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Trip report - Jamaica May 14-23, 2008

Purpose

- To share the good news of our Lord Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God with the Port Maria ecclesia and friends
- To receive personal encouragement by being granted the opportunity to serve.

Results

- An overwhelming opportunity to discuss, sing, and enact God's goodness was provided by the ecclesia. We pray that God was honored and His son Christ Jesus proclaimed in His power and strength leading to a lasting transformation of hearts and minds for Him.
- The Hope of Israel was greatly strengthened in all participants, both local brethren and visitors!

People

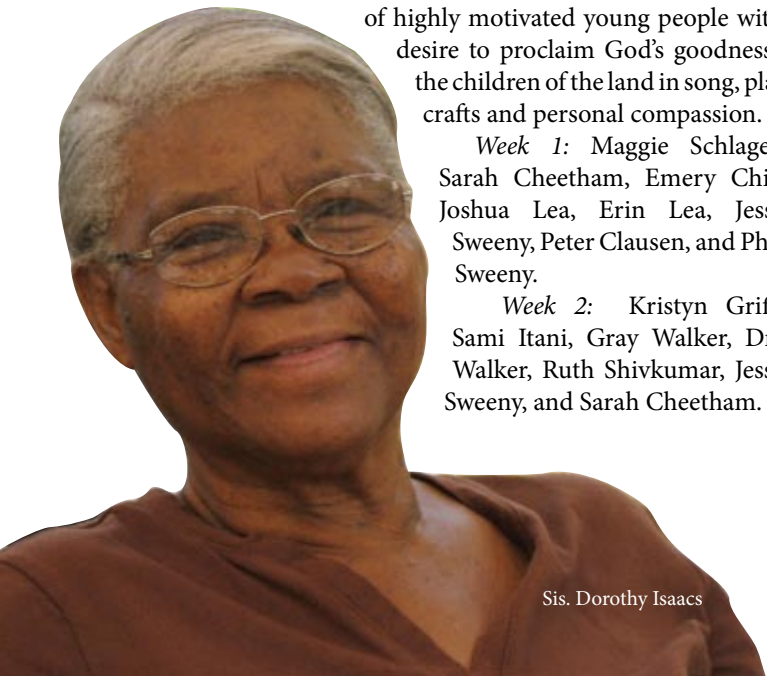
The *brethren and friends of the Port Maria Ecclesia* – full of hospitality, warmth, the love of God, a longing for His son our Lord Jesus and a strong desire for the Kingdom of God.

The *town* – very receptive. The local public grade school encouraged the young people to present daily devotions (Esther, Armor of God) to the children. All were invited to the after school programs. That's a public grade school!

The *teams* – Two elder brethren and a lot of highly motivated young people with a desire to proclaim God's goodness to the children of the land in song, plays, crafts and personal compassion.

Week 1: Maggie Schlageter, Sarah Cheetham, Emery Chiles, Joshua Lea, Erin Lea, Jessica Sweeny, Peter Clausen, and Philip Sweeny.

Week 2: Kristyn Griffin, Sami Itani, Gray Walker, Drew Walker, Ruth Shivkumar, Jessica Sweeny, and Sarah Cheetham.



Sis. Dorothy Isaacs

Events

The *tent "revival"*—Thursday night, Friday night, all day Saturday (lunch and supper provided), Sunday morning and evening. This consisted of both adult and children's classes (Beatitudes and others) and much singing and praising of the LORD God of Israel. The first two nights ≈35 people came, Saturday ≈60, and Sunday ≈50.

The *Children's after school program*—This ran for two weeks with the average number of children participating being ≈40.

Logistics

Rides from Montego Bay airport are provided by ecclesia. There is a two bedroom apartment in Port Maria leased to the ecclesia that you can use if you like (coconuts, sugar cane, and bananas in the backyard!).

The Port Maria ecclesia will help you more than you can imagine!

WCF provided support for the events: tent rental, food for Saturday, snacks for children's program etc...

Recommendations

- 1) Come to the Port Maria Ecclesia! Be prepared to read the Bible, meditate for hours on the law of the LORD, sing loudly and receive great encouragement in God's goodness.
- 2) If you would like to plan an event, consult with somebody who has visited previously, work with WCF and pull together a program. If you provide the idea, the Port Maria ecclesia and WCF will provide overwhelming support!
- 3) Visit the Port Maria Ecclesia with no event in mind, participate in ecclesial activities and enjoy God's creation. The Ecclesia would love to have you. Bring a mask and snorkel!

Love in Christ,

Brother (by God's grace) Phil Sweeny



Nikayla, one of the many children who attended the activities.

In Just Sixteen Days

I am in awe at the impact sixteen days could have on my life.

