include the Swiss and German Red Cross. They have funded 600 houses of a similar size to the ones HS build for the 13 families. The Haitians are struggling, but things just seemed more normal to me than in the past 9 months.

Monday Day 1 – At the end of the 2 hour journey from the PAP airport, where we were only missing one bag, we arrived at the monastery about 7p to the open arms of the brothers and some further major improvements since our May trip. We now had toilets in the new building, alleviating a walk in the dark



over rock to the old building (with a concrete roof). We had sinks and showers right outside the door and the chapel was finished for morning and evening prayer. I thought I was at the Hilton. It’s been a long time since we had showers. Beds were comfortable and the food was awesome. The new Kubota generator was running, so we had all sorts of light. Not only do we take clean water for granted, but we take electricity for granted. I can assure you life is exponentially more difficult without electricity and I appreciated every electron.

Tuesday Day 2 – Up at 5a for morning prayer, breakfast and off to Leogane to Notre Dame de la Charite Orphanage (NDC) which was the main focus of this trip – to install a solar powered water purification



system. Before we arrived at NDC, Fre Olizard gave us a tour of the newly populated chicken coop that produces 750 eggs a day. This is one of the economic opportunities we have participated with LBST to help them fund themselves. We also got a look at one of the staging areas for some of the houses that the Swiss and German Red Cross have contributed through LBST; more on this later.



At NDC, months before, a well had been hand dug so they had water, but drinking water had to be purchased and hauled in from town. We had arranged for Green Energy, a Haitian organization, to put up 4 – 185W solar panels on a 15’ steel pole and leave 4 Rolls 400A, 6V batteries. This would be the heart of the 24V system. The pole and panel were up and installed, but the batteries and controller were not. It made no difference because

today we had to get the water system built. Electricity would wait until Thursday. Because of how busy Fre Olizard is since the earthquake, we no longer have the luxury of having him as a driver, so I drove everywhere including into PAP to get the missing bag. We had Bertone and Ignace, two of our trusted Haitian friends with us, so I left Paul in charge of building the system while Ignace and I went to get the bag. Because of PAP traffic and general delays, this task took us 5 hours to accomplish. When we got back the team had done an incredible job of finishing most of the system and getting the tanks on the roof ready. We were on schedule. And then about 3 that afternoon, the 4 batteries and charge controller showed up. We are good to go. By 6:30p we had done all we could and left in the dark to drive back to the monastery. It was a great day with the girls at the orphanage and in spite of some broken parts, we were on track.



Wednesday Day 3 – This day was committed to driving to Les Cayes to meet with Bishop Guiere Pollard



to do a site survey for the next system. Cayes is 100 miles to the west of Palmiste au Vin and Fre Olizard had to be back at 3p that afternoon for a meeting, so we left at 5:30a. Beside a few potholes along the way, the ride was uneventful. We were there just



after 8a and Bishop Guiere met with us from 8:30 until almost noon. Chuck presented the Bishop with a letter from his Bishop and a framed picture of their Cathedral and I presented a letter from Bishop Baker and Benedictine Order cross. Bishop Guiere was very grateful for the gifts and thanked us warmly. He

