

Bonjour!

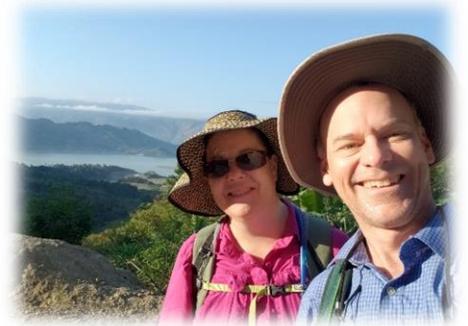


The lilt of the women's accents is as gentle as the pastel blooms of bougainvillea. These voices and flowers belie the rugged, harsh conditions along the trails which link villages in the central plateau of Haiti. As I reflect upon my experience as a member of our medical mission team this past January, one of the most profound memories is that sweet greeting—*bonjour!*

Literally, this French greeting translates as 'good day.' It is offered by virtually all of the women and men traversing those mountain trails as a sweet gift of hospitality to the foreigners—like me—whom they pass along the way.

I had the finest hiking shoes and socks. I was protected under the shade of a wide brimmed hat, ventilated along the sides to maximize air flow. I had the best mosquito repellent money can buy. All I had to carry was drinking water, trail mix, some crackers, and pre-packaged tuna with herbs and sundried tomatoes for lunch.

All the people who said 'good day' to me had none of those helpful tools or protections or snacks; and most carried much heavier loads—under their arms and on their heads. Yet, *they* were the ones recognizing and declaring that it was a good day. What did they see that I could not see? What did they know that I didn't know?

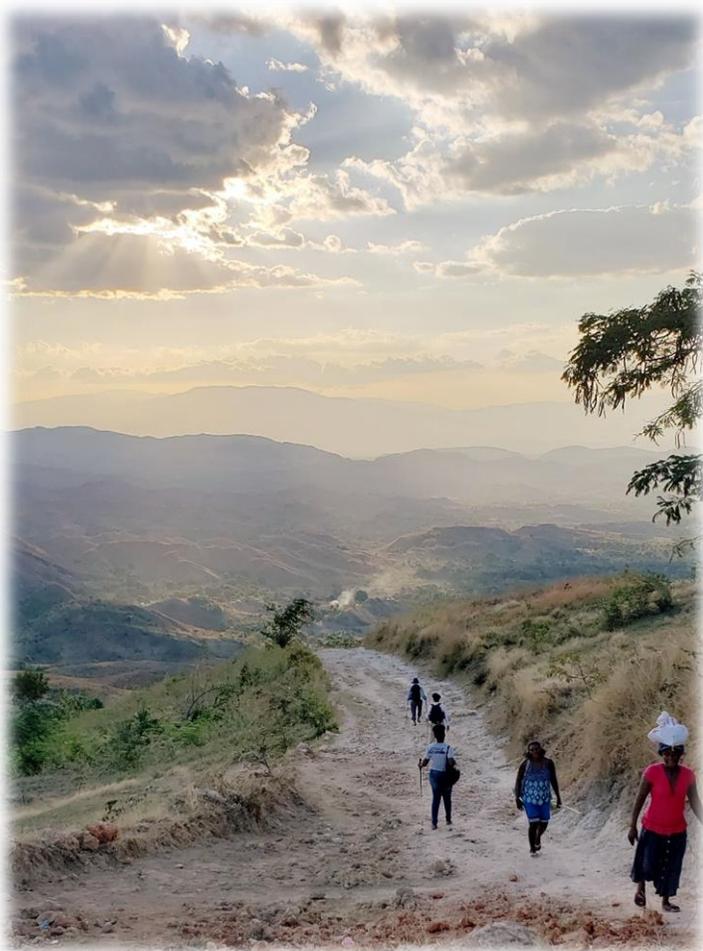


"*Bonjour!*" I responded to each person, winded and weary as I was from ascending those slopes under the hot sun. Under the almost comically ironic circumstances, it was the least I could do.

I thought about some of the rejoicing psalms, written by someone who walked on similarly rugged, harsh pathways under the hot sun. "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!" (Psalm 118:24) "Be joyful in the Lord all you peoples. Serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song!" (Psalm 100:1) What did the psalmist see that we don't always see? What did the psalmist know that we don't always notice?

I promised myself in Haiti that I would not write about how *their* hardships make me thankful for *my* blessings. I should be able to be thankful without using someone else as a contrasting foil. Rather, I vowed to write about how their hardships make me thankful for their courage, hope, perseverance, and joy.

I am humbled by how clearly the people I met are able to see and know the gentle joys of a *bon jour*—a good day—in spite of difficulties and burdens. Moreover, I am impressed by how sweetly they expressed this truth to the foreigner in their midst.



There is a beautiful prayer which summarizes the goodness of the day, without respect to our estimations of things. You can find it on page 461 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, included among the recommended prayers for use by a person who is sick. I believe its truth is valuable to all of us, regardless of the state of our health.