In the summer of 2007, a good friend persuaded me to board a plane for Jamaica. I was less than confident at the idea of living with people I had never met. One might say I was in over my head. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. I went to Jamaica to preach, and soon realized I was the student.

This May, I returned to Jamaica. I could see growth from the seeds we had planted on our previous trip. As I listened to the young men voice their concerns about baptism, I

could hear my own voice when I was their own age. I realized we are the same, despite the differences in culture and experiences. I am so thankful that God was able to use our mission team for His will, and I am happy to report that we have two new sisters in Jamaica. In addition, three young men have decided to take lessons for baptism. Without a doubt, God is doing big things in Port Maria.

In sixteen days God has given me new life-long relationships. In sixteen days God has given me a home in Jamaica. If you ever find yourself with an inkling to do mission work, just board the plane, God will cover the rest.

Josh Lea



At a primary school, we made this poster to illustrate "the whole armor of God." The staff liked it so much, they hung it in the school library!



Chicken foot soup



A seminar attendee and her grandson



A letter received from a 17-year-old girl who attends the ecclesia regularly:

"It's been a pleasure having you all in Jamaica for two and a half weeks. I want you to know that on behalf of the Port Maria Christadelphian Church and Bible School we want to thank you for your great work and time and patience with the kids, we want to say we are inspired by you a lot."

One experienced sister had a lot to say about the children's Bible school. After our second-week classes on the Kingdom she said one thing that stuck out:

"I'm glad you are teaching the kids about the kingdom. They always hear the stories in the Bible, but the kingdom is what matters most, it's the most important thing."

This sister also gives lovely cards and expresses thanks to all the visitors before they leave, and this is taken from a card:

"Words are inadequate to express our profound gratitude to you for the wonderful work you have done with us here, especially with the young people and children. We truly appreciate your labour of love with us here, and we pray that you will come yet again soon."

Building Relationships

First I want to take this opportunity to thank the WCF from the bottom of my heart for the chance to visit Jamaica and meet my brothers and sisters in faith! I must say, prior to visiting, I was never a "kid person." Kids frighten me, but in Jamaica, they inspired me.

We were busy constantly, slept little, and didn't always eat regularly due to other time commitments; however, I was never tired. I truly felt as though I was doing the Lord's work and being strengthened by Him. Moreover, I was able to experience this trip with my brother Joshua which only brought us closer. He and I share an energy that was mirrored

and magnified by the children around us.

The Jamaican people were amazing and their unabashed love for our Lord Jesus was awe-inspiring, particularly Sister Enid. Her strength and courage—both to care for her sister-in-law and worship in isolation—have left a lasting impression on me. She shook my heart and sharpened my Kingdom vision.

Finally, I enjoy maintaining a relationship with the young people in Jamaica. I treasure their phone calls and text messages and I wait anxiously to return to the beautiful island ideally to see them get baptized.

Erin Lea

Two of the kids wrote a letter on the last day:

"I hope you are enjoying [your time in Jamaica]. And we are looking forward to see you next year. It was a really great opportunity for you and the others to [leave] your country America to stay with us [in] Jamaica. Have a great flight!"

Milton told us that he couldn't drive down the street while we were there without being stopped by kids saying,

"Milton! Milton! What time is Bible School tonight?"

He said that they always told him,

"The Christadelphian church is the best church!"

One woman at Bible class said :

"You know, I don't regret one moment of coming to these Bible classes. I love what you people teach."

"What was the best part of your trip?"

This is usually an awkward question for me. But surprisingly, this time I managed to think of one thing that really was "the best" and that was witnessing how much spiritual growth has taken place in Port Maria in the past year.

May 2008 was the second May in a row that I traveled to Port Maria, and I stayed twice as long this year as I had the previous year. In 2007, we returned nightly to an empty apartment. However, this year we held children's classes at the ecclesia and adult classes at the apartment. When we returned from the ecclesia late at night, it was wonderful to come home to a room full of eager Bible students ready to learn, ask questions, and encourage us with their faith and zeal.

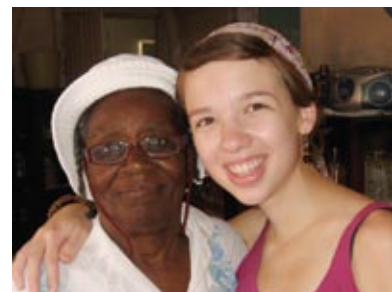
We became very close to several of the women who attended the adult classes, and spent a lot of time with them and their children, several of whom were in their late teens/early twenties, like many of us. We often

spent time with them during the day—at the beach, near their homes, or at our apartment; we did readings together and had wonderful spiritual conversations.

