

Tuesday July 14, 2015

Dear friends and family in support of our DR mission trip,

This is to let you know we arrived safe & sound in the DR, as did our luggage! Which is not something we take for granted, given the turbulent air hovering over the Midwest, heading east, blocking a straight shot to the Atlanta airport. That meant delays leaving and re-routing, getting us into Atlanta late, with just 30 minutes to run and catch the next plane on the other end of that huge airport.



We prayed for a miracle. And we thanked God for speedy and frequent trams,... for an unexpected intercom malfunction that held the plane at the gate for late arrivals. By God's grace we got on board the last plane bound for the DR that day, long after "final boarding" had been called.



As a result, we are simply overjoyed, giddy and goofy, as you can tell from some of these photos taken on board Delta Airlines and upon our arrival in Santo Domingo.

Our blue team shirts, worn by all 24 of us on our travel day, started many conversations with strangers, in which we got to share the love of Christ. We hope and pray to likewise befriend and connect the gospel with Dominicans this week.



Here we are, landed among our DR hosts, hugging and reminding us we're now in our "second home."

Welcoming us to the DR with a smile as wide as the airport signage is Martires Olivero (flanked here by Dietrich Gruen and Pastor Doug Van Essen; also by Vicki Hellenbrand, Doug's wife and the other co-leader of our trip). Martires is the local director of Hands of Hope, our partner agency in the DR. It's "old home week" and a family reunion for Martires' family and many returning vets of this annual DR mission trip, now in its 15th year.

Our team bus provides both welcome relief from the heat and transport to/from a local pizza place, for the international food we all adore, but with a unique topping—niblets of corn.



Back at the hotel (luxurious by local standards, with A/C and a pool), we unpack heavy suitcases (~50 lbs apiece), laden with supplies for a medical clinic and a week-long Vacation Bible School. Also in the mix are dozens of books for the start-up phase of a new library that this community has never had.

Team building at night includes orientation, devotions, a common meal, and scrambling to get "stuff" organized.

In tomorrow's heat, we don work clothes and boots for digging out and building up some 20 bathrooms and 5 septic tanks. That's our ambitious goal for this week's adult team from Madison, together with a youth team from Madison coming to replace us the day we leave here (July 21). We could not do any of this without the funds that you donors so generously supplied! This work is being done in partnership with Dominicans, who will finish the job after we all leave. So our joint project creates jobs.



Everyone is buoyed by our presence, especially our 44+ sponsored kids, who get home visits this week.

More on that good work in days to come. Can't wait to see what happens in answer to your prayers. AMEN.