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

This prayer conveys to me the spirit of *bonjour* expressed by the Haitian people of the central plateau. None of us know what each day holds, so we pray for the strength and courage to face the challenges and be grateful for the mercies along the way.



The people I met on the trails did not ask me for anything. Instead, they taught me about the meaning of the rejoice Psalms. The goodness of the day has nothing to do with my personal estimation of blessings or hardships. Neither does the goodness of the day have anything to do with my resources or my poverty. The day is good because it is a gift of God, period.

I am thankful for all the people who greeted me so sweetly and gently on the rugged pathways of the central plateau, and who helped me see the goodness of God more clearly. They have strengthened my resolve to greet each day and each person with that much courage, hope, perseverance, and joy.



*From the rising of the sun to its setting,
my Name shall be great among the nations. —Malachi 1:11*



The days are long for those who serve on a medical mission team to Cange and the surrounding villages. Even without a digital alarm clock, members of the team wake before dawn with the help of the roosters crowing, dogs barking, or the church bell ringing to call the women's choir to practice. There are rewards for those who rise early. The views of the morning dew from the top of the hill inside the Church Compound are breathtaking. The soaring voices from the women's choir are inspiring. The possibility of completing most of the hike to a neighboring village before the noonday heat is yet another traveling mercy.

A team of dedicated women from the village rise early to prepare a hot breakfast for the medical mission teams who visit Cange. We were well fed—in quality and quantity—for the work that was before us each day. We were also well supplied with clean, cool water in the dining hall. Every team member was able to fill at least two bottles' worth of safe refreshment to sustain us through the heat of the day.

After breakfast we loaded into the van and the jeep. Our robust team necessitated some creative and cozy seating arrangements at times. Most mornings our journey began with the vehicles driving us as far as possible on the paved roads, and even on the dirt roads covered in cobble stones and carved with deep crevices. Our drivers earned my respect and gratitude for their terrific skill. They safely navigated a chaotic assortment of dump trucks and motorcycles on the highways and nuanced routes through the challenging impediments of the weathered dirt roads reaching into the rural, central plateau.



When we arrived in a neighboring village, our team transformed the largest (and only) building of substantial size into a medical clinic with a pharmacy. School students would be dismissed and their classrooms repurposed. Churches would fill with expectant and hopeful people, seeking a healing miracle.

Just as the prophet Malachi conveyed to his listeners, the fundamental tenet of the life of faith is to glorify God in all we do. Whether preparing breakfast for foreigners, or driving a medical team to neighboring villages, or taking care of the sick who come in search of healing; these various ways of loving our neighbors are—in fact—expressions of loving God. Jesus said, “Just as you did these things unto the least of these, you did it to me.”



Love that is built to last.



One of the skepticisms I have about some charitable projects is whether swooping in to save the day is all that helpful if we have not given any thought or care about what happens tomorrow. ‘Here today, gone tomorrow’ is not how God’s love works, so why should it be the way a Church mission works? Well, one of the things about which I am most impressed with our diocese’s medical mission to Cange is how the entire philosophy of this charity is built upon sustainability.

The clinics are only one part of how the people of the central plateau are sustainably protected from an epidemic of hypertension which leads to strokes, heart disease, and premature death. The awful tragedy of untreated hypertension in a country with no social security or welfare is that the disease destroys not only the patient, but also every family member who is dependent upon them.

Using Dr. Paul Farmer’s innovative model, ‘Partners in Health,’ each village in the central plateau has a designated community health partner. These persons coordinate the clinics in their villages with our mission team of doctors, nurses, and lay volunteers. They also ensure that the patients who receive treatment continue to follow through with their prescription medicines and other directions given by our visiting doctors.



We bring an impressive ‘pharmacy-on-a-donkey’ to each clinic during the weeklong mission. Our doctors also order sufficient quantities of hypertension medicine for delivery to the central plateau so the community partners-in-health can keep all hypertension patients supplied and cared for throughout the year.

After long days of trekking to and from the surrounding villages, and screening and treating dozens, if not hundreds of patients; our team returned to the Church Compound in

Cange for delicious dinners. Our ‘entertainment’ each night—whether there was electricity or not—was a ‘pill party.’ These perfectly legal gatherings involved counting, packaging, and inscribing graphically-based instructions for taking medications which any patient—literate or not—could understand.

One of the beautiful aspects of this life-saving, life-changing ministry is that anyone can do it. Clearly, we need doctors and nurses with the skills to diagnose and treat the sick. Yet, lay persons also have gifts to give (and receive) in the central plateau. Anyone with a heart to serve has the ability to glorify God by loving our Haitian neighbors as ourselves. Consider joining or financially supporting this team in the heroic, decades-long mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Upper S.C. It is love that is built to last. It is a transformation which enables even the poorest in Haiti to be able to have a chance at a *bon jour!*

—The Rev. Furman Buchanan, February 2019

