

A Godly Economics Lesson in Jamaica

On February 9, our group met at the Nashville airport at 5:00 a.m. to travel to Mandeville, Jamaica. I was one of the “newbies”, slightly nervous and completely unsure of what to expect. The veterans of the trip assured us that we would love our time in Mandeville and the relationships we formed with the people there. As I stepped off the plane in Jamaica, I began to gradually understand just what they meant.



The second day of the trip started with worship at Andrews Memorial United Church. Andrews Memorial shares FPC’s commitment to serving those in its community as Christ calls us to serve. They have an outreach committee and have established meaningful partnerships with three schools and at least one low-income neighborhood in Mandeville. We were fortunate to work alongside members of Andrews Memorial as we joined these fruitful community partnerships.

During our time in Jamaica we served the community through four major projects, the first of which was in the schools of Mandeville. Adele Holloway, Susie Elder, and I went as faculty members representing Oak Hill School. We visited Ebenezer Primary School and Albion Primary School, observing, teaching, and getting to know the students. Our time was also spent meeting with principals and teachers



to hear about educational challenges, brainstorm ideas and strategies to address these challenges, and offer words of encouragement. We were saddened by the obstacles facing children in Mandeville—limited resources, meager facilities, and homes that were often unstable or even unsafe. Nevertheless, in the midst of these challenges, we were inspired by the spirit of the Jamaican people—the songs of the children, their vitality and playfulness, and the teachers who love them and hope to offer a brighter future.

The second project our group tackled was the construction of a playground for the children of Ebenezer School. Without any space for outdoor play, the school was in desperate need of a playground. Nathan Brandon, Duncan Dashiff, Chris Kirkland, Todd Presnell, Darryl Thompson,

and Jim Wall were just the men for the job! Despite rainy weather, limited resources, and ground that I am told was basically solid rock, they created a beautiful, fenced-in playground for the students to enjoy. The new playground offers swings, wooden platforms to play on, and a slide. More importantly, it is a constant reminder to the children that there are people who love them and are invested in them, their school, and their futures. Our friends in Jamaica have already sent photos of the students running, laughing, and playing together in this fantastic new space.



A few miles away from the school, Mike McGuffin, Stuart Gordon, and Craig Buffkin worked at a community center that was being used to host Sunday School for the people of the neighborhood. They spent the week making the building more secure, functional, and appealing



for the community members there. Our group added windows and grills for security, cleaned the grounds, and painted both the inside and outside of the building. The FPC crew worked hard, but we did not work alone. Throughout the week we were joined by members of Andrews Memorial as well as children, teenagers, and adults from the neighborhood. All were eager to play a part in the work of revitalizing the building. Seeing such a diverse community come together for a common purpose was both humbling and inspiring. At the end of four days the space had been transformed from a bare-

bones structure hardly fit for any event to a warm, inviting community center. We joined together on Thursday with neighborhood residents and members of Andrews Memorial in a celebration of the new, revitalized community center.

Our group's final project is also the one with the best stories to tell. Cathleen Coyne, an oral surgeon, worked with her newly-trained assistants, John Hollins and J.T. Martin, to serve hundreds of patients and pull out 348 teeth in just four days! Cathleen accomplished this tremendous dental feat with enthusiasm for the job and the most kind, calming bedside manner I have seen. I was able to witness the dental



team in action one evening, as they skillfully removed two teeth from our cook, Connie. To say we were impressed by their work is an understatement!

As I return from Jamaica, I find myself humbled, grateful, and inspired. We were able to offer something tangible to our friends in Mandeville—much-needed dental care, a renovated community center, educational strategies and resources, and a new playground. Beyond this service, we had the opportunity to spend one week building and strengthening relationships with our Jamaican brothers and sisters. We heard stories of violence and pain, witnessed the debilitating effects of unemployment and family instability, and saw the challenges facing children in impoverished neighborhoods. However, we also witnessed the power of community partnerships, the delight in children’s faces as they sang and played with us, and the perseverance of Jamaican teachers, ministers, and leaders committed to serving their communities. Although everyone on this trip wished we could give and do more for the people we met, we found that in God’s great economy, we are each called to offer what we have and then trust the grace and provision of our loving Creator.



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