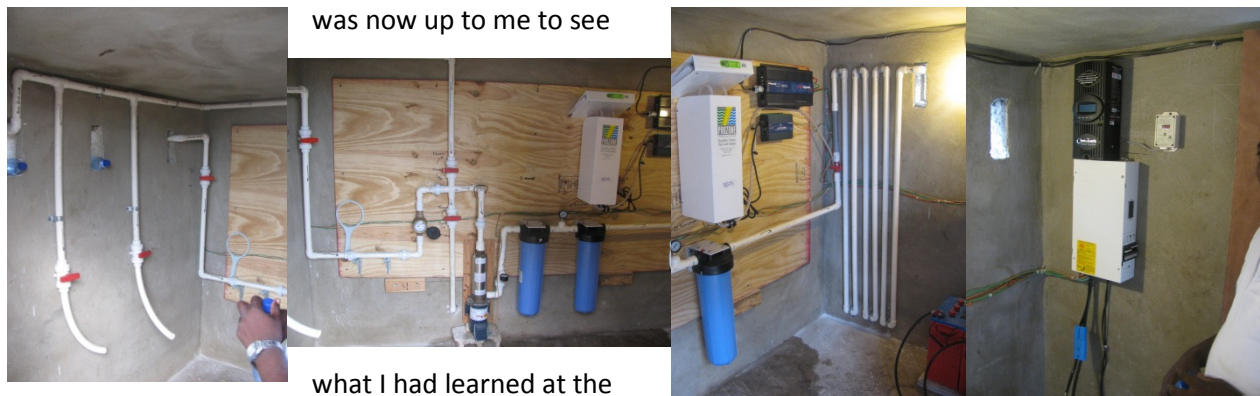


had dedicated his whole morning to this project and even went on site with us to inspect the proposed house and well. Before we left we spent about 1.5 hours discussing the covenant and coming to agreement as to what each party is expected to deliver. We stressed sustainability and early financial independence and Bishop Guiere was very supportive of this position. He is a very kind and gentle man, but one I sensed was a very serious business man when it came to church business. Unfortunately the site left some questions yet to be

answered especially about the well. He had a well engineer and electrical engineer at the site with the priest. The well engineer said the well was 90’ deep and the pump was sitting at about 40’ with 20’ of water above it. I thought this is great, almost too good to be true. Then they turned on the pump and

clear water started gushing out, but about 3 minutes later, it turned gray and I knew the pump had to be close to the bottom and they were sucking the well dry. The well engineer immediately blamed it on bad electricity, but I put that argument to rest with my scope meter and showed them the electricity was just fine. They have a good place to put the system that will serve the community well, but their water source is going to have to improve before we can proceed with this location. The bishop of course insisted we have lunch with him, but Fre Olizard knew if we did we would never make it back to Palmiste au Vin by 3, so we left with our goodbyes to a wonderful leader of that Haitian community. Once back there was plenty of work to be done around the monastery, so we got busy until dark, ate dinner and some hit the sack early. Fre Olizard and I had much to discuss, so this was our time and we made the most of it.

Thursday Day 4 – Up at 5a as usual for morning prayers and breakfast. We had a big day ahead of us. The goal was to get the solar system wired and testing begun. By 6 that evening we had met the goal. It



solar school earlier this year. Even though we had the distribution box prewired there was still a lot to do. We had two inverters, two pumps, a charge controller and a battery monitor to wire up, let alone all the lights to be wired in the three orphanage buildings. At lunch we appeared to still be on schedule and by 4p the first sun power started up the system. We rechecked the wiring three times before turning on the first breaker. These are always an exciting moments, especially when things work right. The panels and charger controller came up just as they were supposed to. The inverters (which turn DC or battery power into AC) came on line perfectly and finally the well pump and the board pump were tested and all was good in the world. It would take us another day or so to sort out all the information and numbers that were being produced by the charge controller and battery monitor and I would spend the next couple of evenings reading and rereading the manual, but the bottom line is all was working correctly. We had one problem early on in that the connector posts on the battery had bolt connections and I had brought connectors like and automobile battery has. I was able to adapt the two together, but then we moved the positive cable too much and the connector broke. By the Grace of God, the solar panel installers had left an extra battery cable which we cut in half and then spliced in to the 1/0 battery cable. We ended up doing the same to the negative cable later which allowed us to shorten these cables to a more proper length and have the correct connector post at the same time. In Haiti you have to always be ready for the unexpected and adapt the best you can.

Back to the monastery after dark to get dinner and some more meeting time with Fre Olizard. It was a good day and we were very pleased with what we had accomplished so far.