To our great joy, the day after we left, our new friends Sandra Reid and Mildred Bishop were interviewed for baptism. When we said goodbye, we told them that we hoped they would be our sisters when next we saw them, and—thanks be to God—they now are!

Another wonderful development in Port Maria was the formation of a CYC in April of 2008. It was formed with plans to meet together every Friday. Many of these CYC members are now studying for baptism as well. Being able to help these children of God grow towards Him in some small way—and being encouraged tremendously by them—was certainly the best part of my time in Jamaica.

Jessica Sweeny



Sis. Jessica Sweeny and Sis. Enid. She and her 98-year-old sister, Sis. Louise, live in isolation in Port Antonio.



New sisters Sandra Reid and Mildred Bishop teaching Sis Sarah Cheetham how to cook chicken foot soup and dumplings.



The tent seminar was a tremendous success. We advertised by word of mouth, leafletting, and hanging this sign on the tent.



The week-two team & company.

Not an Easy Job

I felt skeptical when my uncle, Kyle Tucker, first introduced me to WCF's plans in Jamaica. My uncertainty was underscored by my doubts that any progress could be made in a country stereotyped as being "lazy."

I also considered myself to be the opposite of the ideal adventurous missionary in a foreign land. Yet time went by, and more and more of my peers went to Jamaica and returned with stories that it had strengthened them spiritually. They described their experiences as "once-in-a-lifetime" and "amazing."

Now that I've gone to Jamaica, I realize that words such as "amazing" are the best words to describe a week that cannot be fully expressed with words.

My trip to Jamaica was amazing. It was once-in-a-lifetime.

Some of the people that I met down there were so excited to see me; they sat attentively in class and absorbed the discussions. This was not

because I am an eloquent speaker, but because they hold a genuine interest in God. They are intent on improving their relationships with Him. There was never much downtime. I was always working on something or preparing for a class. The job set before us is not an easy one. However, preaching to those who have nothing is 100 times easier than preaching to those in America.

The situation in Jamaica is far from being perfect. Many more harvesters are needed to not only harvest the ripe fruit, but also to sow more seed. The ground in Jamaica is fertile.

Drew Walker

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www.wcfoundation.org

New Friends

I will forever remember many things about our trip to Jamaica, but one experience that will stay with me most of all is the close friendship I developed with some of the young Jamaican men. I hope I've returned the impact that Marcel, Jason, Rico and Bulky had on my life that week.

On my first day in Jamaica, I gave the Sunday exhortation and these young men were there. I had not met them before, but within hours you would have never known we'd been strangers.

Later that day, they engaged me in a heart-to-heart discussion about their desire for baptism in the near future. For a couple of hours, we turned up passages and I told them about my experiences with baptism. By the time we parted, it felt as though I had known them for years. A deep spiritual bond had been built in one day's time. We would continue to foster this relationship as the week progressed.

While there were obvious cultural differences between us, they were like me in many ways: about nineteen to twenty-one in age, interested in sports, and more-than-visible senses of humor. I came

to appreciate these similarities over the course of the week, but it was their passion for reading Scripture that most caught my attention. More importantly, their desire to move forward in their relationship with Christ through baptism inspired me to examine my spiritual life just as I had instructed them to do.

The time I spent with these young men has strengthened my resolve to return to Jamaica in the future. I want to build on the progress we made down there. In that week, God gave me the privilege of further developing their spiritual lives and it was an experience I will never forget.

Gray Walker



Young men building a bookcase for the ecclesial hall.

Once in a Lifetime

The one week I spent in Jamaica was by far my most life-changing week yet. The members of the Port Maria Ecclesia are such amazing people.

I am especially inspired by Sister Dorothy. She is active in teaching Sunday school and CYC, and in strengthening the other women in the ecclesia. She loves the children so much, and they love and respect her!

The children are enthusiastic about learning about God. I remember the last day of Vacation Bible School. It had rained heavily and I didn't think many children would come, but we ended having over sixty kids

that night.

My experience in Jamaica has caused me to grow spiritually and to be more thankful for the truth. It has also driven me to want to do much more in preaching the Gospel. I hope to go back soon.

Ruth Shivkumar



Girl talk on the couch: Kristyn Griffin, Alyssa Fisher, Jessica Sweeny, Alicia Fisher, Ruth Shivkumar.

Growth in Port Maria

In 2004, there were 6 (4 active) members in the Port Maria Ecclesia. In the last two years, there have been 4 baptisms, bringing the total to 10 (7 active). Since a midweek outreach Bible class started in Dec 2007, the average visitor attendance per night has been 11 people. There are currently five interested friends studying for baptism.

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