



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

Pastor's Update

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By Pastor Pat Quaid

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Cor. 13:14.

Grace and Peace

I would like to reflect in this column on the Mission Jamaica mission trip which was shared by thirty-six people from Lutheran Church of Hope during the first part of February. During this journey we discovered what we already knew, that a mission trip is an incredible opportunity to learn, grow and become aware of what God is doing in the world.

So often when we talk about missionary work and missions, the discussions are abstract and theoretical. We talk about nations, people and their needs which are thousands of miles away of which we have little understanding. But a mission trip becomes intensely personal, as we are plunged into a radically different culture. I am sure that everyone who went on this trip will not be quite the same again.

Mission Jamaica began with a particular vision in 1990 by Pastor Roger Eigenfeld from St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi, MN, in which he sensed God's call to develop an international mission program. Through contacts he had in Jamaica, he was able to find an open door for this mission. The first major event took place with 19 missionaries accompanying him to the Hope Valley Experimental School in Kingston, Jamaica.

Since that beginning, some 22 other ELCA congregations, including Hope, and several colleges, including Luther College in Iowa, have partnered with St. Andrews in this mission. Those who now participate in the mission trips continue to serve at Hope Valley, but new sites have also been developed, including a partnership with Habitat for Humanity. In this past year alone, more than 400 Christian missionaries from 50 different congregations and colleges have become a part of Mission Jamaica.

Why Jamaica? Jamaica is an island located in the Caribbean Sea, south of both Cuba and Haiti, covering a land mass slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. The climate is tropical, hot and humid along the coasts, with a more temperate climate in the interior. Much of the terrain is made up of mountains, with a narrow coastal plain. Ethnic makeup includes about 90% black, 7 %

mixed race, and a very small scattering of other groups.

About 60% of the population is Protestant, only about 4% is Roman Catholic. Another significant religious expression is found in the Rastafarians, a peculiar religion arising out of Jamaica itself. Basically Rastafarians are members of a Jamaican messianic movement dating back to the 1930's. The most bizarre teaching is that the only true God is the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, and Ethiopia is the true Zion. They claim that Christian missionaries and preachers have perverted the Scriptures and that Adam and Jesus were black. The rituals include the use of marijuana and the chanting of revivalist hymns. Reggae music is the popular music of this movement. It is presently estimated that there are between 75,000 and 300,000 adherents.

Many serious problems confront the country of Jamaica. Poverty is rampant, leading to a whole host of social and medical problems. A depressed economy has inevitably led to social unrest and an increasing crime rate. Deforestation and pollution of the coastal waters are primary environmental concerns. Given the ongoing circumstances of the nation and of the daily life of people, the mission teams from Hope who travel to Jamaica can have a dramatic effect.

The involvement of Lutheran Church of Hope began back in 1996 when Pastor John Kline from Hope decided that Mission Jamaica would be a perfect fit for this congregation. Because there was no mission budget at the time, this was a relatively low-cost trip which would give people the opportunity to work and witness in an impoverished nation.

But the key to actually moving on this new vision came from the actions of a member of Hope, Sherry Morrow, who convinced a friend of hers from work, Donna Hadley, to join her in a trip to Jamaica to "check things out." They paid their own way and joined with another participating congregation in this so-called "vacation with a purpose." (It has truly become much more purpose than vacation.)

The experience was so profound that the next year they led a group of eleven people from Hope on a mission trip, with Pastor Mike and his wife Sally joining them for a part of the week. The following year Pastor John accompanied the group from Hope and began to see the myriad of possibilities for mission and ministry. Pastor John summed it up, "There were wonderful experiences over the years and I really felt that many lives were changed. I, also, think that many of Hope's current leaders came from the people who went on those trips. It was like a training ground of sorts."

As the new Missions Pastor at Lutheran Church of Hope, I was a first-year participant in the Mission Jamaica experience this year, along with my wife Missy. Building on the theme for this year's trip "Fostering Hope For A New Day", we joined with 34 other people from Hope to spend the eight days in a missionary effort. The thirty-six include:

Laurie Barr, Mark and Michelle Brandt, Scott Brunscheen, Stacy Brunscheen, Dan and Sue Christensen, Jeff and Kristi Davick, Nancy Douglas, Lori English, Denise Erhard, Christa Hanson, Marilyn Hills, Bob and Thea Houser, Suzanne Keay, Lori Kiewel, Alan Kinsey, Brad Krehlik, Joey Leaming, Jerry Loos, Carol Lucier, Susan Mas caro, Ed Nichols, Nate and Heather Noble, Missy and Pat Quaid, Tina Rasmussen, Dawn Schneider, Inge Sears, Kaylene Steele, Jake and Amy West, and Sonja Whitesell.

Many different ministries took place during our time in Jamaica. For instance, Dr. Jeff Davick led a team of three doctors and a nurse who created a free clinic at St. John's Medical Center. For three days they saw patients, many of whom were very much underserved in terms of ongoing medical care. In fact, our group donated more than \$35,000 worth of medical supplies, which had been collected by people from Hope. These supplies will serve people all year long at the clinic.

Another priority of the visit was to connect with the children of Jamaica, "letting the little children come to Jesus," as we read in Mark 10. Twelve of our group spent considerable time at the West Haven Children's Home, an orphanage with over 80 children, all of them with special needs. In addition to loving and playing with the children, our compassionate caregivers helped with such basics as bathing, changing diapers, and with giving children rides around the grounds. Another group of workers did repair work and painting of the facility and placed two much needed fans into one of the cottages.

Another team went to Riverside, a Basic School for children ages 3-5, where the children were shown Jesus and loved through singing, arts and crafts and games. Some of our builders also helped construct a roof over a pre-existing slab in order to provide space for after school learning.

A unique feature of our group was that Ed Nichols created a prayer ministry at St. John's Clinic. He would offer to meet with patients who had seen the doctors and pray with them. Prayers for healing and health, intercessory prayers for family and friends, prayers for faith and trust in Jesus were commonplace. We know there is such power in prayer and we wanted our mission to be centered in prayer.

Building a spirit of unity and community was also an important dimension of our journey. Each morning our team would gather for devotions and prayer in the garden of the resort where we were staying, and then in the evening we met on the pier surrounded by the beauty of Montego Bay. We will never forget these times together.

Our hope is to expand this ministry in the future, encouraging even more people from Hope to participate. We continue to discover that the mission trip is a time to reflect on how God is working in and through us while we are in Jamaica and then when we return home as well. We are excited to continue supporting a doctor this year at the Children's Home and to give in other ways as well.

We wish to thank the congregation for the support and encouragement we received. We invite you to consider making such a journey with us in the future. As mentioned earlier, there is nothing quite as moving and as transformational as being a part of a mission trip. Mission Jamaica is certainly a God thing.