Friday Day 5 – This is the test and training day. This is where it all comes together. Yesterday we found the trash filter head was cracked in shipping so we took it out of the system until I could get a new head shipped into Haiti. To minimize ‘stuff’ coming in from the source tank, we flushed out the source tank really well and then put a 90 degree elbow inside with a 6” stub facing up. It means we can’t get the last 6-8” of water in the tank, but that is not important. We also found that one of the pressure relief valves on the big blue had come off and of course the spring was missing, so we commandeered a ball point pen spring and modified it to fit. So when we left yesterday all was working. The morning was spent flushing the tanks and system with chlorine, checking for leaks and monitoring the electrical system. I had promised Fre Olizard that I will drive into PAP with Ignace to pick up the replacement Lister-Petter generator that had finally cleared customs. I left Paul in charge again and Ignace and I headed to PAP only to get a call about an hour later that the electrical system had gone down. My worst nightmare; this was the component I was least familiar with, so troubleshooting was not the same as the water system I had installed several of over the years. Basic trouble shooting kicked in and I told Paul how to



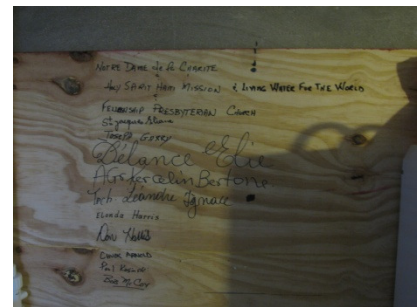
isolate the problem with the meter. Turned out to be a loose battery cable and was fixed in a few minutes. Thank you Jesus! Picking up the generator was uneventful except for the 1.5 hr wait for people to get all the pieces together. We then



headed up into Delmas to see if we could find a replacement for the broken trash filter, but none was to



be had. I found out on Monday when I returned home though that all the driving in PAP took its toll on me from breathing the dust from the vehicles. Looking around some of the places you do not want to imagine what



was in the dust, but for 5 days my respiratory systems was not functioning properly. The last time Ignace and I went to PAP and were gone ¾ of the day we were accused of sitting in the ice cream bar in PAP. Little did they know that I knew a place in Leogane where you can actually buy ice cream in paper cups, so we stopped on the way back to get one for each of the kids as well as the crew. There was total disbelief, especially from Chuck when they accused us of the same thing and we produced 50 cups if ice cream. It was a fun time for all. The crew had finished all the testing and Bertone was now into the training which is more intense than one might imagine. For the next four hours he went over all the aspects of how to run and manage the system. Earlier I had covered some of the solar training and would do more on Saturday and Sunday. It was well after dark by the time we got back to the

monastery, tired, but grateful for a good day and another successful installation under our belt. We are still sorting out all we need to know about the solar components, but the more I learn the more I think we really made the right move for this location. Eliane is not even remotely close to any possible electrical source, so the things she will now be able to accomplish with electricity for the kids are truly a gift from God.

Saturday Day 6 – This day was dedicated to reviewing the housing program that Holy Spirit and the



Diocese began in January and which has now mushroomed through Fre Olizard's efforts into a full scale operation. The Swiss and German Red Cross have committed to build 600 houses in the Palmiste au Vin community. They are similar in nature to the ones we funded originally except they have metal frames made in Vietnam and plywood sides and metal roofs. Fre Olizard has put 12 teams of 5 men each to work building these houses which take 5 days to build from beginning to end. We watched some of the

materials being carted to the site by hand, one piece at a time. It is incredible how this has galvanized the community and I cannot help but to think of St. Benedict and St. Ignatius and St. Therese and all the other religious who put up one or more monasteries in a community and how they were the center of education and economic livelihood during some of the darkest times of Europe's history. We are seeing this very same thing being played out in Haiti where the religious are quietly leading the community through example and with gifts from so many who care from around the world. This is Christ in action.

We then went back to the chicken farm where we set up another battery system with an inverter for Fre Olizard so they had power for the incubator and the watchman's cell phone charger. Since we were close to NDC, we checked in on the kids (a favorite pastime of the team) and the system. All was running well.

The rest of the day we took a side trip to Jacmel to accomplish two things. One was to do a monthly inspection of the water system in Jacmel and the other was to give the crew and opportunity to see another part of Haiti. The trip through the mountains is breath taking going up to almost 4000 feet and then back to sea level. The inspection did not turn out as well as hoped and we found that the log records were not being kept in a manner prescribed. In addition the pressure had dropped 20 lbs on one of the gauges and as we suspected a filter needed changing. This was confirmed by the patho test turning dark way too early. Bertone would go back later in the week with new filters and flush the system. We are also getting a new operator.

