FINDING HOPE IN HAITI

By Kathy McGourty

After three failed attempts to lead a parish, St. James, from Arlington Heights, Illinois to Baraderas, Haiti, we finally took off on December 26th. To say we were thrilled was an understatement! We were hesitant to rejoice until our feet touched Haitian soil. Once they did, we were inundated with the chaos & confusion associated with entering a new culture, especially one dotted with extreme poverty and barren land.

As we drove out of Port Au Prince, (a job that took our drivers close to an hour in a city about 1/30 the size of Chicago!) I found myself feeling overwhelmed by the sights outside my car window. "How am I going to make a difference here?" I questioned. I began to pity the people and then stopped myself. I thought, "God does not pity them..." so I prayed for God's eyes. What came to me was a quote from Desmond Tutu: "More important than us believing in God is that God believes in us." I realized that God believes in the people of Haiti, and so I asked God to show me. The rest of our time was a beautiful revelation of God's HOPE through the people of Haiti.

We arrived (5.5 hours later) in La Borde, where Fr. Pascal greeted us. We were whisked to a beach side restaurant for an amazing dinner! There we introduced ourselves to Fr. Pascal, the seminarians that joined us, and our drivers. "I am the oldest of 8 children, I have been married for almost 29 years and have 4 children. But for most of my life I have known that my family was bigger...and today I am meeting the rest of my family," I shared. Thank you God for eyes of HOPE.

The next day we drove the second most difficult part of our journey over the mountains to Baraderas. What was to be a 3.5 hour trip over dry riverbeds was cut an hour short because of the VERY dry ground. Thank you God for journeys of HOPE!

We walked through the town, enjoying the children. God's HOPE was revealed in the eyes and laughter of the children. We entered the small church in the center of town. There on the side wall hung simple, humble Stations of the Cross...each one askew. As an admitted type-A personality, this sight usually sends me in a panic to straighten the pictures. But for the first time, I saw in these crooked pictures a love and beauty displayed not only in the simple art itself, but in the humble acceptance of life askewed. Thank you God for eyes of HOPE.

Day three, we drove to Fond Tortue to meet with Francois, the head of the KDB growers association. This trip was the most harrowing of them all, up the mountain with drop offs of hundreds of feet just inches from the tires...and then an oncoming vehicle would approach from around the bend! "It is always good to trust in God, but today we also trust in Jean, our driver," I announced to the group. Francois gave us a tour of the coffee fields and a processing plant. The buds were just starting on the coffee trees. Francois told us that it was time for a heavy rain so the coffee trees can get a good start to the growing season, but it had not rained in 2 months. We hoped for rain.
We were treated to a wonderful lunch provided by KDB. The Haitian coffee growers were gifting us with food and drink. The dignity they gained from the sale of their coffee extended to being able to welcome and honor guests from the U.S. Our relationships changed from "richest nation and poorest nation" to honored guests and dignified hosts...equals in God's eyes. Thank you God for eyes of HOPE.

Before heading back down the mountain, Francois took us to one more processing plant, built with no-interest loans from JUST HAITI. After arriving there, the rain began! Francois was thrilled and said that we brought the rain. Of course we did, we laughed...two of the three cancellations had been because of hurricanes or rain! The heavy tropical rain fell for over an hour. Some of us ran out into the rain to dance and celebrate. Thank you God for raining HOPE.

As the fourth day dawned, we prepared to meet with the growers association in Baraderas. Even though it was their holiday time, many growers from Fond Tortue and other mountain communities came to meet us. Among them were six women growers! They moved us with their stories of hope and dignity because of JUST HAITI/KDB. "I only used to plant enough food for my family on my land, and I would cut down the trees. Now I plant all coffee and get such a good price for it, I buy food from my neighbor." "Because of KDB I can buy my children food and clothing and pay their school fees." Thank you God for eyes and ears of HOPE.

The next day we visited a coffee growing community only one hour from La Borde, called Maniche. Pastor Yves shared with us his vision of empowering the coffee growers so that the community and the environment would benefit like Baraderas has. His parish, St. Rose of Lima, was in need of repair before their centennial celebration in August, 2012. Our group from St. James listened and gathered information to bring back to our parish. We were most hopeful about the prospect of supporting a community as they worked toward economic sustainability. We can repair their church and build their school, but if that is all we do, then 15-20 years later nothing has changed and we are repairing and building again. If we support them through JUST HAITI, subsidizing their training through KDB, then in 15-20 years they are repairing and building their own community, and gaining their own dignity in the process. Thank you God for a vision of HOPE.

We returned to the states renewed and filled with HOPE, given to us by the Haitians. At the airport in Miami, going through security, a guard called the man in front of me to come back and get his watch left in the container. "Oh, my Rolex!" he exclaimed and then explained for all of us to hear, "This thing costs $8,000!!" My heart sank. Tears came to my eyes and I found myself asking the same question I had in Port Au Prince, "How am I EVER going to make a difference here?" Only this time, it was about our own country and I realized THAT is the bigger challenge.

But I am filled with HOPE from God. Just as God believes in Haitians, so too does God believe in Americans. It won't be easy, but it will be done...on earth as it is in heaven.