

JUST IN FROM THE MISSION TEAM . .

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+ My trip to El Pedregal was an awakening for all of my five senses. The sights, smells, tastes, sounds and textures of the people of the Barrio will be in my heart forever. It was my privilege to be there again to reunite with so many of them! ~*Kim Peterson*

+ The trip this year was just as amazing as last year and once again, I will never forget it. I really hope that all J2A groups in the future get to do what we did also. ~*Aidan McNamara*

+ It's been a pleasure and a privilege to be a part of this wonderful relationship. I received so much more than I gave and am reminded, once again, of just what is important in my life. Thanks be to God and the good people of El Pedregal. ~*Jeff Clark*

+ It was truly amazing to witness the first CHANCE Scholar attend her first day of school. Thank you for your support to help put my vision into action. ~*Brooke MacDonald*

+ It was another amazing trip to the DR, our second home. In spite of their extreme poverty, the people of the barrio are the most gracious, friendly and giving people I know. We are all blessed to have this shared experience. ~*Jamie Millard*

+ The trip this year was just as, if not more, memorable as last year. ~*Garret Reed*

+ My trip to the DR was about taking me out of my comfort zone and performing physical labor, which I haven't done in a very long time. For the people of the DR this is their way of life. But for a people who have very little in the way of ease of life, their lives are still filled with happiness, hopes and dreams just like anyone else's. ~*Jim Lynch*

+ Being invited by St. Luke's Church to participate in the DR missionary was great. I got the chance to help people in need that I'm proud to call my family now. The only thing that I did not like about this trip is that I had to leave a beautiful piece of heaven on earth. ~*Jose Santos*

+ I can't describe the trip in a few sentences and tell you how I felt about it. It was simply the time of my life and a week that seemed like it lasted forever. The magic that happened there and the friendships that we made with everyone will last in our hearts for the rest of our lives. ~*Neil Guliano*

+ The magic was still there, waiting for me at the gates of Camp Transfiguration. The return trip was half as new, but twice as moving. It got me that much closer to both our group and to the Dominicans. I love them all. ~*Morgan Neiley*

+ How do you sum up El Pedregal in a few sentences? It is paradise in an unexpected place, the true happiest place on earth, and our home. Returning to our home was a perfect experience to see the spirit of God at work inside of each of us. Though the sunburns and bug bites and muscle aches will disappear with time, the impact of this experience will not. ~*Lindsey Sampson*

+ Returning to the Camp in El Pedregal felt like going home to reunite with family and friends. The joy on the faces of those we met as we helped improve their homes was priceless. The smiles of the school children are forever in my memory. A special moment from the many highlights of the week was watching Crystal arrive for her "first day of school." The love of each member of our group for our friends and each other filled my soul. Another amazing week and I am so grateful to have been part of this very special mission trip. ~ *Susan MacDonald*

+ This trip to el Pedregal was my sixth, each different and each wonderful. Four different leaders have been at the camp, each with his or her own style, but the presence of Padre Carlo with his six year commitment should bring significant change. After just a short time he is weaving himself into the fabric of barrio life. My time working on the home of Elaina, Brooke's friend Annie's grandmother, was truly special. In four days we demolished a crumbling wooden structure and replaced it with concrete block walls and a new roof. As we finished the roof, Elaina raised her arms and proclaimed "Buenos es Dios!", (God is good.) The workers all in unison responded " Siempre Fiel!" (All the time.) Amen.
~*Ken MacDonald*

+ We, the kids, have changed since we went down last time. But, the feeling we get when down there never will. It still had that humbleness and spirited feeling it did last time and I will miss the camp dearly. ~ *Kyle Seidenberg*

+ It was pure joy to finally immerse myself in the El Pedregal experience that my family has been so passionate about since their first trip in 2004. I now understand and appreciate the unconditional love and commitment that Sherrie and our children have for this wonderful community. Keep the pizzas coming!
~Larry McCarthy

+ Returning to the DR for the second time reminded me of all the reasons I fell in love with it the first time. There will never be enough words to explain how grateful I am to have this opportunity. The DR and El Pedregal will always be my second home no matter what. Once again I understand how grateful I am and that I must always do whatever I can to help others in need. This experience was and will always be an experience of a lifetime.
~Caitlin Lynch

+ This trip is the ultimate opportunity to serve others and in return leave a changed person with new friends, both American and Dominican. This experience, this group has changed my life in many ways and I hope to keep these changes for the rest of my life. ~Ollie Walsh

+ I now understand what all the previous missionaries have been talking about. Fate has somehow thrown St. Luke's together with a rural barrio in the mountains of the DR, and the result is grace for all. I felt particularly blessed to be able to translate between the missionaries and the Dominicans and make our interactions a little easier and perhaps more meaningful. ~Neal McNamara

+ I had fun on this trip. I liked helping the community out. Going on this trip was a great experience. I have learned to help people in need. I loved it! ~Michael DeLeon

+ Returning to the Dominican Republic offers missionaries a special view of El Pedregal. The surprise and wonder of a first trip gives way to new experiences - reconnecting with old friends and no longer focusing on differences but celebrating the similarities that all humans possess. The physical environment that is the DR takes a back seat to the common causes we all share. Love thy neighbor as thy self. The real work of building a community that is self-sufficient, spiritual, growing, healthy, caring is underway with the guidance of a newly ordained priest with the famous name: Padre Carlos Santana. Along with his teenage and adult disciples, he begins the job of community building, one beautiful person at a time. We were so lucky to be included in that community this past week. ~*Robert Walsh*

+ It is they who have everything and I who truly have nothing. Whether they realize it or not, each person that I met, be it adult or child, has taught me the truth of acceptance and given me the gift of inconsequential love. ~*Kelsey Vivian*

+ This trip was amazing. We were able to continue the trend started last year and do a lot of work directly in the barrio. It was also exciting to see all the improvement that had been made in our absence. Best of all, we were able to reunite with our old friends, and meet new ones as well. ~*Keegan Glennon*

+ I want to try to convey to our St. Luke's community the thankfulness expressed by all involved. To see an old woman, touching her heart with both hands, and then reaching out to the sky. Feeling a small child, hugging you at the hip and not letting go. Physical work until you ache, to improve a life. Dominican children, teens and adults standing up in front of the room to express their heartfelt thanks one at a time, seriously, faithfully. Wiping joyful tears by the bucketful. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for embracing this important program. ~ *Sherrie McCarthy*

+ *The Pine and the Palm*

I saw God this morning
in all His wondrous creation,
looking out upon a pine and a palm
growing strong and tall beside each other.

Two peoples sharing a common ground,
dirtying our hands but cleansing our souls.

I saw Jesus today
in the face of a child,
a hand slipping into mine
to walk beside me
through the streets of the barrio.

A gentle smile, a warm embrace,
the silent passing of a moment shared
echoes though my mind.

I saw the Holy Spirit this night
in the community of the people,

who welcomed us with open arms
and open hearts
into their homes and into their lives,
with gratitude--first to God above all.

I, who have so much,
have much to learn from these people.

With hope, and promises to return,
I look back from my window on the bus.
The difference I leave behind is small
compared with the difference I carry away.

The pine and the palm grow taller,
Amigos en Dios por siempre.

~ John Vivian