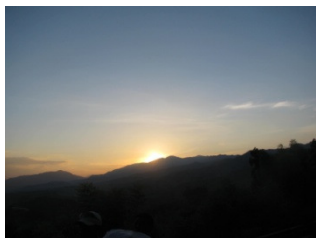
Jacmel had changed from the time I visited in 2008. Some of the touristy places had closed and a couple of the hotels on the beach had closed. The town seemed active, but the area along the beach did not unfortunately. None the less, Elonda found some things to bring back home and she even bought a Haitian made cigar and haggled for it like a pro.

Sunday Day 7 – We slept in until 6a this day, got breakfast and went to mass at 9a in the LBST chapel by the clinic down the road from the monastery. A priest supposed to be there, but at the last moment

something happened and the service quickly became a communion service with Fre Olizard presiding since he is the prior of the monastery. There was a lot of singing by the young people's choir with the bongo drum as the only instrument. Homily was just a long and given by a wonderful lay person who is also one of the teachers at the LBST school and he is a great teacher. After Fre Olizard presented the host (which came from the monastery tabernacle) he asked me to come forward to the altar. Not knowing what to expect at first I realized he was asking me to be the Eucharistic minister. I could not have had a closer moment than at that time, looking this community in the eye one by one as I said the words "This is the Body of Christ" and presenting it to each recipient. There was one lady, Madame Danio whose house we funded and whom I met back in May. She is at least 90 and walks up and down the mountains as if the hills are not there. She has beautiful eyes and I had a very difficult time maintaining my composure as she came forward. She has gone through so much and just takes it all in stride. She cornered Paul outside the church after the service and talked his ear off for ten minutes. We have no idea what she said, but seems that it was thanks for the support of her community. Sunday would not be complete without one more trip to the orphanage, so after lunch off we went. Unfortunately at the bottom of the mountain in Dufort we were stopped in the road waiting for a minor traffic jam to unspool and a 10 ton box truck backed into the right side window of the Kia. And here we are with no Haitian to interpret. Fortunately no one was hurt, but Chuck got a considerable amount of glass on him from the window exploding as the event occurred. I immediately called Fre Olizard who showed up several minutes later. I had expected Haitians shooting at me for whatever reason, but for some reason everyone was quiet and several helped clean up the glass from the window. Olizard told me afterward that many people knew it was a monastery truck and the driver was scared to death because he knew he was at fault. So Olizard makes sure no one is hurt and signals for me to go on. That evening he said we could have gotten names, the driver would have probably lost his job, we would have spent lots of money with lawyers collecting damages, or we could pay for the window and go on. Perhaps there is a lesson we can learn here about accidents in the US. It all seemed very sensible and civil.

We got to the orphanage and none of the girls were in sight. As it turns out they were all in the back under a tree with a small video player and TV plugged into their new found electricity watching a video Eliane had procured for them. The water system was running well and Eliane had run her first batch of water. They had lights the night before and life has changed quite a bit now for those in the orphanage. I pray for the better. I couldn't help but to think about the double edged sword we had brought them through TV and the Internet. The age of innocence can disappear rapidly. Time will tell.

Monday Day 8- Up at 4a to leave by 5:30. Chuck's plane was at 9a and we had plenty of time until we



got to the fuel terminal in PAP and the city came to a stop. When cars start stacking up in a traffic jam, Haitians just make more lanes, typically out of the left hand lanes for oncoming traffic. It's sort of who gets there first. This obviously just



exasperates the problem. Olizard found an escape route out to another highway only to be blocked again by a truck unloading and blocking two of 4 lanes. Patience

and Olizard's skill in driving through PAP on streets narrower than alleys and God's Grace got us to the airport with about 30 min until Chuck's plane took off. What takes 1.5 hrs took 3. Welcome to PAP. All arrived home by midnight, glad to see our family but knowing we had left a piece of ourselves behind as we always do. We had seen the light of Christ in those whom we had visited. Kepoze.